

The Last Decade of the South Shore



1950 - 1960

“It was the best of times. It was the worst of times...”

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

These years included not only radical change but the eventual demise of the company through merger.

**Presentation by Robert Oom
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Soo Line Historical and Technical Society
At the 8th Michigan Railroad History Conference
St. Ignace, Michigan – October, 2004**

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1949

- The DSS&A had been in bankruptcy since 1937
- On November 1, 1949 the DSS&A Railway became the DSS&A Railroad
- The subsidiary road the Mineral Range is consolidated in the new company
- Capital structure was 210,000 shares with a total stated value of \$10,500,000 and bonds totaling \$5 million.
- Henry S. Mitchell to serve as president
- The new company to be headquartered in Minneapolis but Marquette would remain the traffic center.
- The new company “*will compete aggressively for freight business, particularly bridge line transcontinental traffic received from connecting railways...*”

The Mining Journal October 27, 1949

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1949, *continued*

- **October 1, 1949 Steel Strike.** Most contracts are settled in 30 days but others continue until nearly Christmas.
 - **The 1949 shipping season loaded 462,719 tons of iron ore from Marquette, despite the shutdown in the month of October.**
 - **More diesels arrive in October and November:**

3	DT66-2000	300-302
3	DRS66-1500	200-202
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1950

- Rail ore traffic begins via Straits of Mackinac and the Chief Wawatam
 - Another DRS66-1500 numbered 203 arrives in August
 - Several of the 700 series 2-8-0's are sold for scrap including the 702, 704, 711, 712, 713, 715
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1951

- Rail ore continues via Straits of Mackinac and the Chief Wawatam
 - Overall traffic is up due to the Korean conflict.
 - More diesels arrive: 5 Baldwin AS616 204-208 and Alco RS-1 107
 - Four more 700 series 2-8-0's are scrapped
 - December 14 wreck at L'Anse: The 204 and 22 cars with the 717 on the rear roll backwards down L'Anse hill. The 717 overturns near the Falls River bridge and two are killed. The 204 is returned to service but caboose 590 is destroyed. The 717 is scrapped on site the next summer
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1952

- White Pine Branch is begun
 - Relocation of tracks for the J&L Tracy Mine in Negaunee. Production at the Tracy Mine is delayed however.
 - Two more AS616's 209 and 210 arrive. Now 100% dieselized
 - Opening of the Soo Gateway
 - September 17 wreck at Munising Jct. when RS-1's 100 and 101 fall into a deep washout
 - Traffic is detoured by using the LS&I and the M&LS to Shingleton
 - Detour traffic continues but poor dispatching results in a fatal wreck at Onota on October 3.
 - Engine 203 running light collided with a motor car in a rock cut, one section crew member is killed
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1952, *continued*

- Improvements in the shop at Marquette and the addition of a new diesel house
 - The 91 and 92 are the only steam locomotives operating but others remain stored
 - Steel Strike lasts for 53 days, President Truman considers nationalizing the steel industry
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1953

- White Pine Branch is completed
 - The remaining steam locomotives are scrapped except 91 and 92
 - Purchased:
 - 1 Baldwin AS616
 - 100 steel gondolas
 - 100 40' PS-1 boxcars
 - 10 twin hoppers
 - 3 cabooses (ex-DL&W)
 - Declared a dividend of \$1.00 per share
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1954

- **Passenger service is reduced:**

Trains #7 and #8 (Marquette-Duluth) are reduced to tri-weekly

- **Facilities are complete at the White Pine Copper Company**
 - **Dewatering of the Osceola copper mine is begun however no new mining will take place**
 - **Production delayed until 1955 at the Tracy Mine near Negaunee**
 - **The 91 and 92 remain stored behind the roundhouse in Marquette but are scrapped before year's end.**
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1955

- In March Lawrence Lasich dies after falling off the locomotive on Fewsville hill.
 - Full outside handrails are installed on all of the Baldwin road switchers (The center cab units 200-203 were delivered with outside handrails)
 - Trains #7 and #8 (Marquette-Duluth) are discontinued on June 4
 - An RDC-1 is purchased in July for \$164, 281 from the Budd Co.
 - Passenger cars no long ferried across the Straits after July 31. A baggage car (likely NYC) is the last passenger car carried on the Chief
 - Six Airslide® hoppers are leased
 - Ordered 100 fifty-foot PS-1 double-door boxcars to be delivered in 1956
 - More 90 lb. rail is in place in the mainline
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1955, *continued*

- A strike of 112 days at Calumet & Hecla impacted traffic levels
- Centennial of the Soo Locks

No longer owning any steam locomotives, the DSS&A dressed up an 0-4-0 tank engine from C&H for the celebration. The very same locomotive that is at the Houghton County Historical Museum today.

“Visit the Centennial, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan”
was painted on the side sill of several units below the cab

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1956

- **New trains 18 and 19 are instituted to provide faster, better service between Duluth-Superior and Sault Ste. Marie and Mackinaw City**
 - **Heavy repairs are completed on 250 freight cars**
 - **New track machinery is purchased, more 90 lb. rail is laid**
 - **Two-way radios installed in some locomotives and cabooses with good results**
 - **“Radio Equipped for Safety and Service”**
 - **MU connections installed on two Baldwin roadswitchers (209 and 210)**
 - **Application filed to discontinue passenger service from Marquette to St. Ignace**
 - **Celotex® Corporation to build a plant at L’Anse**
 - **Purchased 5 tractors and 4 trailers to provide mail service by truck**
 - **Declared a dividend of \$1.25 per share**
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1957

- **Wreck at Hogan Ore Yard on July 19**

Train number 18 collides with the rear end of train 32

**No serious injuries but caboose 581 is destroyed and Baldwin
center cab 302 is damaged**

- **Passenger operation losses continue to increase, ridership does not**
 - **Lay-offs announced for shop workers in Marquette**
 - **November 1 the Mackinac Bridge opens to traffic**
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1958

- The Budd car makes its final run on January 11 thus ending passenger service with the exception of the *Copper Country Limited*
 - Henry S. Mitchell dies and his longtime associate and vice president Leonard H. Murray becomes president
 - Trains 18 and 19 are discontinued due to a lack of traffic in May
 - Trains 21 and 22 are reduced to running only 5 days per week in October
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1959

- Talk of a merger begins with the presidents of the Soo Line, Wisconsin Central and the DSS&A
 - Steel strike begins on July 15 and dock workers are laid-off initially and later some train crews.
 - Strike is finally settled on November 9 and the ore dock in Marquette sets a record for the tons loaded in the month of December.
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1960

- Merger is approved by stockholders in March.
 - Railroad employees and business owners in Marquette oppose the merger because of the loss of jobs.
 - The shops are to be closed in Marquette with heavy repairs to be done at Shoreham and N. Fond du Lac. Marquette will do running repairs only.
 - East-west traffic on the DSS&A is to be moved over the Soo Line mainline through Gladstone.
 - The DSS&A is merged out of existence on the last business day of 1960 and on New Year's Day 1961 the new Soo emerges.
 - Actually, the Soo Line and Wisconsin Central are merged into the DSS&A since the South Shore has the corporate structure preferred by the Canadian Pacific.
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Would the DSS&A have survived as an independent railroad in the 1960's?

- *The Copper Mine strike which ended virtually all production in 1968*
- *The new open-pit iron mines and pellet plants on the Marquette Range, the Empire and the Tilden, were not in production until the 1970's*
- *With the opening of the Mackinac Bridge, trucks were significant competition including trucks from Canada hauling “overhead” traffic*
- *Escalating costs, old equipment and a worn out physical plant*
- *What the DSS&A “lacked most was economic justification.”*

Wallace W. Abbey, *The Little Jewel*
