



Turntable TIMES

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

Volume 39, Number 3
May-June 2007





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Turntable Times is published bimonthly 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, May 17, 2007 at 7:30 pm. at the Link Museum located in the former N&W Passenger Station, 101 Shenandoah Avenue.

Please be sure to note our weather cancellation policy below., please note, this policy also applies to Board Meetings.

Due to a variety of technical problems, this issue was much delayed in production and is being mailed with the July-August Turntable Times.

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 July/August 2007 issue of Turntable Times is Monday June 18, 2007. 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

What can easily be considered the Virginian's most dramatic and fatal wreck occurred on May 25, 1927, 80 years ago this month. As Train No. 3, lead by Class PA No. 212 rammed Extra 103 east head-on at Ingleside, West Virginia. See the complete story in this issue. J.L. Sanders Collection

Mixed Freight - May/June

by Mr. Robin R. Shavers

CSX Transportation continues to irritate the feds and the fans. If you keep up with railroad accidents, CSX is constantly in the forefront especially over the past six months. Keep in mind that not all of the mishaps make it on the news or in the newspapers. According to a report made public by the Federal Railroad Administration, their inspectors found 3,518 defects or less severe problems with CSX's railroad equipment or operating practices. The railroad had five serious derailments in the state of New York back in December and others in Maryland, Ohio and Virginia. Of the 3,518 infractions, it was recommended the railroad be fined for 199.

Last month I reported that July 1, 2007 would mark the 40th anniversary of the merger of the Seaboard Air Line Railroad with The Atlantic Coast Line Railroad to form the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad which is now a fallen flag within today's CSX Transportation. For the purist it became the Seaboard System after being merged with the Louisville & Nashville for a few years before being officially merged with the Chessie System to create CSX. In honor of the end of the SAL & ACL, the historical society of ACL-SAL will have a 3 and one half day conference/convention here in Richmond, VA. I am part of a 10 man planning committee for the conference. We approached CSX on the hopes of having a rolling stock display, shop and yard tours, an excursion over a freight only line, a guest speaker and three trains at The Triple Crossing. No dice on all of the above. Even Norfolk Southern was game for the Triple Crossing display. We had hoped CSX would agree on a few or one request as a chance to

earn some positive public relations in light of all the flack generated by imposing heat restrictions during hot weather and thus delaying Amtrak trains. At any rate, at my suggestion and a few others, plan B was created just in case. We will have a conference that we trust will be worth the while of all whom wish to attend and participate.

Lets go back in time. This past April 25th & 26th marked 20 years since Class A No. 1218 made its first public excursion after it's massive restoration project down in Birmingham, AL. On Saturday April 25, 1987 the mighty 1218 powered a Roanoke Chapter NRHS excursion train to Bluefield, West Virginia from Roanoke and back on a severely weather challenged day. It was one of the worst weather systems to attack the southeast. At one point a decision had to be made whether to continue to Bluefield or return to Roanoke forfeiting our Bluefield destination. Creeks became rivers and so did some roads. Hardcore chasers were put to the test as detours became the rule. 1218, Norfolk Southern and the Roanoke Chapter came thru in flying albeit wet colors with no injuries or accidents. (editor's note: the reason for the decision to turn back or not was due to downed trees across the main.)

Sunday April 26, 1987 was a complete reversal weatherwise. It was a beautiful day as two shorter trips with 1218 were accomplished. We had a westbound trip to Walton, Virginia that partially made up for a part of the rainy trip on Saturday. We also had an excursion to Lynchburg, Va and back too. All in all, it was a great weekend of steam powered excursion trips over a railroad that was dedicated to steam power to the end, the Norfolk and Western Railway. Precision Transportation prevailed. Though it was Norfolk Southern, technically the N&W Railway still existed on paper and in our hearts.

Speaking of Norfolk Southern, that company will be a quarter of a century old this June 1st, 2007. For those of you not as smart as a fifth grader, that is twenty five years old.

Friends Of The Virginian Railway At Milepost 2007

by Mr. Robin R. Shavers

It's hard to believe that a year has passed since I gave a brief account of last years Friends Of The Virginian Railway At Milepost 2006. I stated last year that I was looking forward to this years get together. That sentiment was shared by many. Last year when I suggested to Skip Salmon that Altavista, Va be considered as a possible meeting location, I had no idea that Altavista would be chosen so soon. That little town has always appealed to me from a railfan perspective. The town celebrates it's one hundred year birthday this year.

The three day event commenced at 2:00 p.m. Friday afternoon at the former Southern Railway depot which served as headquarters Friday and Saturday. For me, the enjoyment started at 7:00 p.m. that evening when we had the mayor of Altavista speak on how the Virginian Railway gave birth to Altavista. The mayor had a great sense of humor and told some interesting stories about some Virginian railroaders and townspeople. Skip Salmon got things rolling by playing guitar and singing the song "Waiting For A Train".

The Myth of the Great Railroad Meetup

On a recent ski vacation in Utah, my daughter and I took a breather from the slopes one day to do some exploring. We

decided to take our excursion to a place in American history, Promontory Summit, Utah.

Promontory is not a place you just happen to run across. Located northwest of Salt Lake City and north of the Great Salt Lake, Promontory is literally in no-man's land of the western plains. This isolated spot on the map is the place where the railroads of the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific met completing the transcontinental rail line. What was to be a walk through American history trivia for my daughter and me, turned out to be an economic lesson in the absurdity of government subsidies.

After pursuing the railroad artifacts inside the Promontory museum and taking the obligatory picture of the spot on the rail line where the Golden Spike was driven, we set out approximately three or four miles east to a spot where our self-guided walking tour would start. The Big Fill Trail allows you to walk along the mile and a half of railroad grade that was created by both the Central Pacific moving east from Sacramento and the Union Pacific moving west from Omaha.

It has been well noted in railroad history that these two railroads were given land grants, low interest-rate loans, and direct subsidies by the federal government. The subsidies were graduated according to the difficulty of the terrain being traversed with \$16,000 paid for construction over an easy grade and up to \$48,000 for grades in the mountains. Additionally, changes to the Pacific Railroad Act allowed payment of subsidies for grading which could extend as far as 300 miles ahead of the tracks being laid.

At the second stop on the trail, the pervenseness caused by the subsidies was in full view. At that moment we were standing on the grade built by the Central Pacific and there less than fifty yards below was the grade built by the Union Pacific. The grades did not meet but ran parallel to each other

and had continued that way for 250 miles - almost a year's work.

It was also noted in the guidebook that the work camps for the two groups were literally separated by a hillside. It was now apparent to my daughter, laughing out loud, that these two railroads had no intention of meeting. The purpose of grading and laying tracks was not to meet the demand for transcontinental passenger service, but simply to collect, risk-free of any market forces, the federal subsidies. Any doubt about this conclusion would be quickly erased up ahead at the tour stop overlooking Spring Creek Ravine.

The Central Pacific constructed a "big fill" of earth to span their portion of the ravine so track could be laid safely upon the ground. Below the "big fill" the Union Pacific spared neither time nor safety by constructing a rickety - wooden trestle across the gulch. The trestle, which was 85 feet high and 400 feet long, was so flimsily built that one reporter suggested, "It will shake the nerves of the stoutest hearts of railroad travelers when they see what a few feet of round timbers and seven-inch spikes are expected to uphold - a train in motion." Of course the trestle was not meant to uphold a passenger train; it was built to transfer the money from Washington to the coffers of the Union Pacific Railroad. It also became clear that the treacherous route taken by the Central Pacific blasting through the Sierra Nevada Mountains was more of a matter of financial begging than passenger convenience. Eventually the powers in Washington D.C. realized what was taking place and ordered the two railroads to link up at Promontory Summit which was ceremoniously achieved on May 10, 1869. What happened next is almost totally absent from our history texts.

Because of the poor manner in which the

rail lines were laid, work began almost immediately to reconstruct the entire project. Three years after the celebrated meeting at Promontory Summit the Union Pacific Railroad was bankrupt. Here we are 138 years later with many people still believing in the economic virtues of subsidies from farm programs to energy development. It makes me smile to know that there is at least now one fifteen-year-old girl, with the image of parallel grades in her mind, who sees the fallacy of it all.

(Above story a commentary by Mark Pribonic, The Ludwig von Mises Institute (Auburn, Ala.) via the Altamont Press newswire (April 4) via Midwest Rail Scene Report, Issue # 267, May 2007)

It was 80 years ago...

by Ken Miller

A bright clear Tuesday morning seemed much like any other early summer day in Roanoke. At the Virginian passenger station, the hulking black PA-class 4-6-2 emitted a haze of smoke from its stack. It was getting warm early, on the side of the tender, condensation appeared on the sides of the tank where the water within had kept the metal cooler, giving a different color to part of the orange-yellow lettering spelling out the road name. Trailing behind the tender were the five somber Pullman green passenger cars, an express car, a combine, two coaches and a club car. Quite a bit of a train for just the handful of people on board, but the Virginian was never much concerned about the passenger business.

Engineer Aldrich was on the ground oiling around with his long-spouted oil can. Aldrich was 57 years old, the number one man on the seniority list of the railroad, having hired out in 1906, now with 19 years of service behind him. He was a director of

several banks in Roanoke and considered wealthy, but enjoyed railroading so much that he continued to take his regular runs on Nos. 3 and 4. It was a pretty easy schedule, have to admit, leave Roanoke about 8:00 am, arrive in Mullens at 1:30 pm, depending on the schedule, probably about 7 hours on duty, then come back the next day on No. 4, leaving at 2:15 pm, arrival in Roanoke at 8:15 pm. Generally a great schedule, giving you an easy night at home in Roanoke.

In the cab, fireman Frank O'Neal was busy with his coal scoop, filling in the corners, and getting a nice even fire going before departure. Conductor Hamilton strolled forward on the station's cinder platform, as he reached the side of the cab of the 212, Aldrich and O'Neal met him, in the time honored ritual, the three compared watches, and then went over yellow tissue handwritten train orders for departure. With that business completed, the Conductor turned, and walked back to the combine, signaling brakeman Agee to climb on board, with a last call of "All Aboard," Agee and Hamilton climbed the steps on their cars, Hamilton waved the highball to Aldrich looking back from the cab of the 212 and with a clang and rattle, closed the traps and doors of the vestibule. Aldrich acknowledged the highball with two toots on the deep steamboat whistle, released the brakes with a hiss of air and pulled the throttle out while putting the reverse lever a bit forward. The 212 pulled out smoothly, little could anyone have known that Aldrich and Agee were on their last departure from Roanoke.

On the other end of the division, at Elmore, fate was beginning to take shape as the crew caller knocked on the door of 52 year old engineer J.L. Weaver. The caller said he was called for an extra east. Weaver probably thought it would be a good day, nice weather, early call, should be home in

Roanoke in plenty of time to get a good nights sleep, hopefully before getting called out again.

Sitting in the departure track was square-head 3-unit electric motor No. 103, the paint was still looking good on the not quite two-year old locomotive. Coupled behind her were loaded "battleship gondolas" with West Virginia black gold, headed to Tidewater, Virginia. On the rear with yellow flags flapping in the slight breeze, was a little wooden C-1 Class caboos. The red paint on the caboos was one of the few bright spots in the drab yard filled with black coal cars.

The 212 picked up speed as it past the yard limits sign, but there was no real hurry, the Virginian always had a schedule that was easy to keep, besides, those coal trains brought in the revenue, the passenger trains were a convenience, and if necessary, the passenger train took the siding on meets.

At 10:25 am, on the other side of the division, Extra 103 picked up orders at MX Tower and was proceeding eastbound. Just below the clearance card, on top of the thin stack, a thin yellow tissue sheet was labeled as order No. 218 and read as follows:

"Engine 103 run extra MX Tower to Roanoke and meet No. 3 Eng 212 at Ingleside. No. 3 take siding."

At Norcross, the 212's tank was being filled by Fireman O'Neal, just a few minutes before 11:00 am. No. 3 was running about 9 minutes late, Operator Wright handed the train orders to Aldrich while O'Neal was back on top of the tank. Wright also delivered orders to Agee and went over them with Operator Wright. Agee then walked back and handed the orders over to Conductor Hamilton. Hamilton read over the orders while enjoying his lunch in the club car when passing Norcross. On top of the group of train orders was order 218.

Hamilton read them over, and then finished off his lunch, as the next station stop was Ingleside. There was some business to attend to as well as an ill passenger and a handicapped man to deal with. Apparently, both men forgot the contents of order 218 after the station work was done, and the highball was given to Engineer Aldrich to proceed west. Train 3 should have proceeded west and entered the passing siding, however, it seems that order 218 was forgotten by all on the crew. Without radios, communication was limited to air signals, or climbing over the coal pile of the tender and walking to the engine cab.

Operating rules require the sounding of a whistle signal for a meet, however, No. 3 passed the passing siding switch climbing the grade without a second thought.

Fireman O'Neal was working hard to make steam on the 1.25% grade, the 212 cleared the west switch of the passing track trailed soft black coal smoke back over the short train. As the 212 entered the right hand curve just a little over one third-mile west of the switch, a cut obscured the crew's vision.

Just west of this curve, clanking down-grade, Extra 103 Engineer had sounded the meeting point whistle, and head brakeman Clowers suddenly realized something was terribly wrong. Clowers spotted the coal smoke above the cut about 200 feet ahead, and shouted out the warning of the impending collision, but with the restricted view, could not tell exactly where No. 3 was. On the 212 probably both O'Neal and Aldrich heard the soft whoof of meeting point whistle from the 103 and leaped to their feet, but it was too late, as soon as they rounded the right hand curve, the 103 was on top of them. Both trains were traveling at less than 20 mph.

With a loud crash, the two locomotives met head-on. With the cry of bending metal

and clanging rods, the 212 climbed upwards onto the cab of the electric motor. The downgrade momentum of the east bound coal train began pushing the 212 and train backwards, finally coming to a halt some 310 feet from the point of impact. In the cab of the 212, the twisting and turning had broken some steam lines which immediately scalded O'Neal and Aldrich to death. Simultaneously, back in the passenger train, a number of passengers had been banged around badly as well, as the cars dropped onto the ballast.

Once the two trains had ground to a halt, it was almost deathly still, only the sound of escaping steam and the cries of the injured people belied the tragedy. Brakeman Agee probably ran back to the west end of the passing siding to call for help as Hamilton attempted to help the injured. The crew riding the little C-1 caboose knew something had gone drastically wrong, but being 90 cars back, probably thought the train had only gone into emergency with a broken air hose. The brakeman

The staffs of Bluefield Memorial Hospital and Princeton hospital and nurses were quickly dispatched to the scene. As news of the horrible wreck spread, hundreds of people began to gather at the remote location to look at the carnage and lend a hand if possible. Interestingly enough, a side story developed according to the Bluefield Daily Telegraph, the photographers were attempting to get views of the accident for both local and national coverage, but were rebuffed by a number of armed guards under orders of the Virginian officials, while the scene never developed into a violent confrontation, and appeals to county officials fell on deaf ears. The photographers apparently kept the Virginian officials occupied while a number of other members of the public took pictures for them!

All in all, twenty people suffered injuries, with Aldrich and O'Neal the only fatalities. The 212 was so badly damaged, their bodies could not be extracted for some time. Engineer Weaver suffered serious wounds in the chest and hips, Andrew Blankenship, the fireman escaped with lacerations to his face and leg. Both men considered themselves lucky

When rescuers managed to get to the cab of the 212, hanging there on a hook was the ill-fated order 218.

With the damage, the 212 was hauled off to Princeton, the 103 to Mullens, where both underwent heavy repairs, it would be months before they returned to service. Both continued to serve to the end of steam and almost to the merger date, some thirty years later with almost no sign of the Virginian's most dramatic wreck.

UPCOMING MEETINGS/EVENTS

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

- June 15 - General Meeting
- July 4 - Board Meeting
- July 20 - General Meeting
- August 7 - Board Meeting
- August 16 - General Meeting
- September 4 - Board Meeting
- September 20 - General Meeting
- October 2 - Board Meeting
- October 18 - General Meeting
- November 6 - Board Meeting
- November 15 - Annual Meeting
- December 4 - Board Meeting

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

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