

## **The History of the Kaleva Railroad Depot**

by Charles Showalter, Manistee, MI.

In the spring of 1887, the Buckley & Douglas Lumber Company of Manistee began building a railroad to transport logs from the forest to its sawmill in Manistee, and named this railroad the Manistee & Northeastern. At the same time, the Chicago & West Michigan Railroad was extending its track northward from Baldwin, Michigan. The two railroads crossed each other at Kaleva, then known as “Manistee Crossing,” for that very reason.

Later, the Manistee & Northeastern was absorbed by the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad, and the Chicago & West Michigan became part of the Pere Marquette Railroad, which in turn was also absorbed by the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad.

### **Did you follow all that?**

**The current building is the second depot to occupy this site.** The first depot, a wooden frame structure, was destroyed by fire in June of 1904, along with all the other businesses and buildings on Walta Street. Oddly enough, all this occurred the same week the depot at Onekama Junction burned. In 1888, the Manistee & Northeastern built the first 32.94 miles of its main line, and it was opened to Nessen City on November 20th of that year. The first Kaleva Depot was built sometime after this date, possibly in 1889, as the nearby Bear Creek Depot was completed in the spring of that year.

Construction of the existing depot at Kaleva started in early may of 1908, and the depot was ready for occupancy on June 18, 1908. The building is constructed of 24,000 Michigan sand lime bricks, which cost \$336.00. Twenty yards of concrete were used for the foundation, at a cost of \$100.00. Also listed on the bill of materials are: four doors at \$7.00 each; 13 windows at \$5.00 each; plus 3 special windows at \$8.00 each. Excavating for the foundation cost \$15.00. A July 1908 M&NE letter states: “Four settees are needed for the station: two at 12 feet long, for the Main Passenger Room, two at 10 feet long, for the Ladies Sitting Room.”

The Pere Marquette Railroad tracks cross the Manistee & Northeastern tracks at a 48 degree, 45 minute angle, and the depot was designed with a break in its middle, to match the reciprocal of this angle, so that each company’s railroad track was square with the building. The depot sits in the southeastern quadrant of the intersection of the two railroads. At one time, there was a watering station here, as well as a coaling station, a freight warehouse, and a station designed for the shipping of fish by the two railroads. All of these structures have since been removed.

At the time the two railroads were being built, the location where they crossed each other (as mentioned before) was simply called “Manistee Crossing,” as the name “Kaleva” was still 10-15 years in the future. The name Kaleva is pronounced **Kal’ ah vah**, but the Manistee & Northeastern always referred to it as **Kah lee’ vah**; why is anybody’s guess. (This second pronunciation is the way it’s pronounced in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, also.)

Near the Kaleva Depot, a Manistee & Northeastern logging train rear-ended another logging train, scattering logs over a wide area, and a photo was made of the wreck. A carload of Hemlock bark, just behind the engine’s tender, was pushed under the tender, lifting it up to about

a 45 degree angle. It must have been terrifying for the fireman and engineer of Engine Number 9, as the coal in the tender spilled into the engine's cab. One can imagine that there were some resulting burns or scaldings. The engine was returned to service after an extended stay in the shops at Manistee.

**Now, if you want beginning & ending dates, pay attention, as there were several, depending on which railroad had possession of the Depot.**

Chicago & West Michigan trains started passing through Kaleva in May of 1890, after High Bridge opened for traffic, and passenger service followed a short time afterwards. Eventually, the C.&W.M. provided transportation to and from the resort areas of Charlevoix, Petosky, Bay View, and Harbor Springs, all located north of Kaleva.

The first Manistee & Northeastern logging trains passed through Kaleva in mid-October 1888, and by early November two trains a day were running. The first Manistee & Northeastern passenger train ran on January 6, 1889, but only went as far as the Bear Creek station, a few miles west of Kaleva. This train was a "special," but regular passenger and general freight service began January 14 of the same year.

The last Manistee & Northeastern passenger train between Manistee and Kaleva arrived at Kaleva on November 30, 1949, after leaving Manistee at 5:00pm. For the first time in almost 60 years, there was no passenger service provided by the M&NE, however, on January 31, 1955, the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad, which had abandoned their tracks between Baldwin and Kaleva, began routing trains through Manistee and over the old M&NE tracks to Kaleva. The last scheduled C&O scheduled passenger train passed through Kaleva, going south, on October 29, 1966, having left Traverse City at 5:55pm as "Train no. 26." The last C&O passenger train crossed High Bridge on January 30, 1955, after passing through Kaleva.

In 1966, the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission for permission to close the Kaleva depot and have all traffic in the Kaleva area handled by the C&O offices in Manistee; the request was denied and the station stayed open.

The last scheduled freight train to pass through Kaleva did so on February 19, 1982. Engineer Julius Gondzar eased his train out of the Boardman Yard, in Traverse City, at just past 3:30 pm on a Friday afternoon and headed south to Manistee. The rest of the crew consisted of Will Short, Trainmaster ; Terry Way, Fireman; Larry Lampton, Brakeman; Fred Horn, Rear Brakeman; and Martin Jaritz riding caboose. At 4:35pm, the train arrived in Thompsonville and 6 cars were picked up at that location from the interchange track with the Ann Arbor Railroad, and two cars were set off for the Ann Arbor. At Kaleva, one lone car was picked up by the train, for the last time, as a small group of people took pictures.

Imagine being at the Kaleva Depot in the early 1900s, when the station was a hub of activity. At that time, the railroads were the only way to travel and to receive and ship goods. The agent's telegraph was constantly chattering, as it sounded out train orders and other related business. People were present all the time, waiting to leave on trains or waiting for passengers to arrive. In

today's world of the automobile and airplane, it is difficult to understand how important railroads were at one time, but they were the country's first experience with mass land transportation.

### **Footnotes**

In 1909, a round trip ticket from Detroit to Kaleva, via the Pere Marquette Railroad, cost \$6.50.

On May 15, 1921, the Michigan Public Service Commission ordered the Pere Marquette and Manistee & Northeastern to maintain a telephone in the Kaleva Depot.

Researched and written by **Charles Showalter, May 2011.**