



LITTLE ROCK CHAPTER
NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Arkansas Railroader



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NON PROFIT ORGANIZATION. SEND EXCHANGE NEWSLETTERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO EDITOR AT 5007 HAWTHORNE RD. LITTLE ROCK, AR. 72207. VISITORS ALWAYS WELCOME.

From all reports received our April Swap meeting was a huge success with a very good attendance. Sorry I could not attend but an invitation from long time friends in Texarkana for a visit made it necessary for me to be absent. While visiting an antique shop on the Dallas highway found a real nice Cotton Belt "Goodie" so my trip was both enjoyable and profitable.

Our program and dates for the May meeting will be announced in another part of this newsletter.

Recent news article states that the Southern Pacific and Rock Island have agreed in principle to allow the S.P. to purchase the Rock Island's southwestern Santa Rosa, New Mexico line for \$57 million. This line extends 966 miles from Santa Rosa to St. Louis, Mo. via Kansas City. The S.P. has been conducting negotiations with R.I. since 1975 concerning this line. Rock Island trustee William M. Gibbons hopes for quick clearance by the I.C.C. of the purchase proposal. The S.P. already enters St. Louis via their subsidiary, the Cotton Belt. With an additional line into this important gateway the competition will become even greater.

Since the first of 1978 the Big Five in Arkansas (MP-SSW-KCS-SLSF-THE ROCK) have had their share of derailments and wrecks, two or three of them being on the disastrous side. The general public is inclined to blame it all on poor track conditions. This is not always true. I would say without hesitation that four of the big five in Arkansas (MP-SSW-KCS-SLSF) have some of the finest track of any railroads in our nation; not only that but their roadbeds are well maintained and well manicured. One of these days we hope that THE ROCK will get their roadbed in the state back to its former status. Some may ask, just what is the reason for all these derailments? Is it excessive speed? Who knows. As to speed; the Class I lines in the state built their reputation on "Fast Freight". If they cannot handle freight fast the biz will go to other forms of transport, principally highway trucks. Most shippers and receivers of freight could care less on the condition of the rail line they give their biz to; they only want it moved fast and if the rail lines cannot do the job then it will go to a competing form of transportation.

Now as to our May program: It will be held on the Third Sunday (Mother's Day falls on the second Sunday). 2 PM is the starting time at the MOP Office Building, 1000 West 4th Ave. in North Little Rock. The date is May 21st, so mark your calendar accordingly. Walter Walker will have a slide presentation of dining car memorabilia including China, silverware, meal checks, menus, etc. Sounds interesting doesn't it? Did you enjoy anything more in your life than eating on the diner? Please come out in force and bring those visitors.

A BIT OF THIS AND THAT

The KCS Shreveport, La.-Dallas, Texas line was once owned by the MK&T (Katy). It was purchased by the LA&T, later the KCS, from the Katy somewhere back in the twenties. Incidentally, the first railroad to enter Texas from the north was the Katy.

The first railroad to use fuel oil to power locomotives in the southwest was the SSW (Cotton Belt)

Although not the longest tunnel in the United States the one that usually comes to mind first is the MOFFATT on the D&RGW. The tunnel, constructed in the early twenties was actually opened in 1928 and the 50th Anniversary celebration was recently held with a special stop at the tunnel by the Rio Grande Zephyr.

Back during the latter part of World War II a passenger conductor running in Texas on a line that also serves Arkansas, retired. What was so unusual about that you say? It was unusual in that this conductor was 89 years old and at the time was the oldest active conductor on any railroad in the United States.

The late Karr Shannon of Arkansas Democrat fame once wrote a book entitled, "On A Fast Train Thru Arkansas". It was a real masterpiece. Among the fast trains Karr mentioned were the KCS Southern Belle, The Cotton Belt Blue Streak and the Missouri Pacific's Eagles. The book was a rebuttal to an infamous book written by Thomas W. Jackson entitled, "On A Slow Train Thru Arkansas" Jackson certainly made our state look rather shamefully when it came to its railroads. It was full of crude sketches of our railroads; among them being a man falling out of an upperberth on the KCS stating the track was so rough it threw him out. Another pictured a station train board with various captions such as "Mo. Pacific three hours late; Cotton Belt 5 hours late, Frisco 10 hours late, KCS arrive noon the next day and M&NA, May Not Arrive. Also, an item about the big whiskey distillery in St. Louis shipping their whiskey to Texas via either MOP or Cotton Belt so it would age. Thank goodness this book has been out of print for several years and hopefully it will never return.

The majority of the general public are unaware that one of the principal reasons why U.S. Mail service has gone down, down, down, was due to our Uncle Sam taking postal car mail away from the railroads. This was also, as you know, one of the main reasons why the railroads got out of the passenger business.

The I.C.C. has denied an application from Southern Railway to discontinue the SOUTHERN CRESCENT and has ordered that line to continue operating the train for a few more months. If you plan to ride it now is the time.

On Pages 3 and 4 you can read an excellent article by our own Mike Adams entitled, "FAST FREIGHT". We have two more articles from Mike in hand and will run them in future newsletters. In addition to Mike there must be some more writers in our club. Your editor might blossom out with another article in the future. If you send me anything please make it short. Space is not available for anything lengthy. If you can put down something with pen or pencil about a railroad (any railroad) please do so. We congratulate Mike for his excellent articles.

So long for this time. Hope to see all of you at the May meeting. Don't forget; it will be on the Third Sunday which is May 21st. Bring those visitors.

Bill Merck - Editor

FAST FREIGHT

by: W. M. "Mike" Adams

It is an axiom that all railroad stories, good or otherwise, include an account of a fast run. Just how fast is something else again, fast varies from line to line and from clime to clime. To an old-time locomotive engineer on the Denver and Rio Grande narrow gauge descending the four percent grades of storied Marshall Pass, ten miles per hour would border on the excessive. From what we have been led to believe, a mile a minute would be dragging your feet wheeling a string of fast freight on the mainline of the old Lake Shore and Michigan Southern. On the rustic white River Division of the Missouri Pacific somewhere in between these two extremes would be considered fast - say a blazing forty miles per hour.

When L. W. Baldwin took over the Missouri Pacific in 1923 and the so-called Texas-Louisiana lines were taken into the fold, he made a play for the eastern perishable freight market by establishing a route from the lower Rio Grande Valley through Houston, DeQuincy, Kinder, Alexandria, Monroe, McGehee, Lexa, Paragould, Dexter Junction, etc., to Dupo, Illinois and the eastern connections. The bulk of the fruit and vegetables out of the Valley moved this way. In season train after train of dripping yellow cars made this long run to satisfy the needs of our eastern seaboard for vitamin C. Not overlooking the northern segment of the country, however, Baldwin established a perishable route from Houston up through Palestine, Longview Junction, Texarkna to North Little Rock and then up the Central Division to Kansas City and Omaha. This train, called the "HO Block" ran from about October to May and was given all the attention lavished on the multiple sections of the renown SUNSHINE SPECIAL.

When the HO block was established a test run was made to see what kind of time could be made running up the Arkansas Division to Newport and turning the train over to the White River Division to handle to Carthage, Missouri and thence over the Joplin Division to Kansas City. At this time, the late 1920's, were living in Aurora, Missouri, some 40 miles southeast of Carthage and headquarters of the White River Division. The superintendent was John W. Daniels and the trainmaster was William A. Anderson. Tommy Shaw was chief clerk to Mr. Daniels while my father was general factotum for the trainmaster. Ted Potter, Sr., was first trick dispatcher, Hubert H. Green worked second, Chet Burke was third and Garland Burleson was relief dispatcher. The inimitable and testy Michael Farrell, a true son of the "ould sod" was roadmaster. The division offices were located on the second floor of the Bank of Aurora - a good city block from the passenger and freight stations to the east along Olive Street. In preparation for the test run a staff meeting was held one evening a few days before the event and several experts came in from Kansas City and St. Louis to lend their intelligence to the endeavor. So many were on hand, in fact, that they could not be accommodated in Mr. Daniel's conference room and the meeting was held in the gentlemen's waiting room of the depot.

Now Dad had to attend the meeting but he also had some work to catch up - a flock of bulletins or letters of some sort had to be stuffed in envelopes. Never one to condone idleness and caring little for child labor laws, Dad took me to the office and put me to work folding and stuffing these bulletins. He told me to stay at the office when I got through, not to bother Mr. Green, and when the meeting was over he would return and pick me up and my reward for these labors would be a nice, shiny "buffalo" nickel. A five-cent piece at that time would buy all the candy you could carry away. I am afraid I ignored these instructions and just as soon as I had the envelopes stuffed I slipped

down to the depot and went in through the ladies waiting room and got there just in time to hear Mike Farrell slam his fists down on his knees and roar like a wounded grizzly; "Dommed if ye do' Ye'll not be tearing up me track running those dommed big hogs forty molles an hour - dommed if ye will"..... The "dommed" big hogs Mike was referring to were the old 1200 class 2-8-2's which they had been using on the White River Division for the past year or so. John W. Daniels was not one to be stampeded by a irate, red-faced Irish roadmaster and he just smiled and told Mike to settle down because the maximum authorized speed for freight trains between Crane and Carthage was being raised from thirty to forty miles per hour and this test train might even exceed that;

Entering Aurora from the east, the Missouri Pacific had a long tangent on a descending grade to just east of the depot where it curved softly to the right or north - towards the paralleling mainline of the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad. It straightened out and west of the depot ran right up a city street or more like an alley, crossed about six city streets and then curved towards the Frisco again and crossing them started a two mile climb to the top of Opal Hill. The city fathers were appraised of the test train and the town marshalls and several section men were stationed at frequent intervals all along the main line through town to head off any traffic, vehicular or pedestrain. When the train was due it seemed to me like everybody in town was lined up along the tracks. Then the headlight came stabbing out of the east just before dusky dark - here she comes". Down that long tangent came the special - headed up by a pair of roaring 1200 class Mikes, I tell you those hoppers had those rolling yellow cars in the wind, the trailing exhausts were turned blood-red in rhythmic sequence as the firemen kicked open the gates of hell and scattered coals on the blazing infernos. Steam my boy - I need steam". As they came by the depot, held down whistles squalling a dire warning to the unwary, they had to have been doing forty miles an hour - maybe more - you could just make out the dirty white flags snapping alongside the stack on the lead engine and then came the long train. And I mean long---they had fifty cars" Fifty rocking, swaying, bouncing yellow cars of Texas grapefruit and they were headed for Kay See". What I mean to tell you is that day the Mo Pac made those Frisco freights look like they were standing still....

At that time the Frisco powered their red-balls with the ponderous and slow series 2 -10-2's. They grunted through Aurora in large numbers trailing long trains and would be doing every bit of twenty-five miles per hour. The backwoodsy White River Division ordinarily couldn't hold a candle to the mainline operations of the Frisco but on that day we Missouri Pacific kids held our heads high - proud our fathers worked on the old White River. No - the White River didn't get the HO blocks. Even if they could have met the time it still would have taken about two or more trains to one to transverse the Ozarks and the HO's stayed on the Central Division until they fizzled out in the 1950's but the ridge-runners of the gallant old White River showed them how it was done that one time.

THE END

P.S. Refer to Item on Page 2 regarding discontinuance of the SOUTHERN CRESCENT. Now have information that the I.C.C. has suspended Southern's notice of discontinuance until August 6, pending an investigation. More on this will be brought to your attention at our May meeting as it is in our interest as well as all other rail organizations affiliated with the N.R.H.S.