



# *Turntable* TIMES

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

**Volume 39, Number 5**  
**September-October 2007**





# Turntable TIMES

**Volume 39, Number 5**  
**Sept.-Oct. 2007**

## **EDITOR**

Kenney Kirkman  
KKIRKMAN50@hotmail.com

## **MIXED FREIGHT**

Robin R. Shavers

## **SMALL RAILS**

Dave Meashey  
kndmeashey@msn.com

## **HISTORIAN**

Kenneth L. Miller  
klmiller@rev.net

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

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, September 20, 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.

## *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 September/October 2007 issue of Turntable Times is Thursday, October 18, 2007. Please send articles, information and exchange newsletters to: Kenney Kirkman, 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**

For those of us involved, it is difficult to believe, but it was 25 years ago this past August that 611 returned to steam. Five years late she and 1218 were stars of the 1987 NRHS National Convention. It was truly some of the glory days. Here, the 611 is climbing the grade towards Christiansburg, K.L. Miller Photo

## **Notice of Annual Meeting**

---

The Annual Meeting of the Roanoke Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society will be held at the O. Winston Link Museum on Thursday, November 15, 2007. The meeting will begin at 7:30 pm. At this time, we will hold our annual election in which four (4) directors will be elected.

Board members whose terms are expiring are as follows:

Jim Cosby  
Brian Crosier  
Carl Jensen  
Bill Mason

Nominations will be accepted from the floor at the Annual Meeting, please be sure you have that person's consent before making a nomination. The committee, headed by Jim Cosby, is searching for nominees for these three positions

Instructions for Absentee Ballot: This year we will elect four (4) directors by secret ballot. Any member in good standing may vote by absentee ballot.

Please Note: if you are interested in running, or know of another Chapter member who is, please contact the nominating committee promptly.

If there are no more candidates than positions, a motion to elect by acclaim will be accepted.

To vote by absentee ballot, one must:

1 - Request an absentee ballot from the Secretary or a member of the nominating committee. You will receive (a) one ballot; (b) one "ballot" envelope; and (c) one mailing envelope.

2 - Mark the ballot (vote for not more than four (4) directors. If more than four (4) votes are cast, the ballot will be discarded).

3 - Place the ballot in the "ballot" envelope and seal. Do not put your name on the ballot or "ballot" envelope.

4 - Place "ballot" envelope in the mailing envelope. Write your name and return address on the mailing envelope and mail to:

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

or the envelope may be hand delivered to the Secretary anytime before the election at the annual meeting.

## **Mixed Freight - September/October**

---

by Mr. Robin R. Shavers

This past August 19 was spent at Burnt Chimney, Virginia enjoying a scaled down run day with the Blue Ridge Live Steamers. Time was also spent talking with Ken Miller of the Roanoke Chapter NRHS. During our discussion of steam excursions and railroading of not really so long ago, he mentioned that this past September 1st thru 5th hailed 30 years since the Roanoke Chapter sponsored the National Convention back in 1977. I mentioned the 20 year anniversary for 1987 in a past Mixed Freight.

I hold within my hands the four page brochure for the 1977 convention. Not only was that my first convention of any kind with a railroad interest, it was the kickoff of meeting some truly enjoyable people that were the backbone of that chapter. Some still maintain that capacity. From a railroad perspective, think of all the changes that have occurred over the past 30 years. Think of all the chapter members that have moved on from their earthly home.

Southern Railway fans take note. The

Southern Appalachia Railway Museum a few months back acquired former SR E8A # 6913. The locomotive was purchased from a private collector up in Binghamton, N.Y. The museum hopes to restore the unit to operating condition. Restoration will include the replacement of all glass and some body panels, small engine parts, and copper items that have been stolen. A great deal of the electrical wiring will need to be restored too. The color scheme of green, cream and gold will be returned. 6913 was built and delivered to the Southern in December 1953. It helped the Southern serve the South for 26 years before it was sold to New Jersey Transit.

Another E8A that has been brought back to the spotlight is Erie Railroad No. 833. The locomotive was purchased from Bennett Levin's Juniata Terminal by the New York & Greenwood Lake Railway, a shortline. This unit was built in 1951. Restoration was performed by Star Trak Inc. The locomotive was repainted into its original Erie passenger scheme at the shop of the Black River & Western Railroad shop in Ringoes.

Earlier this year I informed you readers that July 1, 2007 would mark forty years since the Atlantic Coast Line and the Seaboard Air Line merged to form the Seaboard Coast Line Railroad. To commemorate that forty-year event, the ACL-SAL Historical Society held a four day conference that included tours, talks, slide presentations and a banquet from Thursday June 28 thru Sunday July 1.

For me and nine other guys, the conference started in the cold of January as we were the planning committee. Our efforts paid off as compliments rolled off the tongues of attendees by the carload. The weather cooperated, and everything went precisely as planned. We had a total of 103 attend the banquet which featured TRAINS

magazine columnist Don Phillips and William E. Griffin, Jr., a former RF&P employee and the author for a number of quality railroad books of railroads that have served Virginia and the South. Mr. Griffin presented a slide show entitled "The Seaboard Air Line from Richmond to Norlina." Now for those of you trying to figure out where the heck is Norlina, here is your answer. Norlina is located in The Tarheel State about 68 miles southwest of today's CSX Collier Yard at Petersburg. Along with the offerings of the conference, it was like a church homecoming and school reunion combined as people, both railroaders, and railfans, some who have not been seen or around in years could come together and socialize in memories of the past.

Just over a month later up in Altoona, PA I attended the 2007 Altoona Railfest. This event was normally held during the first weekend of October. In order to operate excursion trains from Altoona west to Gallitzin, Norfolk Southern selected July as their less busy month in terms of freight traffic. The miners were on vacation so I was told as very few loaded, or empty coal trains were observed during my three-day visit.

Railfest 2007 was kicked off with three bands and a surprisingly good fireworks show Friday night July 6th at The Railroaders Memorial Museum. Of course, the main feature for me and hundreds of fans were the three round-trip excursion trains to Gallitzin and back Saturday and Sunday. Featured motive power were Bennett Levin's twin E8As painted in PRR tuscan red paint scheme pulling a 12 car train consisting of some vintage passenger cars, some MARC commuter cars, and a few Amtrak Amfleets. I rode the first run Saturday morning and photographed the remaining runs at various locations. The

morning trip was slightly marred when some nare do wells paintballed the north-side of the train ten minutes into its trip. Along with the NS police, the Altoona Fire Department was alerted to be on hand to wash the mess off upon the train's return to Altoona. To my knowledge, no one was apprehended. The remaining excursions proceeded unblemished. Many fans speculated that senseless act may cause Norfolk Southern to cease future excursion cooperation. I sure hope not.

The Railfest appeared to be well attended by railfans and civilians alike. For the record, there were other activities going on while the excursion trains rolled including a model railroad display and flea market.

## **Long Time Agent at Prince West Virginia Retires**

**M**arvin Plumley, longtime station agent at Prince, West Virginia, has recently retired. Plumley, a familiar face to numerous area railfans including several Roanoke Chapter members, was scheduled to leave his post on July 29 and said his future time would include hunting and fishing as well as trying to become an artist.

Plumley was born a short distance from the Prince station where he worked as a ticket agent for the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad and then for Amtrak. Plumley followed in the footsteps of both his father and grandfather, who were also railroad employees.

Plumley recalled that back when he started his career the C&O adhered very closely to its train schedules, and that one could almost set his watch by the arrivals and departures. The station at Prince is the third depot there, with the first one being opened about 1880.

In his early days it cost about \$3.00 to ride to Cincinnati. Now the fare is anywhere

from \$35 to \$70 depending on when the reservation is made.

Plumley does not recall his first train ride, but noted that given the smoke, whistles, clatter of the wheels and the idea of rolling along a set of parallel rails, the train offered a form of magic that no other form of transportation could duplicate.

(Above excerpted from an article in the Register-Herald by Mannix Porterfield, via The Gondola, Newsletter of the Huntington Chapter).

## **Mayo River Trail**

by Kenney Kirkman

**A**bout 100 people, including your Turntable Times Editor, were invited to gather on the banks of the Mayo River in the town of Stuart in Patrick County on Monday night July 23, 2007 to celebrate the kickoff of the Mayo River Trail Project.

The three-mile paved walking and biking Mayo River Trail will be built along the rail bed of the Danville and Western Railway, or "Dick and Willie" which ran from Danville through Martinsville and on to the town of Stuart from 1884 until July 31, 1942. On that date, 26 miles of the line were removed from the town of Fieldale in Henry County, westward to Stuart.

The Mayo River Trail will begin at a point in downtown Stuart at the intersection of Route 8 and Commerce Street near the former Clark Brothers Warehouse. Planners are looking for a caboose to place at the beginning of the trail, which would serve as a visitor and information center.

From the Route 8, Commerce Street area, the trail will proceed eastward along the Mayo River crossing that stream twice before ending behind the newly constructed Wal-Mart which is located on Route 58 just east of Stuart.

Another portion of the old "Dick and

Willie" route was recently opened as a paved hiking trail in downtown Martinsville. This trail begins just off Franklin Street, which is behind the old Henry County Courthouse, and proceeds eastward to the end of Pine Street, a distance of about six tenths of a mile. Planners in Henry County hope to extend this trail westward from Martinsville to the town of Fieldale, eventually.

## **Carolina Coastal Railway**

---

The Carolina Coastal Railway has recently filed to lease from NS and to operate approximately 133.4 miles of railroad line known as the Raleigh-Plymouth route extending between NS milepost 132.00 at Chcowinity, and NS milepost 228.00 at Raleigh. The agreement also includes several other sections of track at other points between Chocowinity and Raleigh. The transaction was expected to be completed on or after June 21st. (From *Midwest Rail Scene Report*, Issue # 269, July 2007).

## **A Female Railroad Pioneer**

---

by John Emery

Known to Railroadiana collectors primarily through Douglas McIntyre's *Official Guide to Railroad Dining Car China's* chapter: "Letters From Baltimore," Miss Olive W. Dennis was a pioneer.

Olive Dennis was born in Thurlow, Pennsylvania on November 20, 1885. She graduated first in her class at Western High School in Baltimore, Maryland, winning a four-year scholarship to Goucher College, from which she graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1908. A year later, she graduated with an M.A. from Columbia University. For ten years, she taught mathematics at the McKinley Manual Training School in Washington, D.C. During her summer breaks, she would take courses at different colleges and universities around the coun-

try, and one summer's course in surveying at the University of Wisconsin led her to her career in Civil Engineering. In 1919 she enrolled at Cornell University and completed her Civil Engineering degree in 1920. She was only the second woman ever to complete the Civil Engineering program there.

Olive Dennis had always been interested in building things. When she was only ten years old, she scratch-built a scale model trolley that had reversible seats, a pole that moved, and movable steps. Never interested in dolls, she frequently borrowed her father's tools to build doll furniture, learning the hard way that chisels are not screw drivers. In a 1940 interview, she said, "I have always loved making toys and have been trying to do so ever since I could drive a nail."

Unfortunately, engineering was still a man's world in 1920, and she was unsuccessful in getting a job building bridges. Later in 1920, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad hired her as a draftsman. Twenty-four years later, in a groundbreaking work with Miss Dorothy Sells on the jobs that women could perform in the railroad industry she was to write that drafting "is admirably suited to women with adequate technical education."

After a year at the drafting boards, her title changed to Engineer of Service, reporting directly to the President of the B&O. In that capacity, she would travel more than 50,000 miles per year on the B&O, and other railroads to evaluate service, and to make recommendations on how to improve service in a cost-effective manner. One of her first recommendations had to do with lowering the height of coach seats. She observed that many female travelers, being of shorter stature than men, were unable to place their feet on the floor of the coach, instead having their legs and feet dangling off the ends

of the seat. It was she who recommended subdued lighting in coaches in the evening, as well as the reclining coach seat, with foot rests. On a more utilitarian level, it was Miss Dennis who completely redesigned ladies' powder rooms aboard trains, equipping them with constant hot water, free paper towels, liquid soap, and disposable paper drinking cups. She also received a patent for the Dennis Ventilator in 1928; a device that allowed the circulation of air at each seat without having to open the windows, allowing in smoke and soot.

From the standpoint of railroaders collectors, it was her work with dining that is most significant. Let her be praised and damned. It was she who devised the concept of the dinette on board trains. This 24 hour fast food dispensary served dime sandwiches; coffee, soda, and fruit, in competition to the train's dining car. But, it was also she who designed the Colonial/ Centenary dining car ware used by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. It is not entirely clear from the record if she were entirely responsible for the design, or if she was merely the patent holder of record. Indisputably though, she is the patent holder for the B&O's blue Centenary china.

During World War Two, Miss Olive Dennis and Miss Dorothy Sells of the Office of Defense Transportation, co-wrote a study on the jobs that railroads should open up to women in the interests of defense mobilization. Their study showed that there were 32 railroads in the US that employed more than 10,000 workers, and the number of women employed at these roads ranged from 2.8 percent to 13.3 percent.

They found more than 150 positions in the railroads other than stereotypically female occupations that could be performed by women. They dismissed the notion of female executives in railroads only because

of the experience level required for those jobs; they did recommend women for jobs as executive assistants. They considered women ideally suited for jobs related to insurance and employee records. In fact, most jobs not requiring heavy lifting saw the teams' approval for women, if they were qualified, including roles on section gangs and bridge gangs. Labor relations they left to men, except for a few women whom they felt were suited as "conciliators." A full page of their report dealt with women's roles in the roundhouse.

But, their recommendations went even beyond that. They recommended that married women be employed part-time in various roles; for the railroads to work with communities in arranging car pools, day care centers, and building housing projects. A radical notion for 1944 was their recommendation that women be paid the same as men for working the same job.

Miss Dennis much preferred dealing with engineering problems than with esthetic problems such as fabric color (one of her earlier duties). She said in an August 1928 interview, "I'd probably be bored with housekeeping on a small scale, but it's perfectly thrilling to make a train like a home." At the same time, she discussed how she had redesigned the menus aboard the Colonial dining cars to make them more interesting while diners waited for their food. She included historic trivia, biographies, and a travelogue on the pages.

Following the Second World War, Olive Dennis received a position upgrade, and a very important assignment. It was she who was responsible for the complete design of the Baltimore and Ohio's new Cincinnati. The interiors were done based on her knowledge and taste. She even redesigned the shrouding for the four reclassified P-7d Pacific engines, using a 30-60-90 triangle.

Did she ever get to build a bridge? In a way. In 1940, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad opened a large scale model railroad in their Wheeling, West Virginia station. One of the trestles over the railroad's stream was designed and built by Miss Olive Dennis. She described it as being the most fun she had since she built the model trolley 45 years earlier.

In addition to her work for the Baltimore and Ohio, Olive Dennis was founder and, for 17 years, president of the B&O Women's Music Club. She also occupied executive positions in the National Puzzler's League in the 1920s and 1930s, and was a noted cryptographer. She lived with her sister, Miss Hazel Dennis in Baltimore, Maryland, and died in 1957...

## **UPCOMING MEETINGS/EVENTS**

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

- September 20 - Regular Meeting
- October 2 - Board Meeting
- October 18 - General Meeting
- November 6 - Board Meeting
- November 15 - Annual Meeting
- December 4 - Board Meeting
- January 8 - Board Meeting
- January 17 - General Meeting
- February 5 - Board Meeting
- February 21 - General Meeting
- March 4 - Board Meeting
- March 20 - General Meeting

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

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. 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

**Dated Material  
Please do not delay**

Non-Profit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Roanoke, VA  
Permit No. 89