

New York & Erie Railroad Car Locks

by Phil Simms

The New York & Erie Railroad (1832 - 1861) was the first railroad to build in Orange County, NY, where I have lived all of my life. The second was the Warwick Valley Railroad (1860 - 1882), predecessor to the Lehigh and Hudson River. I grew up with the L&HR next to our home, and acquired a life long interest in railroads (history as well as artifacts) from my early years living trackside.

Those early NY&E car locks were all made of bronze and weighed at least a pound and a half (without the forged iron chain attached). The outside shackle pin was used on most early railroad padlocks. A heavy duty lock was needed by



This is the front of the NY&E RR lock shown to the left. Notice the repair marks on the large shackle pin.

“T. SLAIGHT, NEWARK, N.J.” on the reverse. The NY&E RR also had marked bronze switch locks made by T. Slaight. In 1861, the New York & Erie Railroad became the Erie Railway (1861 - 1878), but was still known as the “Erie.” It seems as though the Erie may have had a locksmith to keep these old NY&E car locks working properly, as most have marks to indicate that they have been repaired. One had the post for the key barrel to fit over replaced by a smaller post and used a smaller barrel key! Keys used during this time period were marked “ERR” by T. Slaight. “Erie” bronze switch locks/keys of this period were also made by T. Slaight and marked “ERR.”

I believe the last time period of use for these big car locks was 1878 - 1895, when the New York, Lake Erie & Western Railroad was formed from the Erie Railway. I have a picture

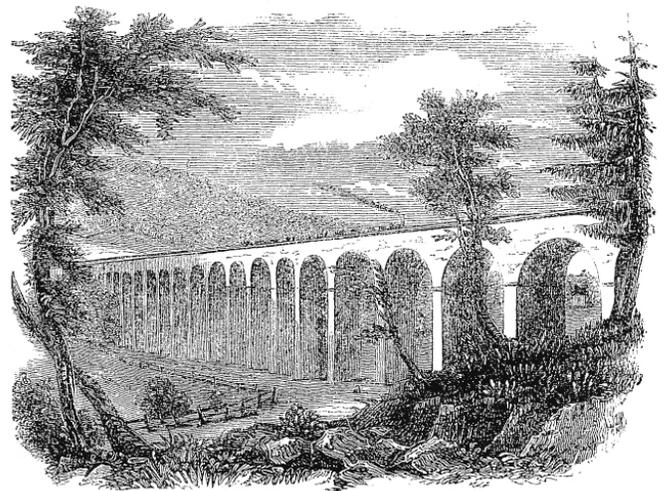
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Large letter variety of NY&E RR car lock. Notice seal hole and large shackle pin. In addition to the NY&E RR car lock key, another type of car lock key (unmarked) is shown.

the early railroads to secure the car doors, or openings to the railroad cars, to prevent the theft of the car contents. These locks proved ideal for that purpose.

The locks pictured bear testimony to the rough use to which they were subjected. The numerous dents, scratches and wear on these surviving examples prove that they were well built. I believe that T. Slaight (1850 - 1903) of Newark, NJ was the maker of these locks. Portions of the makers mark appear on two of the locks, and the “NY&E RR No 413” original key pictured with the first lock is also marked for



The New York & Erie Railroad's monumental Starrucca Viaduct, completed in 1848, still carries trains today. (Harper's New York & Erie Railroad Guidebook, 1856).

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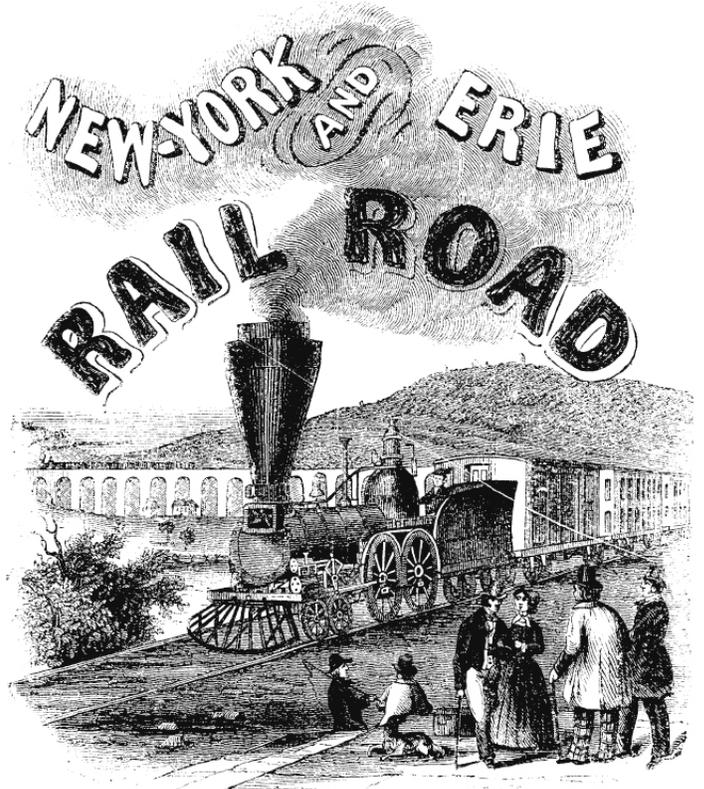
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showing the big unmarked bronze car lock that came with the well worn "NYLE&W RR" car lock key marked "C" on the reverse, likely made by T. Slaight.

Several of the NY&E RR car locks have a number of dents over the railroad initials, in an attempt to obliterate the property marking. Whether this was done by the railroad when there was a name change, cessation of use of these big locks, or something else remains a mystery. The next time you see a "one and a half pounder" lock, look carefully to see if it is marked. Happy hunting!



The more commonly found NY&E RR car lock. These are marked N-Y&E over RR, and the brass ERR key is from the Erie Railway time period. Another type of unmarked car lock key made of steel is also shown.



Woodcut of an early New York & Erie RR train. From Harper's New York & Erie RR Guidebook, 1856.



This is the front of the above N-Y&E RR car lock. The key shows the maker's mark T. SLAIGHT, NEWARK, NJ.



These locks were marked N-Y&E RR, but the markings were obliterated for some unknown reason. Note the different types of unmarked car lock keys in the photo.

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