



**Preservationist Dave Morrison** outside the old Oyster Bay train station, which is being renovated to house the Oyster Bay Railroad Museum.

NEWSDAY / JOHN PARASKEVAS

# HIS LINE ON LIRR HISTORY

Dave Morrison is the go-to guy for local railroad love and lore

**BY JOHN HANC**  
*Special to Newsday*

**D**ave Morrison strides through the old Oyster Bay railroad station dodging workmen's saws and hammers, surveying progress of restoration plans for the century-old structure that will become a museum. Its timeworn walls and 25-foot cathedral ceiling are revealed for the first time in years.

"This is real history here!" Morrison says with enthusiasm. "This is going to be restored to its original beauty, the way it was when Teddy Roosevelt was here."

Originally built in 1889, the station was upgraded in 1902, a year after Theodore Roosevelt became president. He and his staff, Cabinet members and visiting dignitaries traveled by rail between Washington and

his home at nearby Sagamore Hill. While it might be hard to discern the station's charm amid the sawdust, Morrison's fervor for the work being done is contagious — not only for the \$1.4-million restoration but for all things that involve railroad history.

Morrison, who is 71 and lives in Plainview, is an expert on the 182-year-old Long Island Rail Road and is helping to

spearhead restoration efforts at the old Oyster Bay station. The LIRR is the oldest railroad line in America still operating under its original name, he says. An LIRR employee for 25 years, and since retirement in 1999, a collector, author, speaker, oft-quoted authority and historic preservationist, Morrison has been working on that railroad in one form or another for most of his adult life.

**See RAILROAD on E24**

# The LIRR is his train of thought

## RAILROAD from E23

Longtime friend, fellow enthusiast and former LIRR colleague Bob Myers, 70, of Greenlawn, says, "Where do you go for Long Island Rail Road history? The answer is Dave Morrison."

John Specce, president of the Oyster Bay Railroad Museum, the organization behind the station restoration, says, "If there was a degree in railroads, he would be a PhD and a professor emeritus."

Although not an academi-

cally trained historian, Morrison has made a second career for himself while retired, researching and writing about the past. He has chronicled local railroad history in five books. The latest, a photographic history titled "Sunrise Yard and Hell Gate Bridge," was published Dec. 12. The Queens facility opened in 1910 and is still the world's largest railroad passenger car storage yard. Morrison has more than 2,000 books on trains in his library and several thousand LIRR artifacts —

photos, postcards, maps, timetables, annual reports — amassed over the years. He is widely quoted on New York railroad history and has been featured on PBS' "History Detectives" and on the Discovery Channel.

### Penn's former flock

One of his proudest achievements is helping to rediscover and document the large marble eagles that once stood over the original Penn Station. The sculptures went missing during the controversial demolition of that landmark in the 1960s. Restoring the eagles was a major project. Morrison's role was to research and document the location of the 22 original sculptures. The head of one of those recovered is now on loan at the "preview" center of the Oyster Bay Railroad Museum Station restoration; another stands on a pedestal outside the Hicksville Railroad station. There are two at the Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point; two are outside Penn Station, on either side of the Madison Square Garden marquee.

He has done all of his research since retiring. "I've been retired for 17 years, and haven't had a boring day yet," he says.

Morrison's great-great-great-grandfather, Charles Sexton, worked on the Camden and Amboy Railroad in the mid-19th century as a "coach trimmer," installing interior fixtures in the cars. "Railroading is in my blood," Morrison says.

His infatuation with trains began early in life. He was born in Yonkers, and his family had a summer bungalow in Croton on a hill overlooking a New York Central Railroad facility on the Harmon line. "I have a vague recollection of seeing some of what would have been the last steam engines in operation on the New York Central," Morrison says. After graduating high school

Morrison, who is helping to spearhead the \$1.4-million restoration of the old Oyster Bay train station, is enthused by its original features, including leaded glass windows and the location of a fireplace.

in 1963, he joined the Army. "I spent 2½ years in Panama," he says. "I was in a jungle, but fortunately, a more peaceful one than Vietnam."

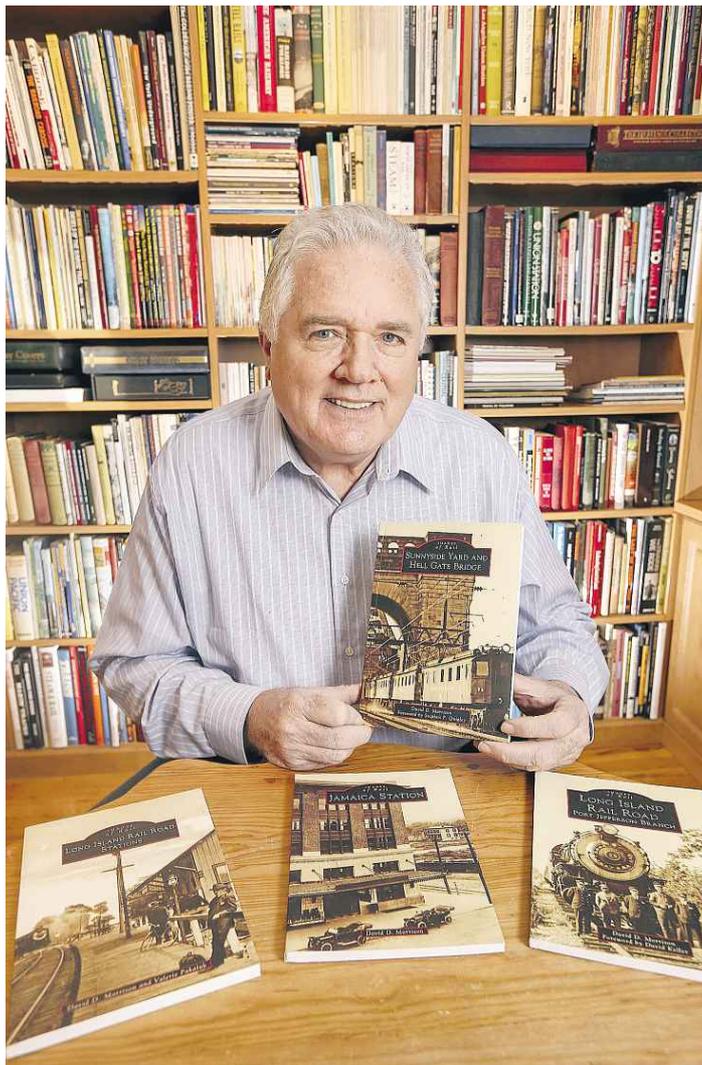
He got a job working for the oil company Esso as a lab technician at its Linden, New Jersey-based research division after leaving the service. He also pursued a bachelor's degree in labor relations, attending Rutgers University's Newark campus at night. When he graduated, he was hired by the LIRR as a labor relations specialist. "I got the job when the railroad was really in the doldrums," he recalls. "We would get radio reports every day about trains being canceled. That's when the shop craft unions were creating havoc. It was not a good time for the railroad."

Morrison and his wife,

Diane, who is 65, moved to Hicksville in 1973 when he got the job. They have lived in Plainview since 1981 and have four children and two grandchildren.

After 14 years in labor relations, Morrison became a branch line manager overseeing the Oyster Bay, Port Jefferson and Montauk branches. "My passion was working with the customers at the railroad stations and the community leaders," he says. During his decadelong stint as a branch-line manager, he also began to learn more about the LIRR's 124 passenger stations — some of which date back more than a century.

"With the things he's collected and shared and written, Dave's had a huge impact," says his friend Myers, who is vice president of Long Island's



Morrison's large collection of railroad-related books includes several he has researched and written since his retirement.

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Sunrise Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society. “Shared is the key word. He is very generous with his time and his information.” Myers says Morrison is also an

activist in preserving the railroad’s history. “Dave shows up at functions. He spearheads things.”

Morrison receives praise as co-chairman of the Oyster Bay

station restoration committee. “Dave brings a wealth of knowledge and good common sense to the committee,” says Spece, who is hoping for the new museum to open in 2018.

**Oyster Bay details**

Inspecting the exterior of the station, Morrison admires the craftsmanship on the original facade. “Look at the beautiful roof bracket,” he says. “And those leaded glass windows! They’re original. And the shells. The station used crushed shells from Oyster Bay as part of the decorative exterior.”

He stops to offer one of his many tidbits about the station: “The architect was Bradford Lee Gilbert,” he says. “He was also the architect for the 1898 Grand Central Station renovation.”

Carefully studying the south-facing exterior of the station, Morrison says, “It’s going to be beautiful when it’s done!”



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Carpenter Sam Drucker adds rafter extensions to the roof of the old Oyster Bay station, which was built in 1889.



FROM THE COLLECTION OF DAVID MOR

Theodore Roosevelt boards a train in Oyster Bay circa 1900. ■ More photos at [newsday.com/act2](http://newsday.com/act2)

## Next stop: These notable stations

**R**ailroad historian Dave Morrison loves everything about trains, but his particular passion is the Long Island Rail Road stations. “The first and last thing you see when you ride a train is the station,” Morrison says. “Things happened at these stations. During World War II, railroad stations were the last place where people saw loved ones.”

While many of the 124 LIRR stations are modernized, others retain their architectural charms; still others have intriguing back stories. Here are some of the more notable stations from Morrison’s 2003 picture history book, co-authored with Valerie Pakaluk, “Long Island Rail Road Stations.”

**GLEN COVE** Built in 1895, the station was featured in a scene in the 1954 film “Sabrina,” starring William Holden and Audrey Hepburn.

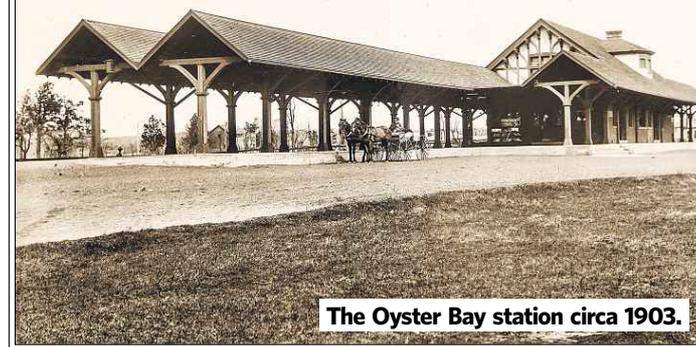
**OAKDALE** The only LIRR station in which a wedding was held (in 1994, Charlotte Herbert and Edward Wintraecken exchanged vows in front of the station’s fireplace).

**FARMINGDALE** The electric substation constructed in 1909 to serve the Huntington to Amityville trolley is still there.

**ST. JAMES** The second oldest existing LIRR station, it was built in 1873, and still has the original potbelly stove in its waiting room.

**SEA CLIFF** The only station that has its original Victorian canopies, once a feature on many LIRR stations.

— JOHN HANC



The Oyster Bay station circa 1903.