

On the 20th Century

Amy E. Wieting



The Twentieth Century Limited, a passenger train traversing between Chicago and New York in 18 hours, began service in 1902. To the left, is a souvenir sheet from Palau with an image of the train from 1902. In 1902, the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern (LS&MS) Railroad managed the equipment and route. In 1914, the LS&MS Railroad merged with the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad creating the New York Central Railroad.

In 1938, the "Limited" was redesigned in the Art Deco style. With the sleeker design and lighter material, the 18 hour trip was reduced to 15 1/2 hours. Two United

States stamp issues have noted this design. A stamp from the "Celebrate the Century—1930's" sheet issued in 1998 (upper right image) and an issue commemorating trains in 1999 (image to right).

The 50th anniversary of the inaugural run did not go unnoticed. In 1952 this milestone was marked by the New York Central System. The images below are of souvenir covers celebrating this event.



The notoriety of the train contributed to references in several areas of the arts. A stage play in 1932, followed by a film adaption in 1934 and major scenes in "North by Northwest" and "The Sting". The most ambitious work was the 1978 Broadway musical, "On the 20th Century", based on the play and film previously mentioned.



Lastly, a personal connection with this train. While sorting postcards sent by my great-grandfather to his family, I found a postcard (see left image) with an image of the "20th Century Limited". Included on the reverse side of the card, my great-grandfather commented that the train was travelling at 65 MPH at 11:00 PM. A philatelic extra, is the one cent Franklin usage. Upon closer inspection, the stamp has a perfin of the LS&MS railroad. Combined, both items

indicate that this trip was taken between 1907 and 1914.

awieting@ix.netcom.com