



# Turntable TIMES

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

Volume 34, Number 9

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Industrial Archeology! Careful sanding and some hard work reveal the true heritage of one of the Chapter's recently acquired gondolas. Originally, Virginian Railway built at the Princeton Shops in 1942, the two gons carried their Virginian paint until the mid-1960s when repainted and placed in Maintenance of Way service by the N&W. While not beautiful by any standard they represent some wonderful history. The railroad and builder the shop crew and mostly the shops where these were built are now virtually memories. This is the type of work our 9th Street Crews can become involved in, come on out and join the fun! Brian Crosier Photo



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**Volume 34, Number 9  
September 2002**

## **EDITOR**

Kenney Kirkman

## **MIXED FREIGHT**

Robin R. Shavers

## **SMALL RAILS**

Dave Meashey

## **SPLINTERS**

Bill Arnold

## **HISTORIAN**

Kenneth L. Miller

All materials should be sent directly to the Editor:  
Kenney Kirkman  
590 Murphy Road  
Collinsville, VA  
24078-2128

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 regular meeting on Thursday, September 19, 2002 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. Due to the long meeting last month, we will have the program in September that was scheduled the 1944 N&W film "Modern Coal Burning Steam Locomotives."

## *From The Head End*

### **Meeting Notice**

The Roanoke Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society will hold its next regular meeting on Thursday, August 22, 2002 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.

### **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 Bonnie Molinary. Bonnie is responsible for Chapter cards and flowers and can be reached at 362-0273.

### **Deadline for Turntable Times**

The deadline for the next issue of Turntable Times is Wednesday, September 18, 2002. Please send articles, information and all exchange newsletters to: Kenney Kirkman, Editor, Turntable Times, 590 Murphy Road, Collinsville, Va. 24078-2128.

### **Material for Turntable Times**

We are always in need of articles, photos or news items for the Turntable Times. Due to copyright restrictions, we cannot reprint articles from many newspapers; a condensed rewritten article crediting the source is acceptable. We still need material on an ongoing basis. Please contribute!

## Mixed Freight - September

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by Mr. Robin R. Shavers

I continue to discover milestones in relation to years of various subjects related to the railroad industry. The year 2002 marks 30 years since the creation of Operation Lifesaver, a national safety program that is dedicated to ending collisions, fatalities and injuries that occur all too frequently at America's railroad crossings. The program was recently expanded to educate the public of the dangers of trespassing on railroad property.

In my August column in my report on our Blue Ridge Live Steamers July run, I commented on how the large number of female patrons made an attractive manifest. They were members of a family reunion being held at a nearby residence. Everyone, males included, were neatly dressed as if they were about to attend a fancy function at The Hotel Roanoke. It was all part of their religious activities in conjunction with their reunion. Their participation in our open house was indeed a plus. There were not as many live steamers present that weekend as there normally are. It was the first time I can remember that we did not have a mass dinner together or a roaring campfire where we all shoot the bull in friendship. The much needed rain that commenced about 6:30 did not encourage a campfire or nighttime train operating. Hopefully, we will have more member participation during our Labor Day Weekend run.

RAIL DAY 2002 sponsored by Trains Unlimited of Lynchburg was a big success. There were quite a few dealers and many attendees. There were also some great operating layouts on hand. One thing that at times was not on hand was ample parking. While RAIL DAY was in progress, a group of attractive young women were having a car wash to raise funds for some cause. The only complaint and drawback to the RAIL DAY event was The White Elephant Table. Too much merchandise confined to too little space. Hopefully, this concern

will be addressed in time for next years RAIL DAY.

CSX continues to improve it's on time delivery of Tropicana products to Jersey City and Cincinnati. CSX delivers over 200 cars a week to Tropicana's Jersey City facility at 96.3 percent on time in 2002. This compares to 82 percent for 2001 and 40 percent for 2000. The Cincinnati facility receives about 90 cars weekly. Trains traveling from Bradenton, Florida to Jersey City, New Jersey endure a 1,200 mile trip in less than 48 hours. The Cincinnati run involves 1,100 miles in less than 53 hours.

## Small Rails

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by Dave Meashey

The Roanoke Valley Model Engineers will hold their fall train show at the Salem Civic Center on Saturday, September 7th. Dealers and display layouts will be present from 10:00am to 4:00pm. The Big Lick Big Train Operators plan to have a display at the event.

The Big Lick Big Train Operators held their August meeting at the home of Brad Dobbins on Saturday, August 24th. Brad is building a 1:22.5 European style narrow gauge layout in his basement. The segments of Brad's layout that are already in service are really starting to look nice. Several LGB locomotives, some with digital sound, performed for club members' enjoyment.

## Chatham Station Grant

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Pittsylvania County, and the Pittsylvania Historical Society recently received a \$259,000 federal enhancement grant to renovate the Chatham train station. Glen Giles, Co-Chairman of the Chatham Station Renovation Committee and a member of the Pittsylvania Historical Society, says the funding will help with the construction of a new roof on the depot. The building was recently bought from Norfolk Southern.

When fully restored, the Chatham depot will become a veterans museum that will serve as a depository for the collections and recordings of Pittsylvania County War Veterans and spouses of county natives.

(Above from Star-Tribune, Chatham, Virginia, July 17, 2002 courtesy of Kenney Kirkman.)

## She Shied

by Dave Meashey

I remember this whimsical story from an issue of the original Railroad Magazine, published many decades ago. It seems that a freight locomotive ended up in a ditch. The derailment was caused by a faulty rail that had broken under the locomotive's weight. The engineer was cleared of any negligence and continued his duties while the locomotive was being repaired.

One day the engineer returned home from work and told his wife, "I got my old engine back today."

"Really," said his wife, "How did she do when you passed that spot?" (Meaning the spot where she derailed.) "Oh, she shied a bit," replied the engineer, "But I kept her going and she was fine after that."

## Mechanical Dept. News.

During the last two months, work has diminished to evening or nighttime. Chad Jordan, Alan Easome, and Brian Crosier repacked and tamped the ballast under the north track to repair the damage that occurred when the water main had broken the night before open house. This work was greatly sped up using the chapter's new hand tamper, which was acquired as scrap recently and rebuilt by Alan. After this was completed, we switched the equipment around so certain pieces were accessible for work.

Chad Jordan has been continuing the restoration on the interior of the 522. He made new

semitransparent lettering for the control stand identification lights. These have been installed and look great. Ongoing work of an electrical nature has kept Chad busy, rewiring many items at the siding including installation of lights and outlets in work areas and equipment.

Richard and Bill Sherman have traveled to West Virginia Central to replace some window gaskets that were leaking in our cars.

Work continues on track two, and we will be planning a work session soon to finish spiking and tamping the new ties so that the track may be placed back in service.

The Chapter's Norfolk and Western caboose will also receive its final coat of paint soon and be ready for lettering. Those who saw it at the open house found it looking quite sharp even without lettering!

For those who love preserving history, we have plenty of projects for everyone. There are many small jobs that almost anyone can do. Please volunteer some time to assist the preservation of your equipment.



NS units leaving 9th Street Maintenance Facility in August after leaving a car. Brian Crosier Photo.

## Railriding in Old Mexico

By Charles H. Bogart

On March 31, 2001, Mary Ann and I flew into Los Mochis, Mexico, to join 47 other railfans, in an eight day, 3000 mile

tour of Mexico's railroads. I had planned to carefully document this trip, but an unforeseen event curtailed this endeavor, thus lack of some detail in this report. The trip was sponsored by Trains Unlimited Tours of Portola, California over Ferrocarril Mexicano (FerroMex) rail. This was our third tour with Trains Unlimited as we had previously journeyed with them to Ecuador and British Columbia. A railfan tour south of the United States border is an experience you will never forget.

We left the hotel at 0700 for our bus ride to the train station. As we arrived at the Los Mochis station the local Copper Canyon train was preparing to leave on its run. As it cleared the platform, our FerroMex chartered train came into view. It consisted of three locomotives #9287, #906 and #8232 with four cars; parlor car "Silver Queen," coach "Ash," observation car "Silver Stirrup," and an un-named parlor car all furnished by South Orient Express, plus a caboosse. At 0800 we pulled for San Blas. Our ride from Los Mochis to San Blas was over the former Kansas City, Mexico, & Orient Railroad (KC,M&O), which was to have run from Kansas City, Missouri to Topolobampo, Mexico. Construction of this line was started in 1900 but by 1912 the KC,M&O was in receivership and the line far from complete. In 1941 the U.S. track was sold to the Santa Fe and the Mexico right of way to the Mexican government. The line in Mexico was finally completed by the Mexican government in 1961. This line was operated by the Chihuahua Pacific until privatized in 1994.

With some 150 seats among the four cars, the group soon split into four sub groups with each claiming a car as its own. The result was no car had over 15 persons in it. The observation car carrying 15 rail fans, the coach 8 train riders, and each par-

lor car carrying a dozen hard core railfans whose conversations were limited to railroad subjects. We had free run of the train, and as we left the station some made for the engine, but Mary Ann and I opted for the caboosse, as it engines #906 and #8232 would only be with the train until San Blas.

It was while we were at the San Blas station that I committed an act of stupidity so great it is hard to comprehend. As we were slowing down but still moving, the person in front of me stepped off the train. I said "Hey!, You should not step off facing away from the car while the train is moving. It is dangerous." Barely were the words out of my mouth when I noticed a train pulling from the adjacent track. I wanted that picture. Safety issues disappeared from my thought path and off the train I stepped facing outward. As I hit the platform I lost my balance, staggered, and went to the ground. I quickly realized the most important thing I had to do was protect the \$100 camera I was holding. This I did taking my weight on my left hand as I hit the ground. By the time I got up the train had pulled to far forward for me to get my picture, and my wrist was hurting. I remember saying out loud, "! !\*\*??, I have sprained my wrist".

After some more photos it was back on the train for Mazatlan over the former F.C. Del Pacifico line, ex Southern Pacific track. One of the train crew gave me a bag of ice to wrap around my wrist to take down the swelling as I went up to ride on the engine. As the day went on the wrist got sorer, but the cab ride was great, Mary Ann even joining me for an hour's ride. At 2100 when we reached the hotel in Mazatlan, Mary Ann asked for a doctor to check me. The doctor took one look and it was to the hospital. An X-ray led to the diagnosis of two broken bones in the wrist. On went a cast. This

was followed by a stop at a pharmacy for drugs. We were ready for bed at 0200.

At 0600 came our wake up call and at 0700 we were back on the bus to the train station. With engine #9287 pulling we were off at 0800 for Guadalajara. The run to Guadalajara was enlivened when we hit a herd of cattle killing three. A cow went flying to each side of the track while one went under the train breaking the air line. It took two hours to free the cow and repair the air line. In re-boarding the train I slipped and grabbed the hand rail with my left hand to steady myself, instant pain. "O well," I thought, "I will just take one of the pain pills and feel better". This I did, and 15 minutes later I was a zombie. My cast and clothes began to feel tight. At 1800 we pulled into Guadalajara. I was slowly rejoining the living but my clothes were tight on me. At the hotel Mary Ann called another doctor. He took one look at me and off to a hospital I went. His diagnosis was that I was having an allergic reaction to the pain medicine. At the hospital the cast was removed, as it was cutting circulation to my hand. A new cast was put on. The doctor also recommended a day in bed for me so my body could clean itself of the medicine. At Mary Ann's insistence I agreed to forgo the train the next day, as the train was going to Manzanillo and would return to Guadalajara the following day.

After a day in bed I felt better and the following day Mary Ann and I set out to explore the Guadalajara. High on our list of things to do was to ride the city's subway system and trolley buses. This we accomplished. The subway operates trams that take power from overhead wires, instead of at ground level like conventional subway cars. That evening we called Chris to say we were ready to rejoin the tour. Thus at 0500 we got up to reach the depot at 0600

for a 0630 pull for Aguascalientes over former National Railways of Mexico track. Leaving at 0630 would get us out in front of the local freight. The dispatcher however sent the freight out first. We would follow it for four hours with our two engines #9287 and #8244 working at no more than 15 MPH as they climbed up into the Sierra. The result was a long day on the train. Mary Ann and I spent part of it in the observation car, part in the engine cab, part hanging out of the vestibule, and part riding on the walk way on the engine. The sun was a killer and one could only spend 30 minutes or so in the sunlight. We were into Aguascalientes at 1900.

The next morning was to be a long run. We pulled at 0700 for Chihuahua with engines #9287 and #8244 leading. We would be running over desert all day and hoped to reach our hotel by 2100. However an engine crew that refused to run at passenger train track speed, an unsympathetic dispatcher, and track work made shambles of our schedule. As the clock reached 2100 we were only halfway to Chihuahua. Chris had thus arranged for buses to meet us at Escalan to transport us on to our hotel. Six of us decided to ride the train on to Chihuahua and forgo the bus. We were due into Chihuahua at 0600 and the train would not leave until 1000. This would give us ample time to get to the hotel and clean up after sleeping on the train. At 0600 we were at the National Railway's Chihuahua station, but it was the wrong station. We were to load at the Chihuahua Pacific's station, on the other side of town. It was 0900 before we arrived at this station. Three of us took a cab to our hotel. Here we got a quick shower before returning to the train for the 1000 pull.

With engine #907 leading, we were off for Copper Canyon and Los Mochis. When

we departed Chihuahua, one of the parlor cars was left behind due to a non-working air conditioner. I chose to spend the day with a select group of three other true railfans riding on the walkway in front of the engine above the coupler. I had packed safety glasses and ear plugs for both Mary Ann and me to enjoy a ride such a ride. I must admit that after an hour Mary Ann departed the engine for the observation car. With Mary Ann's departure the four of us would remain together on the front of the engine until 2000, when by mutual consent, we agreed that the bug strikes on our bodies outweighed the fun of riding in this open position. We were into Los Mochis by 2300.

The next day, as an add on, we took a three hour train ride from Los Mochis to the port of Topolobampo and back behind engine #906. We were the first passenger train over part of this line. The port was a disappointment as it was built to handle self-unloading container ships, and except for a huge concrete pad to hold the containers was devoid of port equipment. As there was no ship in port, the dock area looked disused yet one could tell from the concrete apron that some volume of traffic moves through the port.

Some general comments on our trip. The food was great. The photo run bys however were few and far between and the days long. We did, however, run on some rare mileage track an one had, at all times, access to all parts of the train. The companionship of our fellow travelers was fascinating and the railfan stories told mind boggling. Someone commented the only difference between a fairy tale and a railfan story is that a fairy tale begins with, "Once upon a time" while a railfan story begins with, "There I was."

The hotel accommodations were first

class. Access to FerroMex's engine service areas was made available when ever possible. Freight operations were no different than in the U.S., long heavy freights being slowly dragged from one point to another. I saw a number of rail yards but never saw a hump yard. Many of the freight cars passing by carried U.S. heraldry and a number of these cars spotted the mottos and reporting marks of fallen flags. Speculation was that these cars had carried some shipment to Mexico and never made it back to their owners.

An interesting observation was that much of the track was laid on concrete ties. Some of the ties were solid concrete and some of European concrete design, where only the tie under the rail is concrete, and the gauge is held by a bar running between the two concrete blocks. Due to the heavy weight of the freights now being run in Mexico, all of the European designed concrete ties were being replaced with wooden ties. The "all concrete ties" have been replaced or are being replaced with wooden ties at switches, bridge and tunnel approaches, and in curves with super elevation. It appears that the concrete ties are failing due to lack of sufficient ballast under them. Ballast on the main line right of way was often less then 6 inches deep. A Burlington Northern track supervisor once told me that concrete ties need 18 inches or more ballast if they are to provide the give of a wooden tie

It was also sad to see Mexican rail yards empty of cars and closed passenger stations their windows broken, platforms empty, and their passenger board covered with the word Anulado. La Junta looked like a ghost town with its engine shops lying abandoned and its tracks weed covered. Along the main line rusty or broken rail spurs led off to industries and businesses who's ship-

ping docks were crowded with 18 wheelers. Junked rolling stock sat along side the right of way waiting the scrap dealer.

The ride from La Junta down the Sierras to El Fuerte on the Copper Canyon line, revealed the sign of a derailment approximately every mile. My impression was that they dug a narrow gauge right of way and then laid standard gauge track on it. The curves were sharp and the grade: steep, 2 to 2.5 percent. The line here shoots through tunnels, clings to the mountain side, slitters through deep cuts, soars over high bridges, makes a 360 degree loop, and delivers a delightful litany of sound as the brakes, bell, whistle, engine, and wheels of the train proclaim its passing.

If you get a chance to ride in Mexico with Trains Unlimited or another company go for it A train ride south of the U.S. border is an experience of which all rail fans should partake.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS/EVENTS

September 19, 2002  
Regular Meeting

October 1, 2002  
Board Meeting

October 17, 2002  
Regular Meeting

November 5, 2002  
Board Meeting

November 21, 2002  
Annual Meeting

December 3, 2002  
Board Meeting

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

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