



# Turntable TIMES

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

**Volume 38, Number 3**  
**March-April 2006**

65 Years Ago It Was...

## A Cruel April Fool

### Virginian Ry. Blast Hurls Bodies of 3 In Crew 1/2 Mi.

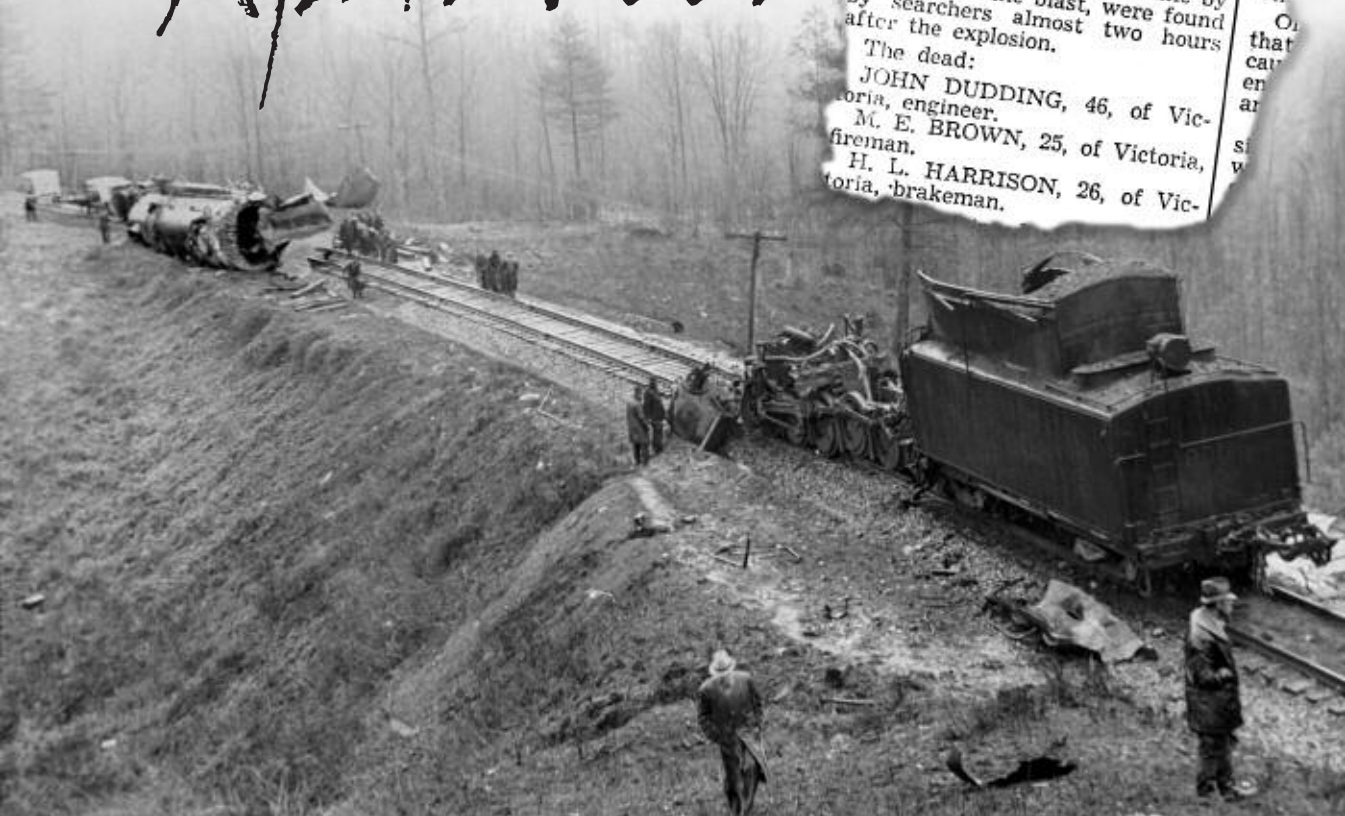
#### Possibility of Sabotage Investigated

ROANOKE, April 1.—(AP) —Three members of the five-man crew of an eastbound Virginian coal train were blown to bits at 5:20 this morning when the boiler of the train's Mallet engine exploded near Stewartville station, in Bedford County, about ten miles east of here.

Bodies of the three men, who were hurled almost half a mile by the force of the blast, were found by searchers almost two hours after the explosion.

The dead:

JOHN DUDDING, 46, of Victoria, engineer.  
M. E. BROWN, 25, of Victoria, fireman.  
H. L. HARRISON, 26, of Victoria, brakeman.





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Turntable Times is published bi-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, March 16, 2006 and April 20th at 7:30 pm. at the Link Museum located in the former N&W Passenger Station, 101 Shenandoah Avenue.

Our program for the March meeting is brought to us by Walt Alexander and Ken Jensen. A video entitled "In Katrina's Wake Norfolk Southern Responds & Recovers." Our April program will be announced at the March meeting.

## *From The Head End*

### **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 May-June, 2006 issue of Turntable Times is Tuesday, April 18, 2005. Please send articles, information, and exchange newsletters to: Kenney Kirkman, Editor Turntable Times, 590 Murphy Road, Collinsville, Va. 24078-2128.

### **Meeting Cancellation Policy**

Any Chapter meeting will be considered cancelled if any of the following conditions are due to weather: Roanoke City Schools are closed on the day of or for the day after the meeting, or Virginia Western night classes are cancelled for the night of a meeting.

### **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 most newspapers; a condensed rewritten article crediting the source, however, is acceptable.

### **Cover Photo**

In the early morning hours of April Fools Day, 1941, one of the saddest events on the railroad occurred, the loss of life. It was 65 years ago when Virginian Class AE, No. 800 departed Roanoke with an unknown meeting with fate, almost 10 miles to the east, the 800 blew up killing all three crew members. You can read the complete story in the upcoming Virginian Chronicles, Volume 1, see the back cover for details.

## Newsletter Information

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by Ken Miller

Everyone should read the following article, as it contains information pertinent to every reader of Turntable Times. As noted in the January, 2006 issue, the Turntable Times is going to a bi-monthly production schedule, effective with this issue, now the Turntable Times will be produced in January, March, May, July, September and November with occasional special issues produced in other months as needed.

Why are we doing this? It is a simple matter of economics, costs continue to rise: postal rates went up in January, printing and paper costs continue to rise, all these continue to bring the Turntable Times to a cost over and above what the Chapter receives in dues and/or subscriptions. NRHS National raised their dues last year, we did not. Turntable Times has been published consistently and we continue to provide service that is not apparent nationally.

Out of the dues we collect, the largest portion goes to National, only \$10 per regular member gets to Roanoke Chapter. Since, at present, we have no income generating operation, i.e. gift shop, rental equipment, excursion train, we continue to spend more each month than we take in, therefore we are searching for every way to cut the costs. While the Turntable Times is a minor cut in overall costs, it is a tangible savings on costs. As outlined in the January issue, producing a Turntable Times is quite time consuming, not to mention the financial obligations. If there are members interested and willing to see most of the additional costs covered, we can and will return Turntable Times to a monthly publication.

Today, a large portion of the population gets its news and information via the internet. We are presently working to develop

the Chapter website to include more material, back issues of Turntable Times and more. You can help us save some money if you have an email, we can send you a PDF version of the newsletter that you can printout on your own printer. If there is an interest in this format, it can be formatted to fit an 8 1/2 x 11 sheet, with printable good quality. You will need Adobe Acrobat reader to view these files, a free program available on most newer computers, if not, easily downloadable from adobe.com. If you have an interest in an electronic version, please email the editor or myself and we can compile a list. Then we will make a decision as to the practicality. It would put the newsletter in your hands sooner, and possibly more frequently with news and information posted to you as we have a story.

## Subscriber Information

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Take a minute, turn your issue of Turntable Times over and examine your mailing label. If there is a red mark, or dot there, it indicates that you are on our mailing list as a subscriber, and we have not received your \$10 fee (more for overseas). **If we do not receive payment before the next issue in May, this will be the last issue you get.** If you wish to continue, please send your check or money order to the PO box listed on the back cover.

## Mixed Freight - March

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by Mr. Robin R. Shavers

The Blue Ridge Chapter NRHS is still trying to find a facility for RAIL DAY 2006. If anyone can be of assistance in this endeavor, please contact the chapter at 434-239-6159 or rick@craddockcunningham.com or www.blueridgenrhs.org This is of an urgent nature. Months are required to put this event on properly and successfully.

You might say the following is a "southern

thang." Norfolk Southern Railway and The Kansas City Southern Railway have come to common terms for improving service and enhancing capacity to what is known as The Meridian Speedway located between Meridian, MS and Shreveport, LA. KCS will contribute the 320 mile railroad line between the two above named cities. NS will invest \$ 300 million in capital improvements over the next 4 years. Interestwise KCS will have a 70% and NS will have 30%. KCS will operate the line and provide NS with service enhancements. NS will be the sole provider for specified intermodal transportation services over The Speedway. Improvements to this important railroad will include extended sidings, stretches of double track, upgraded signaling and other capacity improvements.

Today's railroads have a close resemblance to the federal government and the U.S. military in that they have an acronym for almost any new project or technological improvement. Enter a new system known as LEADER. LEADER is the acronym for Locomotive Engineer Assist Display & Event Recorder. The goal of LEADER is to help engineers determine the optimum speed for fuel efficiency and safety. LEADER will work hand in hand with OTC which stands for Optimized Train Control. OTC improves safety by automatically combining data communications, positioning systems and operating limits.

LEADER provides the locomotive engineer with real-time data about at a train's operating conditions. An on-board computer calculates and displays the optimum safe speed to operate the train. This data is based on topography and track curvatures encountered, train length and weight and other operating conditions.

Norfolk Southern began road testing LEADER in 2004 for two years. It was

deployed on The Belews Creek coal trains that operate between Roanoke and the Belews Creek power plant 109 miles south of Roanoke on the Winston-Salem District. The two-year pilot project involved 15 locomotives and a joint corporate venture involving General Electric, New York Air Brake, Norfolk Southern and the Federal Railroad Administration. The pilot project did indeed prove that LEADER did improve fuel consumption and reduce in-train dynamic forces. With much positive results, NS plans to expand OTC pilot programs to other lines during a two-year period.

## **Those Seaboard Coast Line Days: 2nd Section**

By Mr. Robin R. Shavers

As I noted in my first section of Those Seaboard Coast Line Days, speed of the trains that traveled over the SCL high iron really impressed me considering what I had been used to in Danville on the SR and in Roanoke on the N&W. The Southern Railway trains had two things against them in Danville. Grades north and southbound out of the Dan River basin and a city ordinance. To the best of my recollections, so many fools were being injured or killed trying to beat the trains at the numerous crossings in Danville that the City Council passed an ordinance requiring all trains to reduce their speed within the Danville city limits to 35 mph. This was passed either in the late sixties or early seventies. Today's NS trains are allowed 50 mph. The SR had some more crossings closed, and all the rest received grade crossing protection equipment many years later.

I was impressed with fast SCL freights. The Amtrak's were something else to say the least. I'll never forget my first encounter with a fast Amtrak. During my second and

third year of college, I got involved with some local high school students in an organization called Social Action for Youth. We met on Thursday nights as an organization and would sometime get together at the homes of different members on Friday and sometime Saturday nights. One cool October night (Saturday), a small contingent of us met at The Fitzgerald's home in Carson. A guy named David picked me up at my dorm and from there we drove deep into Dinwiddie County to pick up a few others. I had no idea where I was. I tried keeping in mind where U.S. 1 was as well as U.S. 460 and of course the railroads. It was useless even on a full moon night. We arrived at The Fitzgerald's around 9:00 p.m. We entered the backdoor. The Fitzgerald's were nice folks, very down to earth. They reminded me of The Darling Family on the Andy Griffith Show. Except for daughter Michelle, they all played string instruments. Unlike the Darlings, The Fitzgerald's were educated.

We were sitting around playing and singing songs by Bob Dylan, Crosby Stills & Nash and others to that era in the living room. All of a sudden there was this huge roar and a blaring of air horn around 11:00 p.m. I pulled aside the curtain and blinds to see a blur of moving lights and stainless steel. I couldn't believe it. The Fitzgerald's front porch and house faced the mainline of the Seaboard Coast Line, former Atlantic Coast Line. Joey, the oldest of the Fitzgerald brothers looked at me as if I had lost my mind and asked if I had ever seen a train before. I explained to him that railroading was my hobby and passion. He casually pulled out a pocket watch from his bibbed overalls and says that there will be another train shortly after 1:00 a.m. The train I had just seen was a tardy Silver Meteor # 83. I was pumped. I thought 1:00 a.m. would never arrive. Joey pulls out his pocket watch

after a Jim Croce tune and says to me "Robin, if you wanna see that train, you'd better get movin'. He should be here in about ten minutes or so."

I grab my jacket and head for the front door to make a less than two block walk to the grade crossing. Michelle asks if she may come along mainly to enjoy a cigarette or two. Of course, I welcome her company. The air is still and cool. To the east the chorus of traffic on I95 can be heard, especially the eighteen wheelers as they do their part to keep America's commerce moving. To the west, a dog barks constantly. It's a bark that says "Will someone spend some time with me." As we walk to the crossing, a large cat observes us closely. It determines we are not a threat and strolls across the high iron over to some nearby peanut storage silos and probably for a rodent snack.

Michelle and I hold light conversation about my interest in trains. She admitted enjoying watching them pass while sitting on the front porch. She enjoyed waving at the crews, and they "really" enjoyed waving back at her. Some to the point of almost falling off the caboose. This was one very attractive young woman. We come to the crossing and look due north to see a faint headlight. It's Amtrak train No. 85 The Champion, great name for fast moving varnish. We decide to observe it on the east side of the double track high iron. Sight is slowly joined by the sound of EMD prime movers. A grade crossing warning is administered for a crossing about a mile north of us. To my delight, the oscillating light is activated. We move away from the track about fifty feet. This Champion is coming fast and means business. The horn is blowing for our crossing and in a moment it is there. Three E units, 2 SCLs and a Union Pacific and eighteen cars from various railroads that elected to join Amtrak. This was what railfans

referred to as Amtrak's rainbow era. My God he was rollin'. In 20 seconds, he had cleared the crossing and rounded a gradual curve to the west. I thought to myself, if anything or anyone is in the path of that train, I hoped they would have the sense to give it the right of way. At eighty plus, if he applied the emergency brakes he'd slide clear into the Tarheel State.

I made many more trips to Carson and other locations where those trains could really "peel steel" as they say on today's CSX. The intermodal trains at speed were an impressive sight and sound too. For a number of towns on the former ACL, the railroad is "the main street."

Those Seaboard Coast Line days. Gone but definitely NOT FORGOTTEN.

## Book Review

by Lloyd Lewis

Home On The Rails:

Women, The Railroad, and The Rise Of  
Public Domesticity

by Amy G. Richter,

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

The University of North Carolina Press; soft cover, 6x9 inches; 275 pages; \$19.95; hard-cover, 296 pages; \$49.95

Hands down, this is one of the most interesting; catchy book titles this reviewer has ever seen in his several decades of reviewing the written works of others.

Written originally as the doctor of philosophy dissertation for the author, who is an assistant professor of history at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, this book is certainly NOT the "dry bones" type of such document that we have become accustomed to - but which, as a genre, quite fortunately seem to be departing the scene of academia for the much more entertaining, informative and easily read such litera-

ture, which are still just as scholarly - and yes, includes the many and mandatory footnotes.

This award-winning volume was written by a woman who knows both her own sex and the American railroad industry - and this reviewer would not be at all surprised to learn that railroading is in her family history.

While this writer has both studied railroading all his life - and has so far had a rewarding 17-year professional career in this industry - this book introduces both a new and a truly fascinating approach to the continuing history of the world's oldest large business.

To quote from UNC's book news press release, "From its invention, the railroad reshaped the landscape and transformed American daily life. Although railroads have long been emblematic places of masculine power, they may also be considered 'feminine' because of the domesticity of their parlor cars and the general refinement of their female passengers."

But that is not all: "Amy G. Richter's (book) considers the presence of women on trains in order to chart the changing terrain of 19th Century public culture."

Dealing a great deal with the 19th Century — at the beginning of which railroads first came upon the world scene, this book is both colorful and entertaining in its stories of rail travel in Victorian America. The author "shows that journalists, travelers, novelists and poets used the railroad as a shorthand for social diversity, national integration, technological innovation and corporate organization."

Which, when you think about it, is a "whale of a mouthful," from anyone's mind. One practical and major example of this was certainly the segregation of white and Afro-American passengers into different coaches

of trains in the American Southland for well over 100 years. In the case of shorter trains, conductors separated the races into different and already marked sections of the same car, which were for some reason then labeled "Jim Crow cars"—the origin of which name is surprisingly not examined or addressed in Ms. Richter's fine work.

But that isn't all—by a long shot...

The author delves into how the railroad itself became a way to understand larger cultural issues, in which rail companies large and small operated as both "site and symbol." This powerful assessment from the author and publisher follows:

"Central to the railroad narratives (expressed in cartoons, jokes, novels, travelogues and songs as well as company rule-books, etiquette manuals and legal rulings) was the shifting balance between gender, race and class—the fundamental categories that organized Victorian public culture."

And back when the American railroads still ran their own terribly money-losing passenger trains, which fortunately ended in the dark days of such travel in the 1960s, conductors and their subordinate staffs were sometimes said to be "surlly."

However, even in modern day terms, the premise of Ms. Richter's book still holds true because current day on board Amtrak passenger train employees have been known to be both fired for being consistently and frequently rude ("surlly") to paying passengers and to be sent to what railroaders for several generations have referred to as "charm schools" to quiet and calm their nerves, change their inexplicable attitudes and teach them plain old "good (translated many times, of course, as "feminine") manners."

Enough said - This is a fine book for all American historians and history lovers - amateurs and professionals.

## Friends of the Virginian Railway at Milepost 2006

by Ken Miller

A flyer for this event was in the January issue of the Turntable Times. This will be a very enjoyable weekend, to be held March 31-April 2. Dave Helmer, Skip Salmon and Jeff Sanders has put together an interesting series of tours and presentations with other activities to keep participants busy! If you don't have the flyer, it is downloadable as an interactive PDF on the Chapter website, see the address on the back cover.

Oriented towards Virginian fans, history buffs and modelers alike. This event is a fund raising effort towards the Virginian Station project. We hope that everyone will come out and join in the fun. Please be sure to make your hotel reservations early!

On Friday, March 31, between 3 and 5 there will be an on-site design and use workshop (or charette) at the station. We are looking for ideas of creative reuse of the building with community input. Many people are wondering when things will start moving on this project, there are plenty of times I feel the same. But working behind the scenes is a number of folks, while physical work is not visible, background work is on going. A group including myself, Jim Overholser and Jeff Sanders attended a VDOT workshop on Wednesday, February 22 at Bedford. This workshop is to provide answers for those with TEA-21 funding. Just the mass of bureaucratic paperwork to move forward is almost mind boggling! Once you begin to participate in the station meetings, you will begin to understand why the process is so slow.

As has been pointed out, there are a number of ways you can help, step forward, volunteer, we'll be glad to have you.

We are proud to announce the publication

of a new soft cover book, Virginian Railway Chronicle, Volume 1. This will be an incentive for specific level donors for the station project. This will be the first of a series of soft cover books on the Virginian, published as time and funding permits. Illustrated, in-depth articles as well as many Virginian company drawings, most never published, will be the feature of these books. They will be of great interest to modelers and historians. These drawings will come from the Chapter Archive. These booklets will only available as part of the incentive package for a donation to the station project, more details to come!

### **Membership Reminder**

If you have not renewed your membership, it is very important to do so as quickly as possible, otherwise this will be the last issue of Turntable Times you will receive.

### **UPCOMING MEETINGS/EVENTS**

**Regular Meeting Locations are at the O. Winston Link Museum.**

March 16 - Regular Meeting

April 4 - Board Meeting

April 20 - General Meeting

May 2 - Board Meeting

May 18 - General Meeting

May 20 - Celebrate Roanoke's Rail Heritage at the O. Winston Link Museum - More Details To Follow

June 6 - Board Meeting

June 15 - General Meeting

July 4 - Board Meeting

July 20 - General Meeting

<http://community.roanoke.com/RoanokeChapterNationalRailwayHistoricalSociety>

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