

ARKANSAS RAILROADER
THE ARKANSAS RAILROAD CLUB NEWSLETTER
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SCOTT & BEARSKIN LAKE RAILROAD: Bill Hobins, "Public Information Director" for the S&BL reports that as of this writing, the transfer switch has been set in the SSW team track and the crossing that was earlier removed is almost back in place.

Preliminary surveys have been made final surveys should begin later this week. H & W Railroad Contractors of Pine Bluff & Russellville will handle the construction.

The road has obtained an 1890 vintage coach from the railroad museum at Hilliard, Florida and it should arrive on its own wheels within the next two weeks. It is reported to be an Ex-Georgia Northern with stained glass windows in the clovestory roof.

ABANDONMENTS: Illinois Central Gulf Railroad has been granted authority effective March 23, to abandon its operations in Helena and its river crossing. Missouri Pacific has been given authority to acquire and operate 2.63 miles of line to be abandoned in Helena.

READER RAILROAD: Senate Bill 494 and companion House Bill 675 have been introduced in the Arkansas Legislature. These bills would allow the purchase of the Reader R.R. by the Arkansas Parks & Tourism Commission and leasing to the Reader Railroad Foundation. At this writing, a check with the State Capitol gives no disposition of either bill.

MEETINGS: Arkansas Railroad Club meets the second Sunday of each month. Next scheduled meeting will be 2:00 p.m. Sunday March 11, 1973 in room 305 Missouri Pacific Union Station.

Arkansas Railroad Club is a non profit corporation. For further information, write Box 5504, Little Rock, Arkansas 72205

MARCH PROGRAM: John Martin, Program Chairman, reports that he plans to show films of the M&A Railroad at the March Meeting.

*** HELENA'S PELICAN ***

Randy Tardy

Her last days and years on the Mississippi River at Helena were spent as a big barge, propelled across the Father of Waters to Mississippi by a Diesel towboat. It was a far cry from that glorious era of massive sidewheelers and twin stacks belching smoke as the powerful pelican linked Arkansas to the Illinois Central.

The Pelican, in her prime, was a massive vessel...305 feet long with a beam of more than 90 feet. She was built and launched at Dubuque, Iowa, in 1902 and went immediately into service on the old Vicksburg, Shreveport, and Pacific Railroad in transferring cars across the Mississippi River at Vicksburg.

The Pelican came to Helena in 1930 when a bridge at Vicksburg made her no longer necessary. During the ensuing four decades or so, she has been buffeted by ice storms and high winds. She has plowed through heavy driftwood during periods of high water and came through it all with nary a scratch. Her closest touch with disaster, probably, came in the famous ice storm of 1939 when heavy ice pushed her aside and the river was frozen solid from the Arkansas to the Mississippi shores. Those observing the giant boat noticed she was listing and there were expressions of concern. The ice eventually disappeared...so did the list and the Pelican was riding the waves as sound as ever.

For many years, the Illinois Central engine number 726 was assigned to the Pelican. The 2-3-0 Consolidation accompanied her consistently on each voyage across the Mississippi, hauling the cars to a point near Lula in Mississippi where other locomotives took charge. She would pick up the freight cars consigned to Helena and do switching in her yards within the shadows of the giant levees. Later years saw a Diesel switcher performing the same duties.

Loaded with cars and the locomotive, the Pelican drew from $6\frac{1}{2}$ to $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet of water. Empty she needed only about $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet. Her trestles on either side of the river rode up and down on tracks beneath the water. When the Mississippi was low, the trestles stretched for hundreds of feet to the point where the boat docked. The reverse was true in high water periods.

Sometime, I do not recall the exact month or year, the grand old rail ferry lost her massive superstructure. The paddlewheels on either side were removed as were her engines and all other compartments. Her power was by a small, but modern Illinois

Central towboat. Her basic tasks were the same. Somehow, though, the romance of this unique transportation vessel, was lost.

Now, with the abandonment order of the Interstate Commerce Commission, she too is gone, along with the Illinois Central, from Arkansas. Perhaps, though, some solace can be taken in that a member of her family continues to operate on the inland waterways...the famous "Admiral", an excursion steamer at St. Louis. She and the Pelican were sister vessels, constructed at the same time in Dubuque.

Sic transit gloria mundi...ED.