The ARKANSAS RAILROAD CLUB is a non-profit organization of railroad and train enthusiasts that was formed in 1969. We meet on the second Sunday of most months at 2 p.m. Anyone interested in trains is welcome! Dues to join the ARKANSAS RAILROAD CLUB are currently $20 a year, which includes the monthly Arkansas Railroader newsletter.

The next regularly scheduled monthly meeting of the Arkansas Railroad Club will be 2 p.m., SUNDAY, May 16, 2010. It will be held at Curtis H. Stout, Inc., 2400 Cantrell Road, Suite 100, Little Rock, Ark. Note date change for Mother’s Day. Ed Painter will present a program on the Railroad Club will be 2 pm, SUNDAY, May 16, 2010. It will be held at Curtis H. Stout, Inc., 2400 Cantrell Road, Suite 100, Little Rock, Ark. Note date change for Mother’s Day. Ed Painter will present a show to follow. (Minutes by Ken Ziegenbein)

Arkansas Collectors Show will be held in Jacksonville April 30; May 1 and 2, 2010, in Jacksonville, Arkansas. Items available include railroad memorabilia, Civil War relics and post cards. Hours are 3 to 8 p.m., on Friday and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday. Admission will be charged.

Jackson Railroad will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, October 9, 2010, at the Casey Jones Museum in Jackson, Tennessee. The event is sponsored by the Gulf, Mobile & Ohio Historical Society and the Casey Jones Village. For more information see www.gmosh.org.

ARKANSAS RAILROAD CLUB officers and board will present $500 to the Fort Smith Trolley Museum to help restore a Little Rock trolley at the museum, on May 8, 2010. All club members are invited to attend.

The FORT SMITH TROLLEY MUSEUM is holding an open house to celebrate National Train Day on May 8, 2010. The museum will have free trolley rides and the Arkansas & Missouri will be offering train rides.

May meeting will be held on May 16, 2010, due to Mother’s Day.
First in Arkansas Railroading

Over the next few weeks we will be reprinting articles from the Arkansas Gazette and its predecessors which document some of the “first” in Arkansas railroad history. Since your editor was not alive 150 years ago, some disclaimers on the original reporters as to whether these were some of the first.

The Grand Excursion

Two Hundred Prominent Little Rockers Exchange Congratulations with the Arkadelphiaians.

The Most Important Excursion Ever Made in Arkansas.

A Complimentary Railroad Dinner.

Daily Arkansas Gazette June 29, 1873

For the last few weeks our citizens have been excited over the proposed excursion to Arkadelphia, to be given by the officers of the Cairo and Fulton railroad.

Yesterday, at 7:30 a.m. the excursion train, consisting of three coaches, and a baggage car, in charge of Conductor Frank Allen, and drawn by engine “J. Johnson,” over which the veteran engine John Klinsen presided, pulled out of the yard in Little Rock and rapidly proceeded south.


The highest point on the entire line is situated four miles north of Benton, and is 440 feet above the tide water of the Gulf of Mexico. The distance from this station to Arkadelphia is forty-two miles, and between these two points are a number of stations, including Traskwood, Gifford, Malvern, Huntington, Donaldson and Witherspoon. The principal place is Malvern, although the others give good promise of becoming important towns. It is the railroad station near Rockport, and in a very short time will become an important village. New stores, dwellings, a hotel, and fine large depot are now being erected. Here passengers change cars on the way to Hot Springs, taking stages, reaching the Springs the same evening.

Donaldson, the last made (sic) station, is seen just before reaching the Ouachita river. A side-track has been built, and a number of structures are going up. From here to the river the track runs on a high “dump,” through the river bottoms, which are thickly covered with a fine growth of timber.

A short while after leaving Donaldson, the train crossed the noble bridge and approached Arkadelphia, the terminus of the our journey, where the booming cannon echoed to the whistle of the locomotive, arriving there at 12 o’clock. It seemed, judging from the crowds of people assembled to greet the “first passenger train from the Rock,” that the day was a holiday, and the visit proved it to be such.

Arkadelphia is one of the most important and young cities along the road, and is growing rapidly. It has many fine places of business and residence, and is a desirable location, being situated on a bluff on the south side of the Ouachita river. The depot will be in the eastern portion of the town, near the bridge. The bridge consists of two spans of one hundred and fifty feet each, and is approached on the north by a pile trestle one thousand feet long. It was built by the Baltimore Bridge company, Capt. C.C. Wrenshall being the superintendent of construction. The structure has been faultlessly built, and completed according to time. The track at Arkadelphia is one hundred and seventy-five feet apart, and the trestle east-west. The track going into Arkadelphia has been laid very rapidly, and includes some very difficult work. Mr. E.L. Dudley, the assistant engineer, and Morton Dudley, assisted by a corps of mechanics, are deserving great credit for the faithful manner in which they are performing their work. Two miles of track were laid Friday, and as nearly as much yesterday. The rapidity of its construction has never been beaten by any railroad in the United States.

On arrival at Arkadelphia, the visitors were escorted to Scott’s grove, where lengthy tables, loaded with all the delicacies of the season, awaited the onslaught of the hungry. The meal was called the “Cairo and Fulton railroad complimentary dinner,” and was gotten up the Arkadelphiaians as a mark of their good taste and generosity. Those in immediate charge of the refreshments were Messrs. Legbert and Henderson.

The committee of arrangements was composed of a number of prominent citizens: Messrs. C.A. Gantt, chairman; D.J. McDonald, W.T. Crouch, A.J. Stuart and A.E. Habicht. The citizens turned out at the body at the dinner, and made the welcome cordial.

Mr. H.W. McMillen delivered the speech of welcome, which was brief and to the point. He thought more words amounted to nothing, that the cannons and well-filled tables showed the welcome. He said they were greeted in Arkadelphia in Arkansas style, and closed his remarks by saying the sentiment was “built for the railroad, and built for the roadmen.”

After the welcome the guests were invited to the table, which invitation was eagerly accepted, and the delicious repast about to begin. The dinner was thoroughly enjoyed, and a number of toasts were drunk and responses made.

Gov. Harris Flanugin proposed the toast “Our Governor,” which was drunk, and a neat response made by Gov. Baxter.

The toast “Liberal Citizens of Arkadelphia” was proposed by Dr. R.L. Lewis, and responded to by Dr. Kirkwood.

Cries for “Morley! Morley! Morley!” filled the air, but Morley, who is more of a worker than a talker could not be found. Col. Loughborough was also called for, but he was conveniently absent for the same reason.

The following is Col. Morley’s speech, as made to a number of friends, in a confidential manner. “[The colonel at the time knew no reporter’s listening ear was near] “I am surprised that the good citizens of Arkadelphia should be so ungenerous as to expect me to give them a speech after having given them a railroad, particularly when we have brought them a hundred orators from Little Rock, each ten man power, making the thousand tongues the poet oh’d (swore for) and why should you not owe me? The fact is, the Cairo and Fulton railroad has been built by actions and not words. Words may build railroads out of Memphis, but they will not put out of Little Rock. Our men work like beavers, silently and patiently, and for me to tell you a tale in the presence of the oratorical talent present, would be flat, indeed, like the tail of the beaver. But allow me to congratulate the citizens of your beautiful town on the completion of this long looked for Cairo and Fulton railroad, which opens up to your business men a road to Arkansas to help us through. After the conclusion of the repast the well-pleasure excursionists wound their way to the train, bidding an unwilling adieu to their generous friends in Arkadelphia. The train started at 4 p.m. and at 6 p.m. was a meeting of the excursionists was held on the train, over which Judge Cross presided and R.S. Yerkes and J.S. Dormer acted as secretaries. The following resolutions were drawn up, adopted and signed by every member of the party.

Resolved, That we, the citizens of Little Rock, return our most grateful thanks to Col. James H. Morley and Maj. J.M. Loughborough, officers of the Cairo and Fulton railroad, for the pleasant excursion this day given to us by the opening of the railroad to Arkadelphia.

Resolved, That we all concur in the opinion that this section of the road has been well and speedily constructed, and reflects great credit upon the officers who have had its construction in charge.

Resolved, That we tender our thanks to the citizens of Arkadelphia for the generous welcome given to us on our arrival in that promising city, and the hospitable manner in which we were entertained while there. E.W. Cross, Chairman. R.S. Yerkes. John S. Dormer, Secretaries.

The party arrived in this city on their return at 8 o’clock, well pleased and highly delighted with their trip.

Before closing, we desire to call attention the liberality of the company in providing refreshments. The Havanas (sic) were choice, and Fried Bros. & Stewiel’s (sic) best champagne flowed in abundance.

The Arkadelphia, or Little Rock and Arkansas City Railroad, was chartered as the Arkansas Railroad in 1869, and it was completed and opened for business in 1873. The railroad was a major factor in the development of Little Rock and Arkadelphia, and it played a significant role in the growth of the area. The celebration of the opening of the railroad was a major event, and it was attended by many prominent citizens of the area. The excursion train was a highlight of the event, and it provided a unique opportunity for the citizens to experience the new railroad. The celebration included a complimentary dinner, speeches, and toasts, and it was a fitting conclusion to the construction of the railroad.
To honor the 100th anniversary of the Boy Scouts of America, Union Pacific applied special lettering and logos to Union Pacific No. 7469. The unit is a General Electric C45ACCTE locomotive rated at 4400 horsepower. While the lettering was being applied at the Downing B. Jenks shop in North Little Rock, the locomotive’s number was changed to 2010. The unit was unveiled at Houston, Texas, on March 31, 2010. The unit is seen here passing through Union Station at Little Rock, Arkansas on April 3, 2010, on its first revenue run. Photo by Ken Ziegenbein.
Difficult Birth of the Rock Island in Arkansas

by Gene Hull

On June 15, 1836, Arkansas became a state. By 1840, the population was 97,000; 209,000 in 1850 and 435,000 in 1860. Most of the population were immigrants. In 1849, the California gold rush led to an increase interest in railroads and leading citizens of Arkansas hoped that one of the transcontinental lines which were proposed before the Civil War might be built through the state.

Interest in the north side of the Arkansas River opposite Little Rock was slow to develop, on October 25, 1850, a team of surveyors appeared on the north bank of the river just east of the present Rock Island bridge. They were ordered by the War Department to locate a route for a rail-road from St. Louis to Fulton on the Red River in southwest Arkansas. Captain Joshua K. Barney surveyed what become the Cairo & Fulton railroad, but only completed over 20 years later. Agitation for a railroad between Little Rock and Memphis grew quickly.

The Memphis & Little Rock Plank Road or Railroad was chartered by the Arkansas General Assembly on January 11, 1853. The company's name however was to be simply styled as the Memphis & Little Rock Railroad. If the capital stock of $400,000 was not raised, the company could build a plank road instead. The initial financing was from business interests in Memphis. A Mr. Gregg, an assistant engineer on the Memphis & Charleston railroad, was hired to survey the line. In 1856, grading began at Hopefield, Arkansas, opposite Memphis near the present day location of West Memphis. At the same time grading also began in what is now North Little Rock. The first rail was laid on May 29, 1857. On September 4, 1857, the locomotive "Little Rock" made the first trip over three miles from Hopefield to the end of the track. The gauge of the rail was five and half feet.

The section between Hopefield and Madison on the St. Francis River was completed November 11, 1858. Another section was completed on January 26, 1862, when the last spike driven on the segment between De Valls Bluff and what is now North Little Rock. The section between


Letter from J.L. Meigs, chief engineer of the Memphis & Little Rock to D. Behan dated July 1, 1867. Gene Hull collection.
Letter from J.L. Meigs, chief engineer of the Memphis & Little Rock to D. Behan dated August 24, 1867. Gene Hull collection.

De Valls Bluff and Madison remained uncompleted, using riverboats to tie the two separated sections together.

During the Civil War, Federal troops captured De Valls Bluff and used the railroad to Huntsville as a supply route. United States Army Major General Frederick Steele occupied De Valls Bluff in late August 1863. A great deal of the Hopefield to Madison track was destroyed by retreating Confederate troops. The area that is now North Little Rock was named Huntsville during the Civil War.

On March 7, 1864, United States Captain P.L. Fox wrote a report to General D.C. McCallum on the condition of the railroad. The rolling stock consisted of four worn out locomotives, 18 boxcars, and 12 platform or flat cars, all in poor condition. There were no buildings, scarcely any tools and very little of the necessary supplies for the road or the shops.

The war-ravage Memphis & Little Rock was turned back to its civilian owners on August 25, 1865. The eastern division from Hopefield to Madison had been destroyed. The middle division between Madison and De Valls Bluff was unbuilt. The western division from De Valls Bluff to Huntsville was in poor condition. At Huntsville there was a warehouse 160' x 54', three mess houses, a two-story mess house, a covered platform with five offices used as offices for the railroad and as a freight platform.

Early attempts to rebuild were disappointing. Then, on March 19, 1867, an announcement in the Arkansas Gazette stated that Memphis & Little Rock president R.C. Brinkley had sold the railroad to the Memphis, El Paso, & Pacific, represented by John Charles Fremont, the famous western explorer. The Memphis, El Paso & Pacific agreed to complete the railroad by January 1, 1868. However, the deal fell through and nothing was done.

To illustrate this account five letters have been used. Even though the railroad treasury was practically empty, they still were able to negotiate contracts for repair work. When it became evident the company was unable to make payment, a contractor would transfer a contract to someone else.

The contract for the middle division was issued to Willis Gaylord of New York, with the work being done under subcontract by Nathan Bedford Forrest, the former Confederate general and Charles McCreanor. For some reason, McCreanor transferred his contract to Captain D. Behan, Jr., but Behan could not get authority from Chief Engineer J.L. Meigs.

These letters are dated between June 11, 1867 and September 24, 1867, reveal the difficulty the railroad was having “raising the means to proceed.” It is unknown if Capt. Behan ever received permission to proceed with his work. The Memphis & Little Rock was finally completed between Hopefield and Argenta (now North Little Rock) on April 11, 1871, 15 years after the first rails had been laid.

For the next 27 years the Memphis & Little Rock would suffer financial hardships. The original Memphis & Little Rock Railroad would be sold to the Memphis & Little Rock Railroad on March 17, 1873; this railway would be sold to a new Memphis & Little Rock Railroad on April 27, 1877, which was again sold on April 13, 1887, and then again on September 1, 1887, reorganizing as the Little Rock & Memphis on the same day. The two sales in 1887, were apparently due to the involvement of Jay Gould who owned the mortgages but not the stock of the company and may have contested the first sale. The Little Rock & Memphis entered receivership in 1893, and after five years of attempting to sell the railroad was finally sold to the Choctaw & Memphis on October 25, 1898. The Choctaw & Memphis which had been created by the Choctaw, Oklahoma & Gulf to buy the Little Rock & Memphis and to build from Wister, Indian Territory to Little Rock, was merged into the parent company on June 30, 1900. The Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific gained control of the Choctaw, Oklahoma & Gulf on April 9, 1902.

Part of the original line of the Memphis & Little Rock would be abandoned with the demise of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific in 1980. The segment between Brinkley and Memphis is still operated today, by the Union Pacific.
Letter from J.L. Meigs, chief engineer of the Memphis & Little Rock Railroad to D. Behan dated September 24, 1867. Gene Hull collection.