

Preserving Niagara's railway past

News Oct 27, 2017 by [Steve Henschel](#) (/niagara-author/steve-henschel/9750a086-af9e-473d-9b94-2c34237c1bb6/) [✉](mailto:shenschel@niagarathisweek.com)
<mailto:shenschel@niagarathisweek.com> Niagara This Week - Welland



Canadian Railroad Historical Association Niagara Division president Tammy Frakking shows off a stop marker unveiled in Welland on Monday, marking Stop 19 of the NS&T electric rail line that once provided hourly rail service across the region. - Steve Henschel/Metroland

WELLAND — In a time when Niagara politicians debate the merits of regional transit and the advent of GO service, a group of local railroad historians and enthusiasts have been busy preserving the memory of the hourly trains that once provided fast and efficient public transportation between the municipalities of Niagara.

From 1899 to 1959 the Niagara, St. Catharines and Toronto (NS&T) electric rail line ferried people and goods across the region, with lines stretching from Port Dalhousie to Port Colborne, from Welland to Niagara Falls and from St. Catharines to Niagara-on-the-Lake. At its peak, in 1929, packed cars carried passengers across the region with hourly service.

"It connected the entire area with what was really an early version of the GO Train," said Canadian Railroad Historical Association (CRHA) Niagara division president Tammy Frakking, who was on hand Monday morning, along with members of the group, to unveil a plaque marking Stop 19 on the trail of the former rail line in Welland where it crosses Thorold Road just west of Prince Charles Drive.

The plaque, preserving the history of the line and its impact on Niagara, is the fifth such marker installed by the group, as part of a larger effort to preserve railroad history in the region through photos and public installations.

"It was extremely important," said Frakking, explaining the rail line, the last interurban passenger service when it closed in 1959, was critical in connecting people at a time when cars were not as widely used or available as they are today.

It was the eventual rise of the automobile that drove down ridership and eventually caused the closure of the NS&T line.

Frakking said it is interesting to observe the history from a modern viewpoint in an era when mass public transportation is once again front and centre in political and infrastructure debates.

"They act like mass transportation is something new," she said.

"To me, it was way ahead of its time," said city parks manager Peter Boyce, who represented the city during the unveiling.

"It's amazing something so old is new again," he said.

Andy Panko, a CRHA Niagara member, was on hand to take in the unveiling as well, and to share his memories of the line. He remembers as a child growing up in Thorold in the 1950s, he would use the train to visit his uncle in Welland. The trip would take 31 minutes from Thorold downtown to Welland downtown.

"This was called Uncle Nick's train," he said.

For more information of the CRHA, visit www.crhaniagara.com.

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Steve Henschel is a reporter and award-winning photographer covering the communities of Welland, Pelham, Port Colborne and Wainfleet for Niagara This Week in addition to contributing to Niagara Life magazine. He has a passion for telling the stories of those living in south Niagara and hopes to one day take life seriously. Follow him on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/wellandntw) (<https://twitter.com/wellandntw>).