



Blackhawk Railway Historical Society

In 2018 the Blackhawk Railway Historical Society, a chapter of the National Railway Historical Society (NRHS), embarked on an effort to recognize October as “Chicago Railroad History Month”. On October 24th of 1848 the first railroad train piloted by the locomotive “Pioneer” left the foot of Kinzie and Canal Streets traveling west to the Des Plaines River. Our goal was to recognize that pivotal moment in the city’s history and to promote the idea of a greater celebration in 2023, the 175th anniversary of that first train.

In 1948 the 100th anniversary was celebrated by the great Chicago Railroad Fair, a 2 year extravaganza that took place on the site of the Century of Progress World’s Fair on Chicago’s lakefront. Largely forgotten by average Chicagoans, it is still fondly remembered by both railroad historians and those who attended. It marked the apex of the power of the nation’s railroads that had seen the nation through the World War. The 150th anniversary passed unnoticed as the fortunes of rail transportation had diminished in the intervening years.

We felt it important to remind the city once known as the “Railroad Capitol of America” the debt they owe to rail transportation. Railroads changed the landscape of the city, played a major role in its commercial and industrial growth and altered the social fabric in myriad ways. While the railroads can claim a storied past, they continue to be a vital part of the engine that drives they city’s economy.

We have undertaken a number of initiatives over the last 5 years to this end:

- Established a web presence with our website CRRHM.com
- Commissioned a poster by noted artist Mitch Markovitz
- Applied and received Mayoral Proclamations declaring October Chicago Railroad History Month
- Solicited letters of support from various organizations
- Given public presentations regarding Chicago railroad history
- Applied to the US Postal Service for a commemorative stamp
- Applied to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks for recognition of the site of the former Kinzie Street Station as an official city landmark.

This brings me to the purpose of this letter. We are a small volunteer organization with limited resources. It has long been our intention to encourage organizations, museums and corporations to undertake their own efforts to recognize the 175th anniversary in some tangible way. Chicago Railroad History Month is real and it exists. What it needs is like minded leaders willing to step up and commit to celebrate it in whatever fashion they see fit. It would be great to see multiple celebrations and exhibits that would remind Chicagoans what the railroads have meant to the city and its residents. We are hopeful that this may yet happen. You may contact us at: chgorrhist@gmail.com with any questions and comments you may have.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

David Daruszka, Coordinator
Chicago Railroad History Month
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