

Turntable Times

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One of at least two different depots that once stood at Montgomery, Virginia. This fairly well-maintained structure appears to be in good repair in this late 1917 view. The apparent lack of activity and closed doors would even lead you to the conclusion that this station is closed. In fact it is a bit of a mystery why the structure may have even been here. Passenger and employee timetables show no service even a flag stop. A 1911 and 1914 list of stations and sidings show no assigned agent which leads us to the thought that Montgomery may have been a seasonal shipping (i.e. produce) location. Anyone have any ideas?

Norfolk and Western Photograph No. 2476, K. L. Miller Collection.

Turntable Times

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Editor Kenney Kirkman
Mixed Freight Robin Shavers
Small Rails Dave Meashey
Splinters Bill Arnold
Publisher Richard D. Shell
Publisher Kenneth L. Miller

All materials should be sent directly to

Editor Kenney Kirkman

590 Murphy Road

Collinsville, VA 24078-2128

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Cards and Flowers

If you know of a Chapter Member who is sick, lost a loved one or has a new birth in the family, please contact Elizabeth Leedy. Elizabeth is responsible for Chapter cards and flowers and can be reached at 389-5274.

Meeting Notice

The Roanoke Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society will hold its next general meeting on Thursday, August 19, 1999 at 7:30 pm. The meeting will be at the First Presbyterian Church on the corner of McClanahan and Crystal Spring Avenue in Roanoke.

Deadline for Turntable Times

The deadline for the next issue of Turntable Times is Wednesday, August 18, 1999. Please send articles, information and all exchange newsletters to: Kenney Kirkman, Editor, Turntable Times, 590 Murphy Road, Collinsville, Va. 24078-2128.

From the Turntable Times Editor

Effective with the December, 1999 issue of Turntable Times, I will be resigning as Editor.

I began as Editor of Turntable Times in late 1994, and wish to thank everyone who has helped in some way with the Chapter newsletter, be it large or small. I will not attempt to list everyone's name, as I'm sure to leave someone out.

My decision to resign has nothing to do with the recent change in schedule for Turntable Times during the past few months. Priorities in my life such as work have made it impossible for me to attend a single Roanoke Chapter meeting so far during 1999, and even more difficult when trying to find enough quality time to put together the newsletter each month.

If you would like to become Editor of Turntable Times, please contact me either by letter or phone. Or, you may get in touch with Roanoke Chapter President Richard Shell or Ken Miller. Again, Thanks to Everyone.

Kenney Kirkman

Small Rails - August

by Dave Meashey

The Roanoke Valley Model Engineers continue to upgrade the track and scenery on their layout modules. Some of the track is being upgraded with longer turnouts. We are working on a few modules at a time, as Rick Anderson's basement will only hold three or four modules at a time.

The Big Lick Big Train Operators held their July meeting at Steve King's home on July 17th. Attendance was small, but those of us who were there were treated to Steve's 7/8 inch scale live steam Forney in action. The little locomotive pulled her four car train around Steve's completed loop. As with the prototype Maine two-foot gauge railroads, there were a couple of minor derailments. Steve corrected some minor negative super-elevation on the offending curve and the train ran smoothly after that. A new covered bridge was also in use on the

railroad. The club is having some difficulty finding members willing to host meetings. The “faithful five” have all either hosted a meeting or established a meeting date. It is hoped that some of the newer members will offer to fill in some of the empty months.

The Berksy Trolley

by Dave Meashey

When I helped as a volunteer engineer at the Wanamaker, Kempton & Southern Railroad, a tourist line in eastern Pennsylvania, there was not enough business during the week to justify keeping a steam locomotive fired up for those days. Instead, a railcar called the Berksy Trolley was used for the lighter weekday traffic. The Berksy Trolley made the same trip as the steam trains, but could do it more economically.

The car had originally been a brakemen’s shuttle at the Reading Railroad’s hump yard in Reading, Pennsylvania.

Originally brakemen would ride the freight cars down from the hump and control their speed using the hand brake. The motor car would convey the brakemen back to the hump for another ride. Both the brakemen and the car were sidelined when car retarders came into use.

The WK&S purchased the car sometime in the 1960’s, and volunteers converted it to resemble a single-truck trolley. The car was splendid in its yellow and red livery, and delightful to ride in. A Chevrolet 283 V-8 had been selected for the car’s prime mover, making it somewhat over-powered. During the early 1970’s the car was re-engined with a Chevrolet standard six cylinder engine, which was more in keeping for its size. I haven’t been able to visit the WK&S for many years, but I hope the Berksy Trolley is still in use.

On Line of Road

by Bill Purdie

One time I took #4501 and a nine-car passenger train to Moundsville, West Virginia. Home of the State Penitentiary. We were there for almost a week making scenes for “Fools Parade”, a movie starring Jimmy Stewart, Ann Baxter, George Kennedy, William Windom and others. I had the pleasure of sitting at the table at meal times with Jimmy Stewart. He was one very fine gentleman.

On Sunday the train was not needed so I decided to work maintenance on the engine. I had backed up to the edge of the sidewalk where a fireplug was located. I had the hose in the tender and was sitting on the top of the back-up headlight while the tank filled. General Road Foreman Walter Dove was cleaning the fire and making a lot of smoke.

At noon, church turned out and down the sidewalk came five or six semi-elderly ladies. The one that was doing most of the talking looked up at me and said “Hey you up there, Don’t you know that smoke is a health hazard?” I replied “No ma’am, haven’t you heard the news about steam engine smoke?”

“No” she replied, “tell me about it.” I replied that “Scientists have discovered that steam engine smoke is full of vitamins and they are going to run these engines all over the country to make everybody healthy”.

She turned to the other ladies and remarked “Isn’t that wonderful girls?” They all walked down the street smiling.

(From The Hot Box, Atlanta Chapter, NRHS, June, 1999.)

North to Alaska!

There’s a big plan floating around in Canada and Alaska, and it could forever change the face of this last great frontier. The plan, put

forth by Alaskan railroad proponents and the newly organized Canadian Arctic Railway, is to build a railroad from Fairbanks through 850 miles of Alaskan and Canadian wilderness to connect with BC RAIL and the Lower 48 states. In Fairbanks it would meet up with the Alaska Railroad, helping to transport both visitors and commercial goods. Today, just one road, the original Alaskan Highway, built in World War II, connects Alaska to its southern states. This new \$3 billion dollar rail project would be an additional avenue for commercial trade and tourism.

In May 1999, the Alaskan State House of Representatives gave its unanimous consent to establish a right of way for the rail route down south. This railroad would travel in a southeastern direction from Fairbanks through a mountainous region in eastern Alaska to reach the Rocky Mountain trench, just short of the border with the Yukon Territory. The rails, once in Canada, would continue southward before turning east to Whitehorse, YT. Crossing the border into British Columbia the line would continue south connecting with BC Rail's Takla Subdivision, on that road's unfinished Dease Lake extension.

The idea linking the territories of Alaska and the Canadian Yukon with the south is not new. In 1960 Swedish financier Axel Wenner-Gren proposed such a railroad. This plan was to push northward from the Summit Lake area, at Odell, B.C., along the Rocky Mountain trench to the Yukon territory. The Province of British Columbia offered exclusive rights to natural resources in the area in exchange for a construction startup. The plan came under criticism in the press when it was revealed Wenner-Gren's money came out of W.W. II as a Nazi collaborator, and the entire railroad for resource deal was called off.

In December 1964 plans were revived, this time with construction to be paid for by the British Columbia taxpayers. Pacific Great Eastern,

the predecessor of BC RAIL, pushed the rails northward 73 miles from Odell to Fort St. James. This segment was opened in 1968. Construction was begun on a 112 mile line to Takla Lake. In 1969 the BC government decided to push the line northward to Dease Lake, located 412 miles from Odell. While right of way construction continued it soon became apparent that cost estimates were way out of line. Locating engineers had not correctly estimated volumes of earth and rock to be moved, and monies needed to push construction in the isolated region soared. Expenses grew and a change in the political leadership led a 1976 re-evaluation of the Dease Lake Extension. This led to the appointment of a commission that recommended a "pause" construction. Operation was cut back to sawmills at Bear Lake, BC, although the rail extends farther. The unfinished right of way is completed as far as Iskut, not too far (but some very tough construction miles) from the northern British Columbia border.

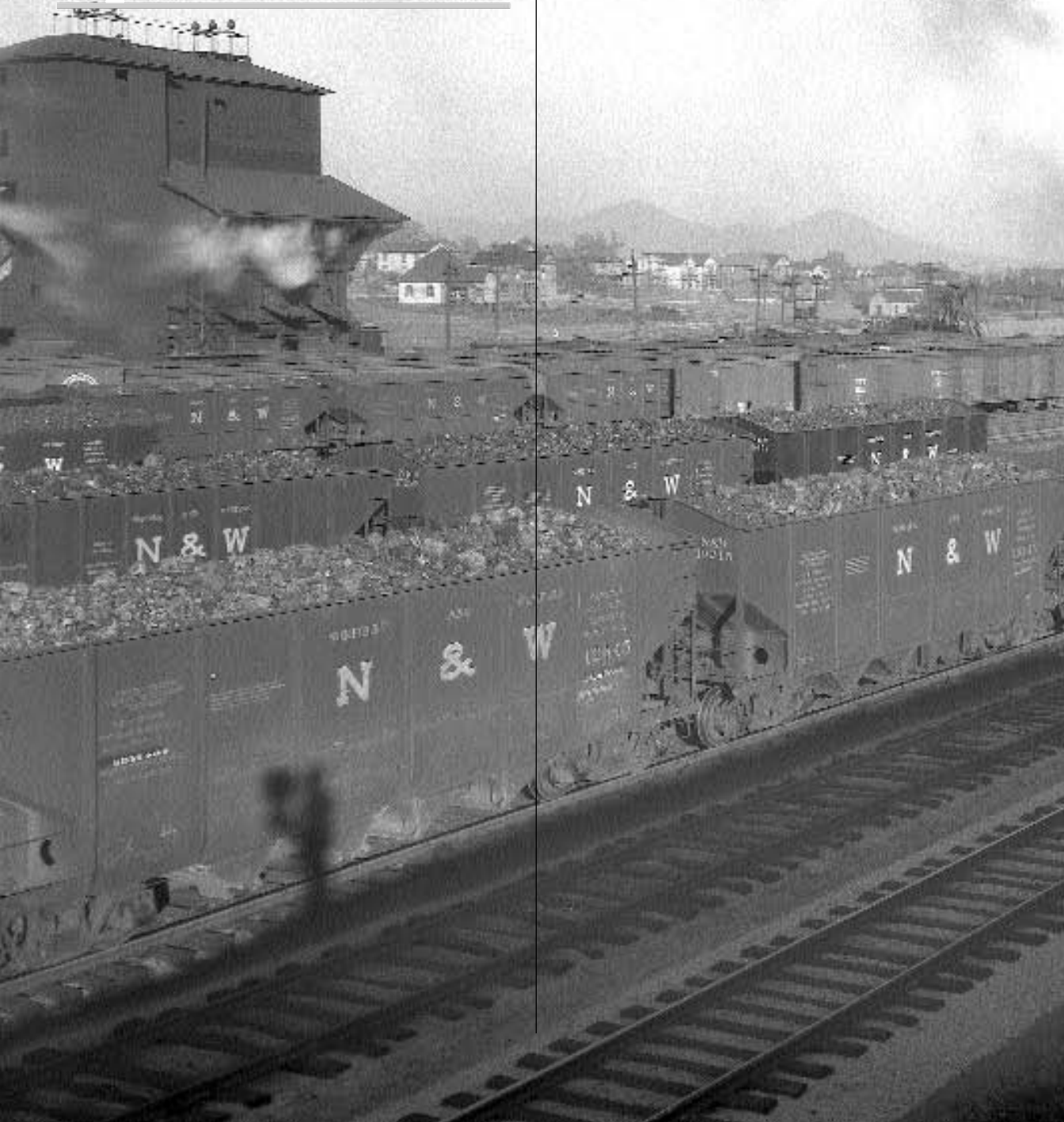
Now the revived emphasis on a rail route comes from the citizens of Alaska. Soon rail proponents will gather to plot the next steps. They hope construction will start within six years. More importantly, several things make that time frame seem realistic.

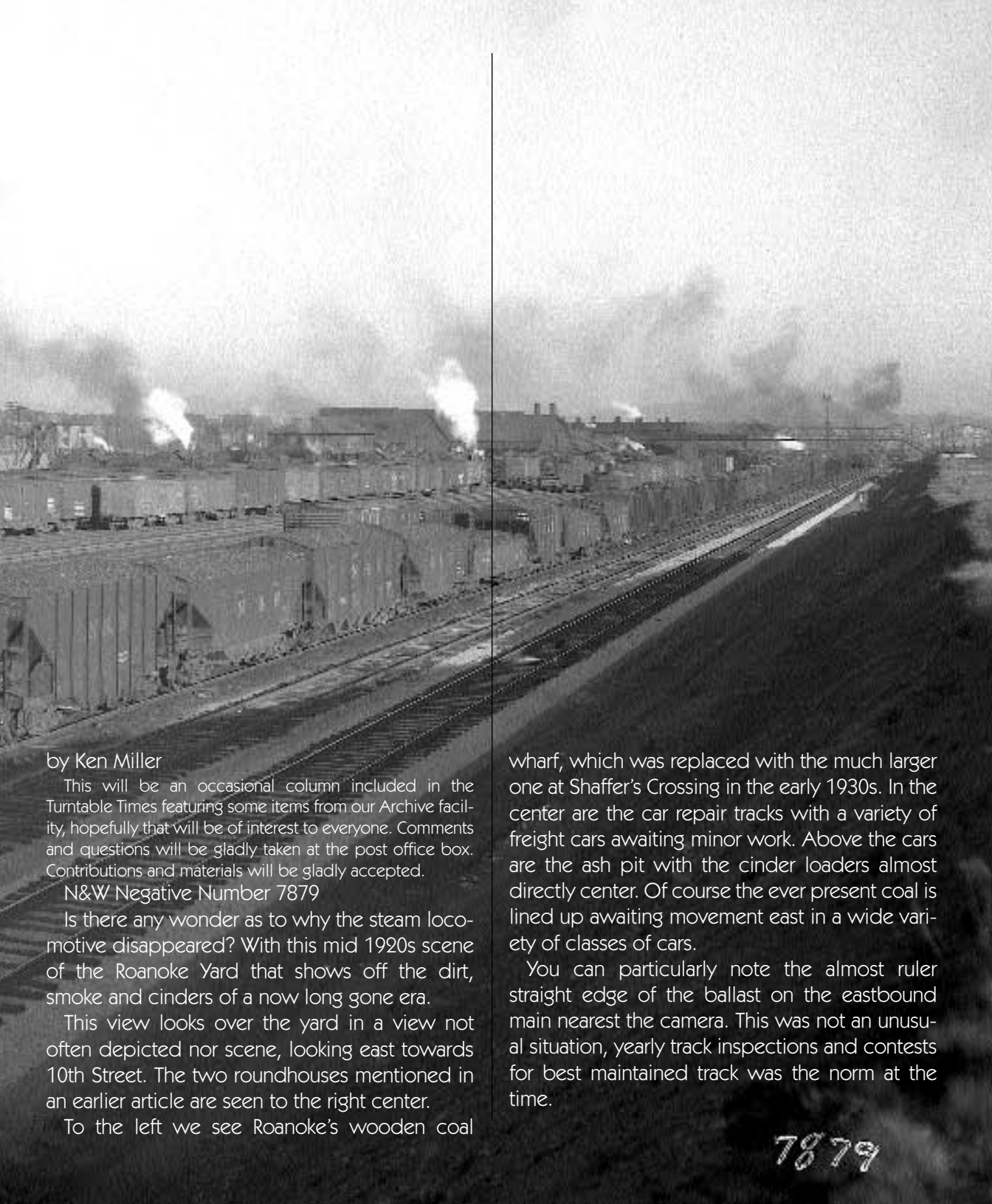
First of all, the US government is moving toward putting an antiballistic missile defense, or "star wars" base near Fairbanks. A rail link with the lower states would help in building the facility by lowering costs of transportation.

Second, many mining companies back the plan and would use trains to get their products to market more efficiently. Most Alaskan mineral reserves, except precious metals, now cost too much to bring to the world market. Alaska contains low sulphur coal deposits which rival the Powder River basin in size. Lower rail transportation costs would bring these resources into the



From the
ARCHIVES





by Ken Miller

This will be an occasional column included in the Turntable Times featuring some items from our Archive facility, hopefully that will be of interest to everyone. Comments and questions will be gladly taken at the post office box. Contributions and materials will be gladly accepted.

N&W Negative Number 7879

Is there any wonder as to why the steam locomotive disappeared? With this mid 1920s scene of the Roanoke Yard that shows off the dirt, smoke and cinders of a now long gone era.

This view looks over the yard in a view not often depicted nor scene, looking east towards 10th Street. The two roundhouses mentioned in an earlier article are seen to the right center.

To the left we see Roanoke's wooden coal

wharf, which was replaced with the much larger one at Shaffer's Crossing in the early 1930s. In the center are the car repair tracks with a variety of freight cars awaiting minor work. Above the cars are the ash pit with the cinder loaders almost directly center. Of course the ever present coal is lined up awaiting movement east in a wide variety of classes of cars.

You can particularly note the almost ruler straight edge of the ballast on the eastbound main nearest the camera. This was not an unusual situation, yearly track inspections and contests for best maintained track was the norm at the time.

7879

domestic marketplace for the first time.

Third, the Canadian Arctic Railway, a start-up company in British Columbia, has mapped out a route for the Canadian section. Canadian Arctic President David Broadbent says he already has several New York investors interested in funding the project. The ambitious Canadian portion of the route would serve Whitehorse, then strike out for Dease Lake and the unfinished BC RAIL roadbed. While negotiations continue on ownership of this unfinished right of way, a completed railroad would generate revenues from which the beleaguered British Columbia taxpayers would be relieved.

Fourth, tourism is growing fast. The number of annual tourist visits to Alaska has doubled to more than 1 million the past decade. Even the waterfront town of Valdez, home of one of the nation's busiest oil-loading ports, is a prime example of why the rail link is needed. Like the rest of Alaska, its dependence on oil is fading. Revenues from the port aren't as high as in the past. But tourism is speeding ahead. Visitors come to fish for halibut and salmon. Or they take sea kayaks out to Prince William Sound, their paddles plying the waters once sullied by the Exxon Valdez's spilled black goo. It's a sign of the times for this town as well as all of Alaska. Oil is still king, but tourism is challenging and will be greater in the future.

Someday the line may be part of a larger North American system. Montana Rail Link has been mentioned as a possible partner to acquire Canadian Arctic. There's still more dreams down the road. Among them is a plan to carve out a 55-mile rail tunnel under the Bering Strait to Russia, at a cost of at least \$15 billion. With global trade growing, this tunnel would serve as a vital link in a system which would link much of the world by rail. With logistics solved and an extension of the Trans-Siberian rail network,

intermodal trains would be able to run from New York to Beijing, Moscow and London. But first things first! A rail link between Alaska and the Lower 48 States is a step that may someday link the world by rail. (From High Iron, Winchester Chapter, NRHS, August 1999).

Book Review

by John Austen

American Railroads in the Nineteenth Century: A Pictorial History in Victorian Wood Engravings by Jim Harter; 1999, Texas Tech University Press, 2903 4th Street, Box 41037, Lubbock TX 79409-1037; 9"x12", 320pp.; ISBN 0896724026; \$45.00.

As the title states, this is a collection of nineteenth century wood engravings. The engravings are organized topically in eighteen chapters. Each chapter begins with a page or two of narrative commenting on the development of the topic depicted. The balance of the chapter consists of the engravings. A brief caption at the bottom of each page identifies the engravings on the page and notes their time period, e.g. "Baldwin-built N&W Consolidation locomotive at the 1893 Columbian Exposition". Many of the engravings occupy a full page. Most are shown two to the page, more in a few cases.

There are chapters on locomotives, stations, bridges and tunnels, passenger operations, freight operations, wrecks, and other topics. There is even an 1887 illustration of a dome car proposed by an inventor, with three domes resembling Vista Domes. There is also an 1885 illustration of an N&W work train in Virginia. An engine is pushing a boxcar and wooden track inspection car number 3152. This car has tiers of seats so several persons can view the track at once, including one sitting on a bench on the roof! The roof is a sort of irregular hip roof. A smoke jack projects through the roof near the rear of the car. The only windows are small and high, one group ascending along with the tiers of seats at

the observation end, another group being in a horizontal row near the center of the car.

There is also a one-page introduction and a one-page bibliography (considerably less than one page, actually). As might be expected, these engravings have been published before; the bibliography lists a few secondary sources and no primary sources. There is no index; but that is not really any problem, since the purpose of the book is to give the flavor of the times for American railroads collectively.

American Railroads in the Nineteenth Century: A Pictorial History in Victorian Wood Engravings delivers just what you would expect based on the title. The engravings do the work; the brief narrative is sufficient to introduce the material and place it in context. A full variety of American railroads are covered, including cable cars and electric trolleys. An alternative style of gathering the electric current is even shown, where in the wire is under the track as if it were a cable (but not moving), with the current collector resembling the cable grip but simply sliding along the wire more like a trolley pole. The

engraving is a cross-section of the installation, and shows the advantage engravings often have over photographs. A well-thought-out picture can indeed be worth a thousand words (or more...). Such a system was used in Washington D.C. I wish everything in Washington were as clear and useful as this engraving!

The engravings reproduce well. Some are apparently from photographs; others obviously are not, taking advantage (in both cases) of the opportunities to show or emphasize things in a manner not achievable with photography. The true value of the book is two-fold. The factual information presented by the engravings constitutes an effective history of the development of railroads in nineteenth-century America. The engravings collectively (as such) also serve as a reminder of the state of the art in graphic communication, and illustrate the techniques and inherent opportunities of that medium. This is a good book, whether you want it as a "coffee table" collection of nice illustrations, or as a component of a serious historical study of Victorian technology.

Turntable Times is published monthly as the newsletter of the Roanoke Chapter, National Railway Historical Society, Inc. Opinions and points of view expressed herein are those of the staff members of the **Turntable Times** and not necessarily reflect those of the members, officers or directors of the Chapter. Items of interest should be sent to Editor Kenny Kirkman, 590 Murphy Road, Collinsville, VA 24078-2128.

Editor, Turntable Times
Roanoke Chapter NRHS
P.O. Box 13222
Roanoke, VA 24032-1322

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