PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-56

The railroad at Shipshewana, 1887–1906: grading at Sturgis, the receivership of March 1889, the depot assessed in June 1889, and the robbers who came by handcar

Michael Urbanski ORCID 0009-0006-8183-5828 (https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8183-5828), Project Scroll · Issued 5 November 2026 · Version 1 · doi:10.5281/zenodo.23968748 (https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23968748)

SUMMARY

The line from Goshen, Indiana, to Sturgis, Michigan, that made the town of Shipshewana was begun with great promises. The Goshen correspondent of the *Indianapolis Sentinel* reported on 21 April 1887 that grading had begun at Sturgis that day and that the company promised "to have trains running by the 1st of November." The track was finished only in December 1888. On 11 March 1889 the Farmers' Loan and Trust Company of New York sued in the federal court at Detroit for unpaid interest on the construction bonds, and the court appointed W. K. Ackerman of Chicago receiver; on 10 July 1889 the circuit court at Goshen ordered the Canada and St. Louis sold. In June 1889 the State Board of Equalization assessed the company's buildings at Shipshewana, a depot at $400, a water tank at $400 and a stock pen at $50: the earliest record of the depot we have found. The railroad also served the town's robbers. In November 1897 men came in from Sturgis "on a stolen handcar," blew the vault of the Davis bank and left on the same car, and in October 1906 six masked men who dynamited the bank vault "escaped on a handcar." By 1921, when the bank was reported robbed "the ninth time ... in 20 years," the robbers came by automobile.

THE RECORD

1. ***Indiana State Sentinel*** **(Indianapolis), 27 April 1887, p. 5**

> *"Goshen, April 21. Work began on the grading of the Michigan, Indiana and St Louis Railroad at Sturgis to-day ... The company promises to have trains running by the 1st of November."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn87056600/1887-04-27/ed-1/?sp=5)

2. ***St. Paul Daily Globe*****, 12 March 1889, p. 4**

> *"Detroit, Mich., March 11. The Farmer's Loan and Trust Company of New York have begun suit in the United States circuit court here against the St. Louis, Sturgis & Battle Creek Railroad company, asking the appointment of a receiver ... The reason for this action is alleged to be the non-payment of interest on construction bonds. ... This morning the court appointed W. K. Ackerman, of Chicago, receiver"*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn90059522/1889-03-12/ed-1/?sp=4)

3. ***New-York Tribune*****, 12 July 1889, p. 2**

> *"Goshen, Ind., July 11.—Judge Van Fleet, in the Circuit Court here, yesterday ordered the sale of the Canada and St. Louis Railway ... the sale to take place on August 17 and to net not less than $9,000 per mile."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn83030214/1889-07-12/ed-1/?sp=2)

4. ***Documentary Journal of Indiana*****, 1889, State Board of Equalization, railroad assessments, La Grange County (June 1889)**

> *"CANADA & ST. LOUIS. Newbury, Shipshewana. Depot $400; Water tank 400; Stock pen 50."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/documentaryjourn1889indi)

5. **"Shipshewana Bank Robbers,"** ***Indianapolis Journal*****, 4 November 1897, p. 2**

> *"it is surmised that the robbers came in from Sturgis, Mich., at about 1:30 o'clock on a stolen handcar and left after the robbery on the same car, which was found in a ditch near Middlebury."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn82015679/1897-11-04/ed-1/?sp=2)

6. **"Bank Robbers Get Little,"** ***Washington Herald*****, 25 October 1906, p. 1**

> *"Three of the robbers remained on guard while the other three men blew the vault door. ... The robbers escaped on a handcar toward this city."*

Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn83045433/1906-10-25/ed-1/?sp=1)

7. ***Glendale Daily Press*****, 12 December 1921**

> *"Local authorities believe that three men who came here yesterday in an automobile committed the robbery. It is the ninth time the bank has been robbed in 20 years and the third time this year."*

Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/cgl_001687)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The financial collapse of the company that built the line is dated to March–July 1889, within months of its completion; the Shipshewana depot is documented from June 1889, five months after the town plat; and two robberies of the Shipshewana bank, in 1897 and 1906, are shown to have been made by men who came or went on the railroad.

LIMITS

The federal suit names the St. Louis, Sturgis & Battle Creek company, the Michigan end of the line; the Goshen sale order names the Canada and St. Louis. The 1897 and 1906 reports say what the papers surmised or were told on the day; the arrest of 1898 is not part of this note.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

The 1893 county atlas; Ford (1920); 7 Score and 10 (1982); the Pumpkinvine trail's history pages; Abandoned Rails; Michigan Railroads; the *Documentary Journal of Indiana* for 1889, 1890 and 1909; the *Railroad Gazette* and *Engineering News* for 1887–89; Chronicling America and the Internet Archive's newspapers for 1887–1922; web searches.

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/), and how we weigh each kind of record in Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/).

"New" means new to print as far as we can tell. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will credit it here and raise the note's version.

WORKS CITED

Earlier work, catalogues and databases named in this note, besides the records quoted above.

1. *Poor's Manual of the Railroads of the United States* (New York, 1891). https://archive.org/details/poorsmanualofrai24newyuoft

2. Sturgis, Goshen and St. Louis Railway Company, Michigan Railroads. https://www.michiganrailroads.com/railroads-in-history/485-q-s/3933-sturgis-goshen-and-st-louis-railway-company

---

THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in The railroad that made Shipshewana (projectscroll.com/news/the-railroad-that-made-shipshewana/). In the discoveries register:

- `rr-receivership-1889` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#rr-receivership-1889)
- `rr-depot-1889` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#rr-depot-1889)
- `rr-handcar-robberies` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#rr-handcar-robberies)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

Michael Urbanski, “The railroad at Shipshewana, 1887–1906: grading at Sturgis, the receivership of March 1889, the depot assessed in June 1889, and the robbers who came by handcar,” Project Scroll Research Note 2026-56, version 1 (5 November 2026), https://projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-56/. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23968748.

BibTeX

```
@techreport{urbanski202656,
  author      = {Urbanski, Michael},
  orcid       = {0009-0006-8183-5828},
  title       = {{The railroad at Shipshewana, 1887--1906: grading at
Sturgis, the receivership of March 1889, the depot assessed in June
1889, and the robbers who came by handcar}},
  institution = {Project Scroll},
  type        = {Project Scroll Research Note},
  number      = {2026-56},
  year        = {2026},
  month       = {nov},
  url         = {https://projectscroll.com/discoveries/notes/2026-56/},
  doi         = {10.5281/zenodo.23968748},
  note        = {Version 1}
}
```