

# Little RRRR on the right track

by Patricia Moore

The offices of the Raritan River Railroad are much like those of every other railroad -- bare, stark, unadorned.

And the depot outside the building at 170 John st., South Amboy is much like any other small town station with tracks stretching for miles in both directions.

However, unlike most railroads which are bankrupt or close to it, the RRRR is still a solvent operation.

The secret, according to Robert Kipp, general manager, is simple.

"We're a small operation and we offer personal service," he says. "We're on a first name basis with the people we serve. It takes a call to the office to get what you want, not a lot of red tape. We have a competent group of employes and we

satisfy customers."

The RRRR runs between South Amboy and New Brunswick, an area dotted with sprawling, thriving, industrial complexes.

The company's six 900 horsepower diesel electric locomotives handle some 800,000 tons of freight per year from such customers as NL Industries, the Middlesex County Sewerage Authority, Hercules, Inc., E. I. DuPont, Sunshine Biscuit, New Jersey Steel and Structural Corporation, Continental Can, Vornado, E. R. Squibb, Personal Products, Permacel, Chicopee Manufacturing, Cel-Fibe, W. W. Henry Company and Riverside Supply.

Although many railroads with sharp declines in revenues are seeking Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) permission to do away with some 17 percent of all rail lines in north

Jersey, Kipp states that the RRRR is expanding, and expects to increase customer volume by 20 percent within the next ten years.

"We won't do anything but prosper," Kipp predicts, pointing out that many areas the RRRR serves are still growing.

There are 58 people employed by the RRRR. Four crews consisting of the engine man, conductor and two assistant brakemen or flagmen actually run the trains.

Inbound, the trains deliver raw materials to the industries. Outbound they bring finished products to South Amboy where the cars are interchanged to the mainlines of the CNJ or Penn Central for distribution throughout the country.

The line was organized in 1888 by the Central Railroad of Pennsylvania. It began service in 1890 from South

Amboy to Bound Brook, with a stop in New Brunswick, under the management of Thorvald Filskov. The line was then handed down to Filskov's son Harold, and then to his grandson Harold T. Kipp took over in 1965.

In the early 1900's, the RRRR became known locally as the "Movie Railroad". Early filmmakers in New Jersey used the line for scenes in such silent epics as "The Peril's of Pauline" and "The Call."

Filming took place on the main line in Sayreville near Ducks Nest, and in Milltown where some long-time residents can recall Pearl White in the title role of "Pauline" fleeing the dastardly villain.

In the Sayreville segments, the film makers would capture the RRRR engine rounding the curve in its approach to the trestle.

They would then speed up the film to make the train look as if it were running faster than it really was.

Milltown's attraction as a film capital was because of the high embankment along the tracks where engines and cars were toppled and set afire in spectacular action scenes.

Filming took place on Sunday afternoons in the sleepy little town with only a handful of curious children watching.

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The growth of the railroad and the growth of communities like Sayreville and South Amboy are inter-related, since the RRRR played a major part in industry's decision to locate in the area, bringing with it jobs and increases population.

The RRRR discontinued its passenger service in 1938, but, unlike other railroads,

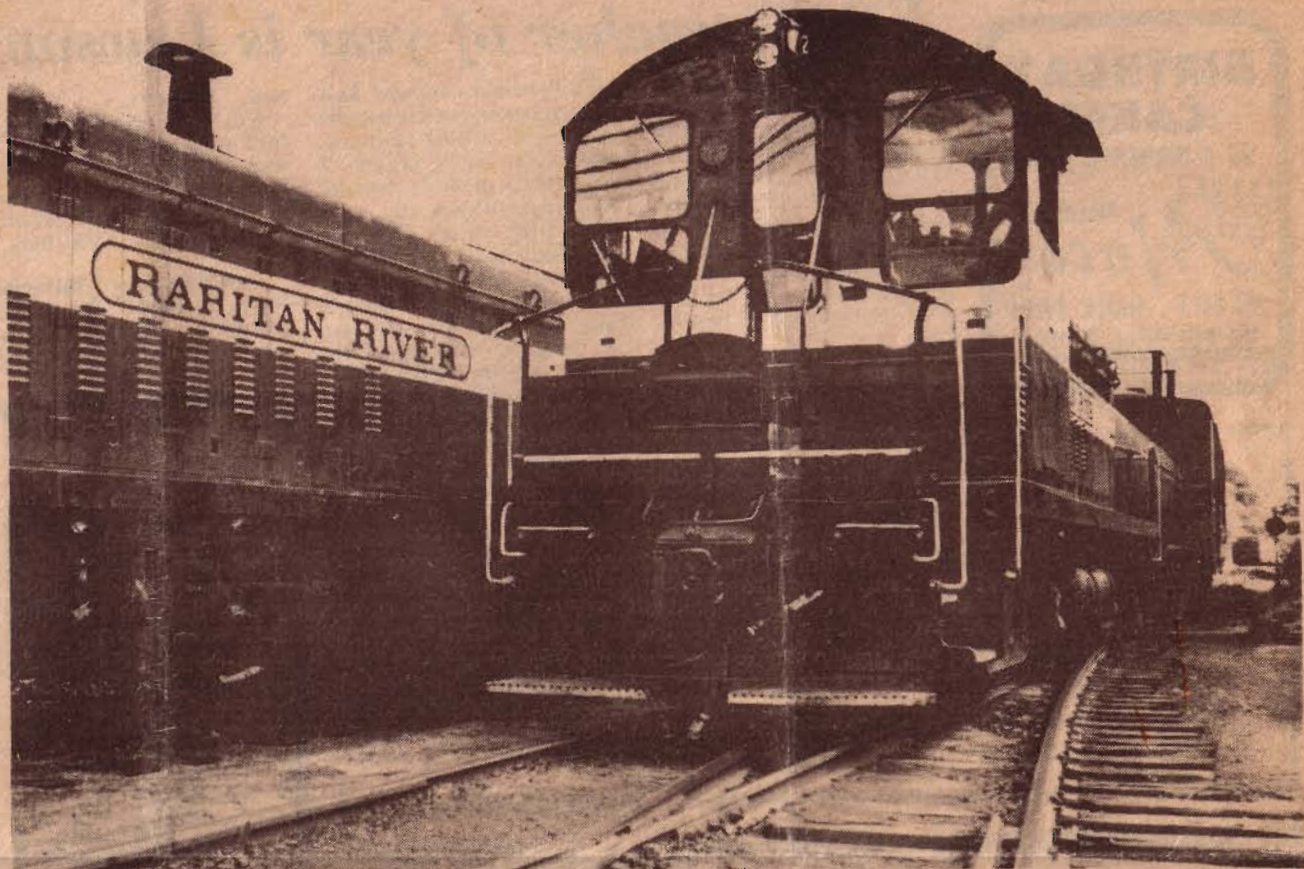
its freight service has steadily increased.

The competition between rail and truck was one of the prime factors in the decline of railway freight service. According to Kipp, railroads must purchase rights of land, lay tracks, acquire necessary appurtenances, pay for maintenance, and pay taxes, all of which made freight charges higher than those of trucks.

Discussing today's environmental regulations, Kipp says studies show that train emissions are far cleaner than those from trucks. He also states that today's higher fuel costs for trucks means that trains can carry four times as much tonnage as a truck at the same fuel cost.

The RRRR is classified as a Class II railroad, an ICC designation for a railroad with operating revenues of less than \$5,000,000 a year.

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**STREAMLINED**-- The above map shows the 15 mile route the Raritan River Railroad has traveled for the past 86 years. On the right the modern diesel electric engine like the one

photographed at the Parlin Depot on Washington rd., is a far cry from the steam engines of earlier days. The mini-railroad continues to prosper in its service to local industry.