

ARKANSAS RAILROADER
ARKANSAS RAILROAD CLUB NEWSLETTER
VOL. 5 NO. 11 NOVEMBER, 1974

NOVEMBER MEETING: Regular Monthly business meeting will be held on Sunday, November 10, 1974 at 2:00 p.m. in the Missouri Pacific Office Building, 1000 West 4th Street, North Little Rock, Arkansas. On the agenda will be the appointment of a nominating committee for the forthcoming annual election.

PRIVATE VARNISH? Friday, October 25 found Rock Island car LAKE MICHIGAN spotted on the old private car track next to the CHOCTAW which is now the property of Hugh Patterson of the Arkansas Gazette. This is a platform observation with smooth window posts and side panels with a fluted letterboard. Ex Golden State equipment? Who knows something about this one?

T.V. SPECIAL. Watch your T.V. Sets for a Johnny Cash Special on November 22. This is a special on railroads and will feature such as the Nashville Union Station and engine 4501.

NRHS BULLETIN: If you have not sent in your reader survey card that was received with your last NRHS Bulletin, please do so. Reports are that response has been good but please get your card in so your opinions can be tabulated with the rest.

PINE BLUFF REPORT: Noted recently in the Cotton Belt's Pine Bluff Gravity Yard were Sleeper SP 9114 and Dynamometer Car SP 137. The sleek streamlined sleeper with orange-red letterboard over freshly painted gray sides contrasted markedly with the shorter dynamometer car. That ancient, rust spotted, Pullman green unit, with its distinctive circular section, was wired to three trailing loads of automobile engines.

The engines were being shipped in a new rack system, Telemetry cables linked the loads and the 137. Some element of that system had failed south of East St. Louis and the on-board technical crew worked frantically to reestablish their TV and other data logging capability. They were successful and the five cars went back on the APPLA, immediately ahead of the caboose. The train-Auto Parts, Los Angeles-got on the road with fifteen minutes delay charged to the test crew.

EPA STANDARDS: The Environmental Protection Agency has recently issued proposed standards to reduce noise from trains operated by interstate railroad carriers.

"Among other things, meeting the standards would require the installation four years from date of final promulgation, of mufflers on most locomotives which represent the best available technology at reasonable cost."

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BUILDING PROJECT: The building committee reports that the roof and sidewalls of the club's building are now completed. Doors have been installed and a "freight" door built on the layout end to facilitate moving of large items in or out. Electrical work should start within the next week.

ASH TRAYS: Ash trays with the club emblem are still available at \$2.50 each and with the Missouri Pacific emblem at \$2.25. These will make nice Christmas gifts.

AMTRAK BILL: President Fork has signed into law a bill that authorizes an additional \$200 million for the current year and increases the Federal loan guarantee from \$500 million to \$900 million.

The bill requires the Transportation Department to give priority to major population centers with no passenger service when assigning yearly experimental train routes.

CHRISTMAS PARTY: An additional order of business at the November meeting will be the preliminary planning the annual Christmas Party.

Arkansas Railroad Club is a non-profit organization that meets on the Second Sunday of each month at the Missouri Pacific Office Building, 1000 West 4th Street, North Little Rock, Arkansas. For further information, write P. O. Box 558, Little Rock, Arkansas 72205.

A GIRL NAMED NELLIE--AND HER APRON--PROVIDED A NAME FOR AN
OLD FLAG STOP

BY CLIFSTONE . HULL

Very few people can tell you whatever happened to Nellie's Apron. Probably even fewer can tell you where or even what it was.

Nellie's Apron was an insignificant railroad flag stop on the north bank of the White River where it twists its way through the wooded valleys among the limestone ridges and bluffs northeast of the town of Norfolk.

The Ozark Mountain country was famous for its apparently unlimited supply of excellent hardwood timber and other wood products. And in the early days, this native wealth was going to market aboard the riverboats trading on the White as far as Buffalo City, about 12 miles upstream from Norfolk.

Several steamboats were making regular runs out of Old Buffalo City, a short way up from the point where the Buffalo River joined the White, but the Civil War diminished the river traffic somewhat when several of the vessels were put into the service of the Confederacy.

After the war, traffic fluctuated, sometimes up, sometimes down. But about the turn of the century, the government at Washinton authorized a series of locks and dams for the White, sharply increasing river trade.

Moreover, in 1901, the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern acquired a charter from the state to construct the White River Railroad to extend from Batesville along the White northwest to a point on the boundary between Marion and Boone Counties.

The folks at Buffalo City were overjoyed--they would both have rail and water traffic.

This was destined to be the most expensive railroad per mile of track the old Iron Mountain ever built. Nevertheless, it was completed, and it finally went all the way to Carthage, Mo.

The Iron Mountain's executives early realized the potential of a splendid source of revenue from the forests of pine and hardwoods which blanketed the Ozark Mountains. At a point a couple of miles down the White from Buffalo City, a siding was built, and cords upon cords of crossties and cedar posts were brought in and stacked in rows. They were loaded aboard freight cars and were sent to the world markets.

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A small shed was built beside the track and anyone boarding a passenger train could wave a flag as the train approached and the engineer would stop for him.

The place was given the unusual name of Nellie's Apron.

How it got its name has become a legend, and what is truth and what isn't is impossible to determine.

During the bustling days before the railroad was built, a large boarding house was erected to accommodate the growing crews of tie cutters and timber workers. The landlady had more work than she could handle, so she hired a young girl who lived back in the hills near Norfolk. The girl's name, of course, was Nellie.

It was inevitable that she would attract the attention of some of the younger boarders, and she finally devoted most of her affections to one particular Casanova who had a reputation of wooing every girl he met. Their friendship soon developed into a serious courtship and Nellie was in fiburative Heaven.

Then one day her young man was notified that he was being transferred to a similar wood yard at Calico Rock. The lovers were separated by 25 miles of the twisting White River and the intervening ridges of the wild Ozark Mountains, but he promised he would write to his Nellie frequently until they could be together again.

After a tearful parting, he boarded a shallow-draft river-boat and disappeared downstream, borne away by the swift-flowing river.

Day after interminable day passed and no letter came. Nellie waited, hoped and made excuses, and then, one day she received word from an acquaintance that the gay deceiver was courting one of the sweet young things at Calico Rock.

The world of fantasy ended for Nellie that day. In the evening after the chores were done, she went for a walk along the banks of the river, seeking solace from the White-river rapids and the deep blue-green pools of the swift flowing river.

Nellie had failed to return by the time the long shadows of evening came marching across the mountains and her worried friends organized a search party. They hunted along the river bank anxiously seeking some sign of Nellie, and loudly calling her name.

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Finally, one of the party found the large apron which Nellie had been wearing when she left the boarding house. It was lying on the bank beneath a large elm tree. Here the waters of the White swirled and swished angrily over a rocky shoals to a deep dark pool.

The next morning the search party dragged the river well downstream, but Nellie was never found.

Whether the heartbroken girl had drowned or had simply left her large apron as a decoy while she made her way across the rolling mountains to the oblivion of a new life is a secret kept by the cold, swift-flowing waters of the White River.

However, another version of the legend has young Nellie living near the little station on the railroad.

One day she was walking along the track searching for a cow which had broken out of the pasture, and while making her way along the winding track which closely followed the tortuous channel of the White, young Nellie discovered a broken rail. While wondering how she could notify someone about the danger, she heard the long wail of a locomotive whistle. Within a few seconds she knew, the speeding train would plunge into the deep waters of the river, so running frantically along the track, Nellie tore her apron from her waist and began waving it back and forth. The engineer saw her desperate signal and brought his train to a shuddering stop only a few feet from the broken rail.

The closing chapter of the Nellie's Apron legend was written when Norfolk Dam was constructed in 1941 on the North Fork River. Great quantities of river gravel were required as aggregate for the concrete in the structure and one prime source was the heavy deposit known as the Lowe Buffalo Bars, about two miles downstream from the point at which the Buffalo River joined the White. More than one million cubic yards of gravel were taken from the river, and in the ensuing years, floods on the White also changed the appearance of the banks in the area. The station at Nellie's Apron was removed along with the rails in 1936. The only vestige of Nellie's Apron to survive the passing years is the weathered, weed-grown embankment where the rails of the siding had lain.

Nevertheless, the legend of Nellie's Apron still lives in the memory of a few old-time railroaders who rode trains along the twisting White River Division of the Old St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern.

Was young Nellie fact or fiction? Who knows? And who really cares, so long as the legend lives to give enjoyment to those who tell it to those who enjoy hearing it for the first or hundredth time.
