



Turntable TIMES

Volume 32, Number 1

January 2000

The Official Newsletter of the Roanoke Chapter, National Railway Historical Society, Inc.





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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.

Meeting Notice

The Roanoke Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society will hold its next general meeting on Thursday, January 20, 2000 at 7:30 pm. The meeting will be held at the First Presbyterian Church on the corner of McClanahan and Crystal Spring Avenue in Roanoke. Please remember that the chapter meeting will be cancelled if inclement weather causes the closing of Roanoke schools on a scheduled chapter meeting date.

From The Head End

Welcome to the newly redesigned Turntable Times. Since it has been some years since we redesigned the appearance of the newsletter, we felt it was time with the turn of the calendar.

Last year, the Turntable Times took a wide variety of delays, some in the initial prepress stage and many at the print shop. We are intending to solve these problems this year. We are utilizing a design service to layout the issue in a timely manner and will be placing restrictions on the printer to deliver the issue on a reasonable time frame. If they do not deliver, we will find one who wants the business and will be concerned with deadlines.

We still need membership input on the newsletter, it still comes down to just a small handful of people producing the majority of material. What the readers want to see in the newsletter is up to them, we cannot always produce what is desired when we do not know what people want! We are not mindreaders by any means. We are even considering producing a larger newsletter, only on a less frequent schedule, perhaps quarterly or even less frequent. Using more photos and other material would be a part of this magazine sized issue, but we would still need help from others,

Cover Photo

It was fifteen years ago this month in some of the coldest temperatures when ex-C&O 614 was test run six days a week in coal service on the C&O mainline from Huntington to Hinton, West Virginia and return. In a scene probably never to be repeated, the 614T recalls the glory days as she rushes westbound at Mt. Carbon in a heavy snow fall with the wind blowing so hard it was snowing sideways.

Photo by Kenneth L. Miller

2000 Officers and Directors

At the December Board meeting, the board of Directors elected the following officers to lead the Chapter for the year 2000.

PresidentRichard D. Shell
Vice President.....Kenneth L. Miller
SecretaryGary Ballard
TreasurerWanda Troutman
National DirectorBill Arnold
Director at Large.....Grace Helmer
Director at LargeCarl Jensen
Director at Large.....Bill Mason
Director at LargeDave Meashey

Meeting Cancellation Policy

Since it's that time of year, as a reminder we have the following policy regarding inclement weather.

The general meeting will be considered cancelled if any of the following conditions are met: Roanoke City Schools are closed on the day of or the day after the meeting, or Virginia Western night classes are cancelled for the night of a meeting.

Saturday, January 22, 2000

We will hold our annual banquet at the Hotel Roanoke at 7:30 pm. Our guest speaker will be Lewis I. (Bud) Jefferies author of the popular 1980 book; N&W: Giant of Steam. Bud has promised a program that will be tailored to everyone.

As per the membership vote at the November meeting, we will have a buffet style meal served in the room with two different entrees, vegetables, salads and desert. The cost of this will be \$21 per member, family member or significant other. Cost for any other guest is \$26 per

person. Please make your reservations with Bill Arnold at 389-3217 no later than January 12, 2000 and pay at the January meeting.

611 Report

by John A. Garrett

We moved the Queen back December 2nd and coupled her to the auxiliary tender. My helpers were two Queens from the Roanoke Chapter, Grace Helmer and Kathy Overholser, plus four guests visiting the museum, two from Winchester, one from Detroit and one from Canada.

She moves as easy as ever and very gracefully. I plan to have smoke coming out her stack during the fiftieth anniversary.

Reminder

Remember that your dues are now due and should be sent to the Membership Chairman at the Chapter Post Office Box as soon as possible.

Christmas Social

Thanks go out to Wanda Troutman and Bonnie Molinary with Kathy Overholser for heading up our fine and well attended Social held on December 9, 1999 at the Virginia Museum of Transportation. They produced a wonderful spread of finger food and everyone seemed to enjoy the social get together.

Mixed Freight-January

by Mr. Robin Shavers

I really do not have a lot to report on rail road newswise this month. What little there is can wait til next month. There is

nothing timely about it. What I will touch on was inspired by fellow Turntable Times columnist Dave Meashey. Further motivation was planted months ago by a number of requests printed within the pages of this publication for Roanoke Chapter members to get more involved with chapter activities such as contributing to The Turntable Times, volunteering time to the souvenir shop at The Virginia Museum of Transportation and assisting with the West Virginia Central excursions.

Mr. Meashey expressed puzzlement as to why late summer and early autumn are rather slow for model railroad clubs. There are many reasons for this slack period. Late summer is vacation time for a lot of folks. Another important item is the location of the meetings. Some meeting locations are at the mercy of extreme temperatures and if cash for payment of utility bills is limited or downright scarce, most folks are winding down from summer vacation and are busy getting back into the groove of work or education. Early autumn is also a busy time for all sorts of railfan activities everywhere be they model or prototype. The above are just examples that I am personally aware of. I'm sure individuals whom contribute to this slack period can offer more.

Another subject Mr. Meashey touched on was the number of model railroaders out there whom hold no membership(s) with local model railroad clubs. I too have noticed the same thing within the Richmond metropolitan area. Whenever I visit a local hobby shop, most of the patrons whom stop by and talk model railroading and purchase either prototype or

model railroad merchandise hold no membership with area model railroad clubs. I know by asking them in casual conversation and by observations made at model railroad events sponsored by local clubs. The most common reason I am told as to why joining a model railroad club is not desired is the politics and indifference of personal agendas. Most of these people have their own home layouts or band together with a few close friends whom have parallel goals. Model railroading and prototype railroading as a hobby should be fun. Unfortunately, this fun often lacks within many clubs or organizations. Many of these people will quickly tell of unhappy situations or events that turned them off involving clubs. Why put up with nonsense when you don't have to. Yes Mr. Meashey, a lot of potential club members do view clubs as stifling and or authoritarian and some are. Let's not leave out unfriendly too in some cases. God knows I've terminated my share of memberships with railroad related organizations.

The way I see it is this way, the phrase "user friendly" was one of the more popular phrases from the now gone nineties. The nineties may be gone but model railroad clubs are not and if anything, most of them definitely need to aggressively adopt "user friendly" as a policy for the new millennium that is upon time.

Railroads in the New Century

by Dave Meashey

When I was in high school (Fall, 1958 to Spring, 1963), most of the kids my age believed the railroads were a dying

industry that would be gone before the end of the 1970's. Of course George Orwell's novel 1984 seemed to be drawn from the distant future. How strange it seems to realize that the year 1984 is now receding rapidly into the distant past. But the railroads are still with us. Sure, they had to run over some badly twisted track to get here, but they have come out stronger and better for the most part.

Some things have not changed a lot. Flanged wheels still roll on steel rails, spaced four feet eight and a half inches apart. The business of moving trains is still a relatively labor intensive endeavor. Bulk commodities are still best moved on the rails. But the snorting iron steeds and trundling electric locomotives have been replaced by rumbling high horsepower diesel electrics and nimble (and oh so silent) high speed electrics. Third generation diesel electrics are now replacing second generation machines.

On-board computers in these new locomotives monitor engine fuel efficiency, adjust electric power outlet, control wheel slip, and check on other systems within the locomotive. Many of the familiar features of the diesel locomotive control stand are now replicated on a color computer monitor screen. The new century will surely see some interesting innovations.

Will another material finally replace wood as the primary choice for railroad ties? Will new designs for passenger trains allow higher speeds on some of the more restrictive routes in the northeast? Will the commuting public once again embrace the passenger train as a solution to increasing automobile gridlock?

Will a mag-lev system actually be built and operate profitably on the North American continent? I know I don't have the answers to these questions, but it will be fascinating to see what happens next.

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.

Small Rails-January

by Dave Meashey

The Roanoke Valley Model engineers have been running trains on their layout at Crossroads Mall during the holiday season. The club's display was open to the public on Friday evenings, Saturdays, and Sunday afternoons through December 19th. The club held their annual Christmas dinner at Sunnybrook Inn on December 14th. Two "run your own train days" have been planned for the New Year's holiday weekend. On December 28th the club will elect the first board of directors.

The Big Lick Big Train Operators will hold their next meeting in the spring of the year 2000.

A Note From The President

by Richard Shell

This begins my fifth year as President of the Roanoke Chapter, NRHS. I would like to thank everyone who has stood by me over the past several years. We have had many successes and a few failures. A former boss once told me that you have to hit the wall a few times in stock car racing to learn how to get around the track.

During this year I have set some goals for the Chapter that I believe will breath some more life into the membership activities. We need someone to head up these ideas so the responsibility doesn't fall upon one or two people.

I would like to see us run a bus trip to a tourist railroad similar to what we did a few years ago when we went to East Broad Top and Western Maryland Scenic. I understand there is a new upstart tourist train close by in North Carolina and this may be a good possibility.

We are currently working with Amtrak to try to run an excursion weekend this fall. Bluefield, West Virginia would be an obvious destination. The Bluefield trips work well for Norfolk Southern, its a beautiful ride, and Bluefield always comes thru with a terrific festival whenever we arrive there.

Another opportunity we take advantage of every few years is going to Washington, DC on Amtrak's Crescent. This one-day round trip is a long day but has always been a fun outing. There is just so much to see in Washington. We usually have around 25 to 35 people on this outing and Amtrak usually works out a group rate. Again, this trip doesn't take too much ground work to put together. The last time

we made the trip we simply met in Lynchburg at Kemper Street station. No bus, no fuss...just a simple fun outing that the whole family can enjoy.

I would like us to have a Chapter picnic again this year. Again, this is a great event where we have no business meeting, just good fellowship and food.

We need to schedule another outing to ride our very own train on the West Virginia Central. If you were scheduled to work there this past year and didn't get called, please give me a call at 992-3611 so we can make sure you get up there this year. I don't want anyone to feel slighted or hurt if you didn't get there this past year. We had some scheduling snafus that we want to get resolved as soon as realistically possible.

The Christmas Party in December was a terrific success and I thank everyone who helped make it a success. Special thanks to Bonnie Molinary, Wanda Troutman and Kathy Overholser for a great job with food, decorations and phone calls. We had members there who we haven't seen in years! (The ladies have already agreed to do it again this year.)

One more goal I have this year is to take Mike Valentine's idea and shorten the business portion of our meetings, both Board meetings and General meetings. We do need more time for programs and social time.

If you have any other membership activities ideas please get in touch with me or any other board member. We really would like to have your input and ideas to make the Roanoke Chapter a better organization for everyone.

Turn of the Century in Review

by Ken Miller

Now how can review an event that is only days old? Simple, we are talking about the year 1900, exactly 100 years ago. I thought it might be interesting to take a very brief look to see just how far things have progressed.

It was quite a different world in a lot of ways on the N&W at the time, but some other things seem to have changed only slightly. The N&W Annual Reports of the era provide great detail on operations, services and construction at the time, giving us a wonderful time capsule of the times.

New motive power added during the year included fifteen powerful 2-8-0s half of them built in the Roanoke Shops.

Some of the new industries located along the N&W that year included seven new cot-

ton mills, 1 silk mill, 1 cotton oil and linseed oil works, 4 wagon and buggy works, two handle factories, a stave works, three planing mills and 16 sawmills.

Revenue was up from 1899 by about 19% with total earnings of over \$14 million while expenses had only risen about 7% for a total of about \$8.5 million.

Coal and coke traffic was by far the most prevalent freight traffic then as is today, with lumber and iron ore being the next highest tonnages. Bituminous coal however far outnumbered iron or lumber products by almost a 2.5 to 1 ratio.

The mainline rail weight at the time was primarily composed of 67, 56 and 85 pound rail, Quite a contrast to today's 132 pound rail!

Who would like to guess what railroading will be like when it becomes 2100?

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