



LITTLE ROCK CHAPTER
N.R.H.S.

ARKANSAS RAILROADER



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'288-G². Motor Car #1.

Panama Railroad motor car #1 about 1908. A story about the building of the Panama Railroad begins in this issue. *(Gene Hull collection, courtesy National Archives)*



Trains meet at Matachin in 1869. The engine is one of the Niles machines. (Clifton E. Hull collection)

The following story written by Gene Hull details the history of Panama's transcontinental railroad. Due to its length and many photos, it will be printed in installments in the *Railroader*. I'll try to make the installments in consecutive months, but that is no guarantee. Very little has been written about this line, so this will be a unique experience.

PANAMA'S TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD

by Gene Hull

On 10 May 1869, at a semi-arid spot at the northern end of Great Salt Lake the sun shined brightly and the sage brush swayed and danced as a chill wind blew across the sloping land. At 12:47 p.m. a silver plated maul slammed down on the head of a golden spike. At Promontory, Utah the Central Pacific and Union Pacific were joined, connecting Omaha, Nebraska and San Francisco, California. A system of other railroads extended eastward to the eastern seaboard.

The nation celebrated the completion of its transcontinental railroad!

Far, far away to the south, on 27 January 1855, the witching hour of midnight was drawing near at an equally isolated spot on an "S" shaped strip of semi-equatorial land, near the northwestern edge of South America. The place was a small clearing in an almost impenetrable jungle. The darkness was so dense it seemed almost tangible.

A tropical storm was pouring a deluge of rain upon a small gang of black-skinned native laborers. An oil-

burning lantern coast a pale, flickering puddle of yellow light, which was quickly consumed by the Stygian darkness.

A white man stepped into the wavering glow, carrying a heavy spike maul. One of the laborers knelt and held a small iron spike in place with a pair of tongs. With a few strokes of the maul, the last spike was driven.

The 47-mile Panama Railroad was complete from the Caribbean Sea (Atlantic) southward to the Pacific Ocean. A true one-railroad transcontinental line was ready for service.

There were no chattering telegraph to spread the news to a waiting, expectant world. There was no famous photographer to record the event on film. There was no famous poet to write glowing words of praise. The event was buried in a odious swamp, hidden from the world.

Just 14 years, three months and 11 days later, the world would rejoice with a raucous, drunken crowd at Promontory Summit, Utah.

Compared with our nation's railroads, very little has been written about the short, but significant line of rails across the isthmus of Panama.

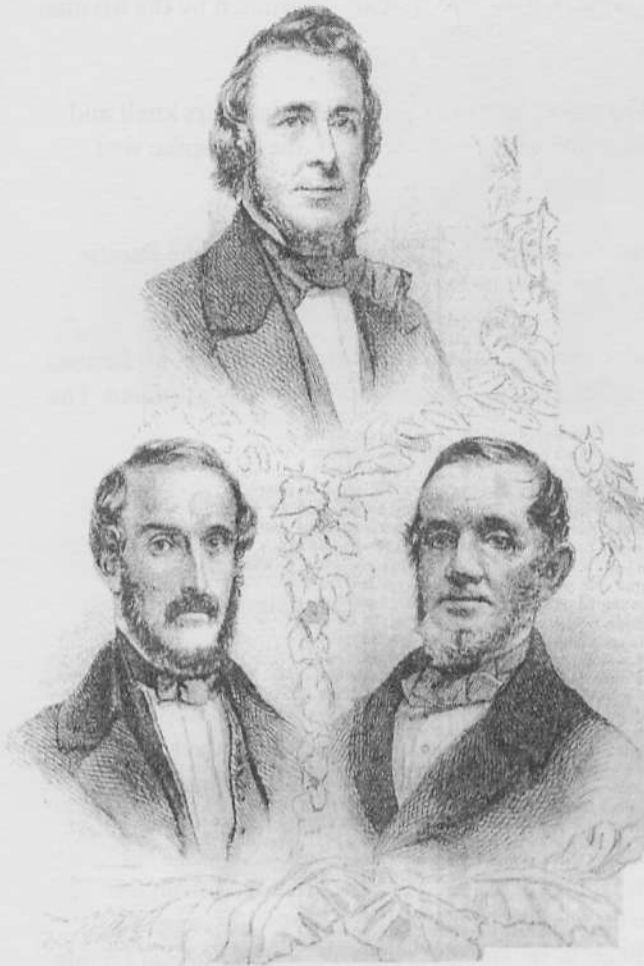
Early in the history of the western hemisphere, trade routes became matters of importance. Also, since the creation of man, wars of conquest have raged (it is the nature of the beast). The Spanish seemed very adept at depredation and they located their way across South America. The many tons of precious metals and jewels must be transported across the narrow, intervening strip of land called Panama.

Beginning at the city of Panama (established in 1519), on the south shore, a trail was hacked from the jungle northward. It ran about 10 miles to the crest of the east-west Cordillera, the principal range of mountains along the isthmus. This crest was later determined to be an extension of our Continental Divide between Alaska and the southern tip of South America (Cape Horn).

Northward from the crest the trail ran about 30 miles to the ancient town of Nombre de Dios (Name of God), then turned east 10 miles to Porto Bello (Beautiful Port). The trail was paved with cobblestones, a major project at that time.

As world commerce developed, there was a foreign interest in that narrow strip of jungle. A crossing here would eliminate sailing about 7,000 miles around the Cape Horn. To protect its own industrial efforts, the U.S. Congress gave its approval of a message from President James Monroe in December 1823. The U.S. would regard as an unfriendly act any move by a European nation to interfere in the affairs of, or increase its possessions in, the Americas of the western hemisphere. The Monroe Doctrine said - NOT IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD!

In 1832, the U.S. Congress sent Col. Charles Biddle to Panama to negotiate a concession for construction of a railway. He also inspected the country for the best route. Biddle died shortly afterward, but interest in the project continued.



Wm. H. Aspinwall, John L. Stephens, Henry Chauncey. (Clifton E. Hull collection)

In 1848 a charter was granted to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company to deliver mail between the U. S. and Panama. The incorporators were William H. Aspinwall; his uncle, Gardiner Green Howland; Henry Chauncey, from Maine; and Edwin Bartlett.

Three wooden paddle-wheel steamships were built - CALIFORNIA, OREGON and PANAMA. They would deliver mail between New York, Panama and San Francisco. The discovery of gold in California in January 1848 took Aspinwall's attention away from mail delivery.

When the mail boat arrived at Panama City, there was a crowd of 1,500 men on the beach crammed into a disease-ridden, unsanitary mass of tents and shacks. Four hundred forced their way aboard the California-bound steamer. **THE GOLD RUSH WAS ON!**

Gold seekers from the U.S. chose the Panama route instead of the difficult, plodding march across the plains, desert and mountains of the uncivilized, Indian infested overland route. They arrived by boats at the port town of Chagres on the north coast of Panama and scrambled aboard filthy little river boats headed upstream on the Chagres River. When they reached the head of navigation everyone changed to uncomfortable flimsy bungs (canoes) paddled by natives. When the river ended a change was made to long-eared mules. Fares were

exorbitant and space for baggage was very limited. On the jungle trails southbound they endured sudden heavy rains and swarms of malaria-infected mosquitoes.

For Aspinwall, the future had arrived, tomorrow was today. He immediately sent an associate, John L. Stevens, to Bogota, the capital city of Columbia, which controlled Panama. From the government he secured a concession for the PANAMA RAILROAD! The company would have the right to excavate a canal or build a highway or railroad across Panama. Also, they could operate steam-powered vessels on the Chagres River. The concession was exclusive for 49 years. The company was granted 250,000 acres of land, and other government land could be used freely. The terminals, one on the north (Atlantic) shore and the other on the south (Pacific) shore would be free of all charges.

John Stevens and John L. Baldwin, a skillful and experienced civil engineer, explored the general route of the proposed railroad. They found a low gap in the cordillera not more than 300 feet above sea level where rails could cross without excessive grades. This would allow the road to be built across the isthmus of Panama from Porto Bello to Panama City within the specified time of eight years.

The Panama Railroad was incorporated in New York on 7 April 1849.

In January 1849 the company hired Col. George W. Hughes, a member of the U.S. Army Topographical Corp (predecessor of the present Corps of Engineers), to make a location survey. He assembled a crew of

38 men and began work at Navy Bay, a deep indentation on the north shore where cargo ships could unload.

The first 13 miles of the survey lay in a dense, swampy jungle, which "reeked of malaria" (at that time it was believed the fever of malaria was caused by breathing the humid vapors of the jungle). They found an enormous population of every species of biting, stinging insect and plenty of alligators and venomous snakes.

In the relatively short distance (less than 50 miles) they found an area so beautiful the natives called it "Paraiso," or Paradise, as well as rugged country with steep hillsides and many turbulent streams flowing through deep, dark chasms. The low notch in the continental divide could be lowered by excavation to reduce the maximum grade of the railroad. Breaking from the forest, the crew descended abruptly to the shores of the Pacific at Panama City.



Surveying original alinement of the Panama Railroad in the jungle swamp. (Clifton E. Hull collection)

This was not an ideal land in which to build a railroad. From June through December there are deluges of rain in cloudbursts which often last as long as three days. Rivers rising near the crest of the cordillera head for the sea like tidal waves. On the north slope, the principal river, the Chagres (CHAG-RESS), rushed through deep, narrow canyons and often would rise 50 feet in two hours. The isthmus was covered with a dense jungle, but there was not durable timber for railroad construction. Native population was unaccustomed to physical labor and was undependable. Men, materials and provisions had to be imported thousands of miles.

Headquarters of the railroad was at 78 Broadway in New York City and the Executive Committee met the first time on 9 July 1849 to ask for bids. The construction contract was awarded 12 October to a company headed by George M. Totten and John G. Trautwine.

A special steamboat was designed to move men and materials up the Chagres River about 30 miles to the village of Gorgona, where construction would begin. The north terminal was on Manzanilla Island in Naval Bay. A two-mile causeway was built through a terrible swamp to reach the mainland.

Early in 1850, Trautwine and Chief Engineer Assistant James Baldwin went to the village of Chagres to secure a half-dozen bongo riverboats and a crew of 12 natives with axes and machetes. Down at Manzanilla Island they found it was a virgin swamp with mangrove trees, massive vines and shrubs with flesh-cutting thorns - an almost impenetrable wall.

Thus, a dozen natives with machetes and axes, slashing and splashing in a swamp, began work on Central America's first transcontinental railroad.

When the tide came in, men were standing in water five feet deep! A derelict wooden ship was brought in for a place to sleep. Soon, more than half the crew were suffering chills and fever of malaria. Forty more workers and another boat were acquired. Baldwin always carried his lunch under his hat and would eat while standing in swamp water and mud, often waist deep.

Trautwine sent an order to New Orleans to have a small pine board shack built and shipped to him. Trees were cut from an area on the island, four logs were driven into the mud, and the shack was mounted on top of the logs. This was the first permanent structure in what became the town of Aspinwall (later Colon).



The first shack in the swampy jungle on Manzanilla Island for Assistant Chief Engineer James Baldwin. (Clifton E. Hull collection)

the men reached the Chagres River and the native village of Gatun (ga-TOON) meaning "seller of smuggled meat." While working in the swamp the men were literally "up to their - - - in alligators."

Late in 1850, pile driving equipment arrived. A rock quarry was started near the river and many tons of crushed rock were dumped in the swamps until a firm foundation for rails was achieved.

By April 1851 construction had reached Gatun and alinement stakes were driven another 16 miles to the village of Barbaocoas (Spanish for "barbecue"). For a long time it was thought that the road was built with a five-foot gauge. However, the few remaining records of the Portland Locomotive Works, founded at Portland, Maine, in 1848, show 20 engines built for the Panama Railroad. The first 10, delivered between 1852 and 1856 were built at 5'-6" gauge. The first engine of 5'-0" gauge was delivered in 1865.

The first rails were the inverted "U" type. They had one-inch flanges which rested on the crossties and were anchored with three-inch spikes. These rails were first used in 1835 and were called "bridge rails." They weighed 40 pounds per yard. The type used on the Panama road were more rounded on the surface where the wheels ran and were first made in 1844. These were called "Evans rails."

There were some brief, steep grades on the railroad and it was believed the ordinary adhesion locomotives would be inadequate. At a later date this assumption was found to be wrong. In the meantime the officials became interested in a grade-climbing engine invented by George Sellers in Cincinnati.

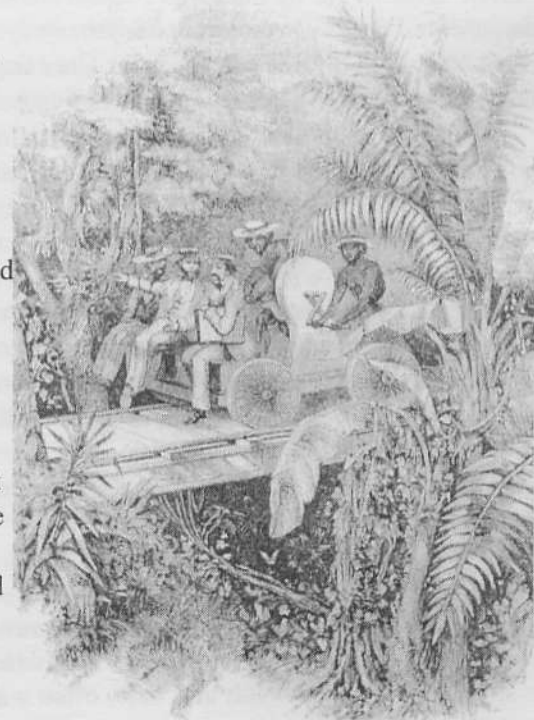
The Panama Railroad hired Sellers as mechanical engineer in August 1850. He still had his shops in Cincinnati and worked up a contract with the railroad by which he would build three engines for \$9,750.

Other shacks soon were erected for the workers.

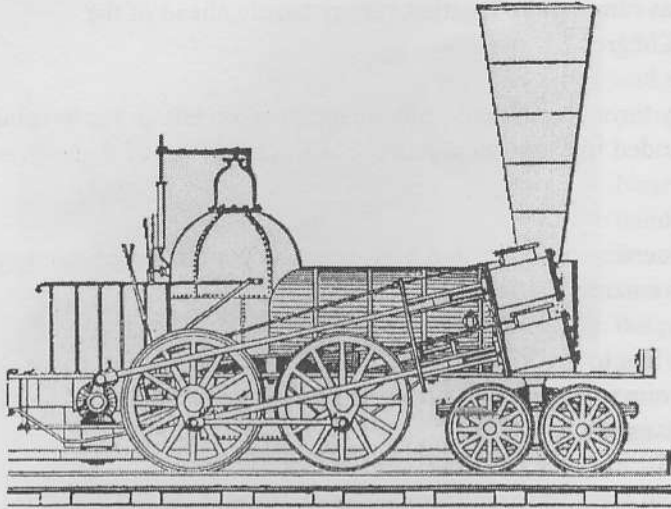
The surveyed alinement reached a ridge of high ground called Monkey Island. A large population of the primates lived there - "Well, there goes the neighborhood!" A cemetery was established by the railroad for the many victims of malaria.

Manzanilla Island was cleared and built up with earth embankment above high tide. Businessmen came, rented space and built stores, gambling halls, saloons - typical town. Docks were built to accommodate ships bringing supplies, materials and machinery.

In August 1850 construction was begun on the mainland around Monkey Hill, soon to be called Mount Hope. Struggling across four miles of swamp,



Panama Railroad's chain-driven, hand-powered hand car. (Clifton E. Hull collection)



An example of the grade-climbing locomotive invented by George Escal Sellers. (Collection of Gene Hull)

Meanwhile, there were some changes on the railroad. Trautwine resigned in November 1850 and the road experienced a financial slump. It was decided to do more excavation and lower the steep grades. The grade climbing feature would not be necessary. The three engines were accepted as simple adhesion machines and the first one was out of New Orleans aboard an ocean vessel on 14 March 1852. A few days later the other two were on their way to Panama. Thus, the first engines arrived.

By 1 October 1851 eight miles of track had been completed at a cost of more than \$1,000,000. Expectations of quick profits disappeared. Stock value began to fall sharply.

The gold rush to California had begun two years earlier, but travelers still were frantically making their way west. They could prove to be the salvation of the embryo railroad. The only way for them to cross the isthmus was by crude boats up to the headwaters of the Chagres River, then across the crest of the cordillera and down the south slope to Panama City by donkey or on foot over the miserable trail through the dense jungle.

In December 1851 two boats arrived at the mouth of the river with 1,000 passengers. Soon they were amazed when they heard a LOCOMOTIVE WHISTLE! On the mainland there was a train of little gondola cars and a tiny locomotive. The Panama Railroad was taking laborers to work laying track. The travelers hurried to the railroad office. George Totten told them he had only seven miles of track laid, but the people wanted to ride anyway.

Taking 1,000 crazy men for a seven-mile train ride would certainly delay the construction work and bring a reprimand from officials in New York. To discourage the crowd he quoted a charge of 50 cents a mile and three dollars for each 100 pounds of baggage. The excessive charge was eagerly accepted. Totten collected nearly \$7,000!

The Panama Railroad was in the passenger business. Its worthless stock on Wall Street began to rise rapidly. The railroad sold \$4,000,000 worth and construction proceeded in high gear.

At the Atlantic terminal a ship dock and wharf were constructed. The wharf was 1,000 feet long and 40 feet wide with all piling covered with cooper as protection against wood-eating Tereido worms. On shore a stone warehouse was built 80 feet wide and 300 feet long.

The population of Manzanilla Island was growing steadily. A small brick depot was erected and President John Stevens said the railroad should commemorate the name of one of the road's originators. When the cornerstone was laid on 29 February 1852, the place was named ASPINWALL.

The government of Colombia rejected the name. It should bear the name of Christopher Columbus, who originally discovered it. It should be known as COLON (ko-lone). There was great resistance and the controversy continued for 38 years. Finally, the Columbian postal department refused to deliver mail addressed to Aspinwall. Since 1890 the town has been Colon.

James Baldwin, field engineer for the railroad, was running the location survey barely ahead of the construction crew, following the east side of the Chagres River.

One night the crew, weary from hacking their way through the dense jungle, made camp late in the evening. During the night sleep was disturbed by what sounded like the fierce roaring of lions and tigers. There was none of these animals in this region.

Next morning two hills were seen south of the alinement and they had a tremendous population of monkeys, which had created the terrible noise. The hills were named Lion Hill and Tiger Hill.

Nearby was a grove of huge trees, measuring 100 feet to the lowest limb. Natives used the trees to carve out their large bongo canoes. One specially large one was named in honor of John Stevens. It was 18 feet in diameter and branches at the crown were 150 feet across.

The railroad penetrated the jungle, establishing stations as it went. Eighteen miles from Aspinwall was Bujio Soldado (Soldiers's Home). Nearby was a sandstone quarry, furnishing material for construction.

The survey followed the Chagres River's twisting, serpentine path through the jungle, reaching the little village - Bueno Vista (beautiful little view). There were about 40 bamboo huts with roofs of palm tree branches.

On 1 May 1852, rails reached Frijoles (Free-ho-lees), translated as "beans," 18 miles from Aspinwall. A station was built here. The area was blessed with a wide variety of vividly colored birds.



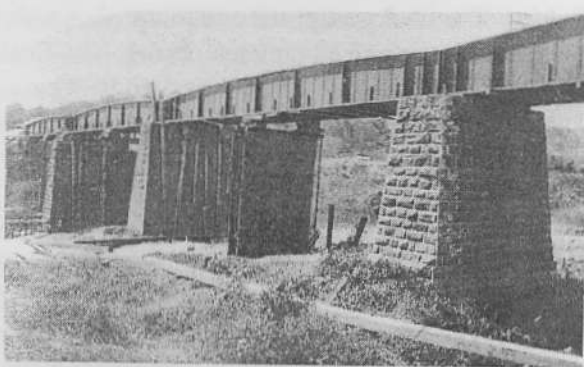
On 30 May 1852, the village of Tabernilla (ta-ver-neel-yah), translated as "Little Tavern," was reached. Rails were within a mile of Barbacoas when construction ceased. The rainy season started early in June and a cholera epidemic began spreading quickly. Death was almost certain for the victims. Contaminated food and drinking water were the principal causes. Late in August 1852, the railroad's work force was greatly reduced and those who remained were very weak. Pres. John Stevens died 10 August from malaria. Wm. C. Young succeeded him. George Totten had to battle the jungle alone.

On 6 July 1852 rails reached Barbacoas, where the Chagres River had to be crossed. It was 300 feet wide in a deep, rock-bound channel. The remaining 21 miles to Panama City would be built by a contractor, Minor C. Story. He had to build a bridge across the Chagres, lay 21 miles of rails within a year and do it for \$3,500,000.

Story, from Poughkeepsie, New York, attacked the job with a boatload of Irishmen. A wooden bridge began to take shape. When Totten saw the framework, he quickly sent a message of protest to directors in New York, but to no avail.

The rainy season had begun. Clouds hug low over the crest of the Cordillera, thunder rumbled across the jungle and the deluges of rain fell. Water in the gorge of the Chagres rose quickly and its roar filled the air. Timbers began creaking in protest and workers became nervous. Soon they rushed to the ends of the bridge, just as the "beanpole and cornstalk" construction was swept away. Story and his contract disappeared.

David Hoadley was the new president and George Totten again was in charge of the engineering. He put 7,000 men to work erecting an iron bridge. There were six spans of 100 feet each on stone piers.



Panama RR steel bridge at Barbacoas over Chagres River. (Clifton E. Hull collection)

The railroad had its first serious accident 1 October 1853. A little 4-4-0 locomotive with four baggage cars and two loaded passenger cars left Aspinwall at 3:30 p.m. on the way to Bujio Soldado..

Near Tabernilla the track lay in a deep cut on a left-hand curve. Just beyond was the bridge across Mindi River. As the train came out of the cut the engineer saw a huge bull on the bridge, belligerently challenging the puny engine. With whistle screaming, the engine met the bull. Both lost. Mr. Bull was mangled and the train fell into the ravine. The boiler ruptured and two passengers died.

The iron bridge across Chagres River was completed and at 11:00 a.m. 26 November 1853 the first train (a locomotive and nine cars of passengers and freight) rolled across.

In January 1854, the railroad had a locomotive shipped around cape Horn to Panama City. Work began in earnest on the Pacific slope of the cordillera.

At the northern foothills the town of Gorgona was established. This was head of navigation on the Chagres. This hilly country made construction very difficult. Excavation revealed the presence of extremely hard igneous rock, produced by terrific heat deep in the earth and brought to the surface by volcanic action.

About a mile beyond Gorgona the rails reached the village of Matachin (Mata-CHEEN). A new station was built and an extra track was laid so that opposing trains could pass. Here the rails began climbing to the summit of the Continental Divide on a one percent grade. Three miles up grade was the village of Emperado (soon Americanized as Empire).

Excavation began at the summit of the Divide. The cut was 40 feet long. Rails here were 40 miles from Manzanilla, and it was only 12 miles to Panama City.

Several months were spent making the deep cut. Travelers arriving at the end of track were very surprised. Instead of a jungle wilderness, they found the new village of Culebra (Koo-LAY-bra, meaning serpent), with about 2,000 inhabitants.

Beginning the descent to the Pacific Ocean, there were tall volcanic cones among a mass of irregular ridges of the cordillera. Springs furnished the headwaters of a small stream (mis-named RIO GRANDE) with several little tributaries. Rails followed the main stream, making high fills and deep cuts necessary to cross the little streams and ridges.

Three miles below the summit, the rails entered a high, beautiful valley known as Paraiso, or Paradise. It was a place of tropical beauty.

Rails were laid just to the right of Cerro de Buccaneros (Hill of Buccaneers). It was on the slopes of this hill that Henry Morgan, the Welsh pirate, camped in 1671 to launch his attack against Old Panama, or Panama La Vieja (Cup of Gold). The old city still lay in ruins.

The grading was completed in November 1854. Early in the morning of 27 January 1855 the two construction gangs could see each other. Intermittent torrents of rain fell during the day. When the sun broke through the heavy overcast, humid heat lay like a blanket over the land. Darkness came.

Large lanterns with rancid whale oil in their fonts were lighted. The work gangs met and mingled. An air of anticipation and excitement surrounded the area. The last rail was set in place on pine crossties. The final spike was held in position. George Totten stood in the pouring rain with a nine-pound maul ready. The dense shadows of night swayed in combat with the feeble glow of the lanterns. Totten swung the maul and the spike sank into the tie with a thud.

IT WAS FINISHED!

On Sunday, 28 January 1855 a train ran from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean for the first time!

The citizens of Panama made plans for a day of celebration. On 5 February a steamship sailed from New York with 16 special guests aboard (names unknown). On 15 February the ship sailed into the harbor at Aspinwall with flags of Panama and the U.S. waving.

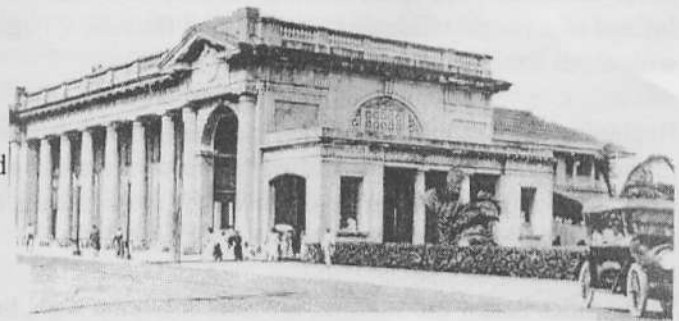
At 9:00 a.m. 16 February 1855, a train of nine passenger cars and a baggage car left Aspinwall with the 16 guests and 457 regular passengers. The engine and baggage car were decorated with flags and banners.

Floral arches spanned the track at most stations. After a busy and exiting day, George Totten presented entertainment at the Aspinwall House. Champagne was served with toasts bring drunk to the President of the United States, the governor of Panama, the President of the Panama Railroad, then one more just for the h--l of it. A grand picnic was held on the bank of the Chagres River at Bojio Soldado. On Tuesday, 19 February 1855 the guests sailed for New York.

The Panama Railroad was in business.

It was a single-track road 47 miles long with a maximum grade of slightly more than one percent for four miles approaching the crest of the Divide. Rails were laid on pine crossties, which disintegrated quickly in the damp tropical heat. As a remedy, ties of *lignum vitae* were imported from Cartagena, New Granada. The wood was so dense and hard holes had to be drilled before spikes could be driven. Side tracks were laid at Matachin, Gatun, Barbaocoas and at the summit of the Divide. There were four yard tracks at Aspinwall and three at Panama City. There were a roundhouse, machine shop, car repair shop and blacksmith shop at Aspinwall. Stations were established about every four miles with freight houses, depots and homes for employees.

A telegraph system was necessary for efficient operation. Mahogany wood poles soon were destroyed by jungle rot. George Totten made a mold with several joints totaling 20 feet high and a diameter of eight inches at the top and fifteen inches at the bottom. Several of these molds were filled with concrete to produce a supply of permanent poles to support telegraph wires. On 12 August 1855, station superintendent J. W. Johnson at Panama City sent the first message.



*Railroad station at Panama City; from color postcard.
(Courtesy - Tom McConkey)*

There were six heavy locomotives and four lighter ones. Rolling stock included 22 passenger cars with a capacity of 60 passengers each, as well as 51 boxcars and 72 flat cars. Wood was stacked along the road at intervals for \$3.00 a cord as fuel for locomotives.

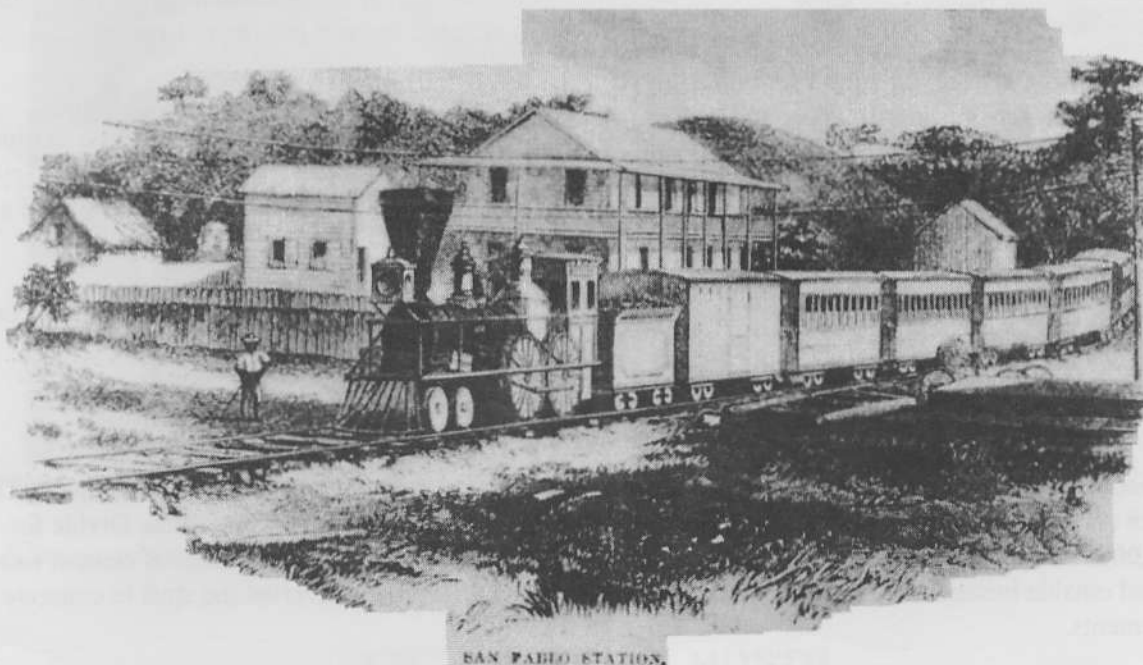
By the time the railroad was in operation it had cost \$6,564,552.95. First class passenger fare was \$25.00, children under 12 years old \$6.25; second class fare \$10.00; personal baggage 10 cents a pound; mail 22 cents a pound; coal freight rate was \$5.00 a ton; first class freight in boxes or bales was 50 cents a cubic foot. All freight charges were paid in gold.

The Panama Railroad was a very lucrative investment. In a letter to Jonathan Meredith, Wm. Aspinwall said, "My own private opinion is that no speculative investment I have ever known offers such returns as the railroad stock for a permanency - the monopoly is complete on the part of the New Granada Government and our own government has sanctioned and guaranteed it by the treaty of neutrality. I have increased my original investment considerably and so has Mr. Chauncey and we each hold over \$100,000 for which good money has been paid - and we both take a good lot of bonds in addition- if we can do so fairly."

As happened so often for other railroads, disastrous fires had an enormous impact on the history of the Panama Railroad. Records were repeatedly destroyed. On 26 December 1862, the railroad office building suffered \$250,000 in damages.

The Panama Railroad played a part in the Civil War. The Confederate Army had many sympathizers in the western states. The southerners had eager designs upon the gold fields of Colorado, Arizona, Nevada and California. The southerners captured several Union forts in the west.

The safest route westward for Union troops was via steamships. This was also true for recruits from California. Gold from California was sent eastward by steamships. The specie landed at Panama City and was loaded aboard iron-clad cars of the railroad and transported to Aspinwall. Confederate ships captured several gold-laden vessels in the Atlantic. Between 1855 and 1867 there was more than \$700,000,000 in gold shipped on the railroad without the loss of a single dollar.



Rebuilt Niles engine at San Pablo. First car an "iron clad" for hauling gold specie - later used as storehouses. (Courtesy Sylvan Wood estate - Gene Hull collection)

A new contract was negotiated between the railroad and the government of Colombia 30 January 1875. (New Granada was a predecessor of Colombia-Panama. On 4 November 1903, Panama revolted and became free of Colombia..)

The railroad would pay Colombia \$1,000,000 in gold plus \$250,000 a year during the life of the contract (99 years). The railroad would extend its rails into the Bay of Panama so that deep water ships could reach its wharves. Mail, officials and troops of Colombia were moved free of charge.

The completion of the Central Pacific-Union Pacific westward venture at Promontory, Utah on 10 May 1869 was the turning point in the fortunes of the Panama Railroad. The flow of mail, gold bullion and passengers was redirected to cross the continental U.S. quicker and cheaper.

By 1877 the Panama Railroad had revenues of \$1,284,000 and operating expenses of \$998,000, leaving a profit of \$286,000. Essentially the road was bankrupt. On Wall Street the stock plummeted from \$369 in 1874 to \$52 in 1877.

There were some changes of officials and improvements began to appear. The road owned 18 locomotives in January 1876, all from Portland. Years of neglect had taken their toll. One engine exploded, killing the engineer. Car roofs leaked. Most stations were closed, rails and ties needed replacing.



Locomotive "Colon" built by Portland Locomotive Works, August 21, 1865. Note left side controls. (Clifton E. Hull collection)

With changes in officials, improvements were seen. The entire road received new rails, as did yards at Colon and Panama City. As fortunes improved, a new nemesis appeared.

A French company wanted to dig a canal across the isthmus. This would destroy the railroad. The arrogant attitude of the rail officials caused ill will of the Panamanians. This feeling soon included all Yankees, not just the railroaders.

At Paris in 1876 the "Societe Internationale du Canal Interoceanique" was formed. One of the group was Ferdinand de Lesseps. He was responsible for the Suez Canal in Egypt. He was vigorous and active at 74 years of age. They put a

price tag of \$214,000,000 on a canal even before visiting the site!

To persuade the American government to ignore the Monroe Doctrine exclusions of foreigners, de Lesseps brought \$2,000,000 to Washington.

It Worked! (There was no special prosecutor.)

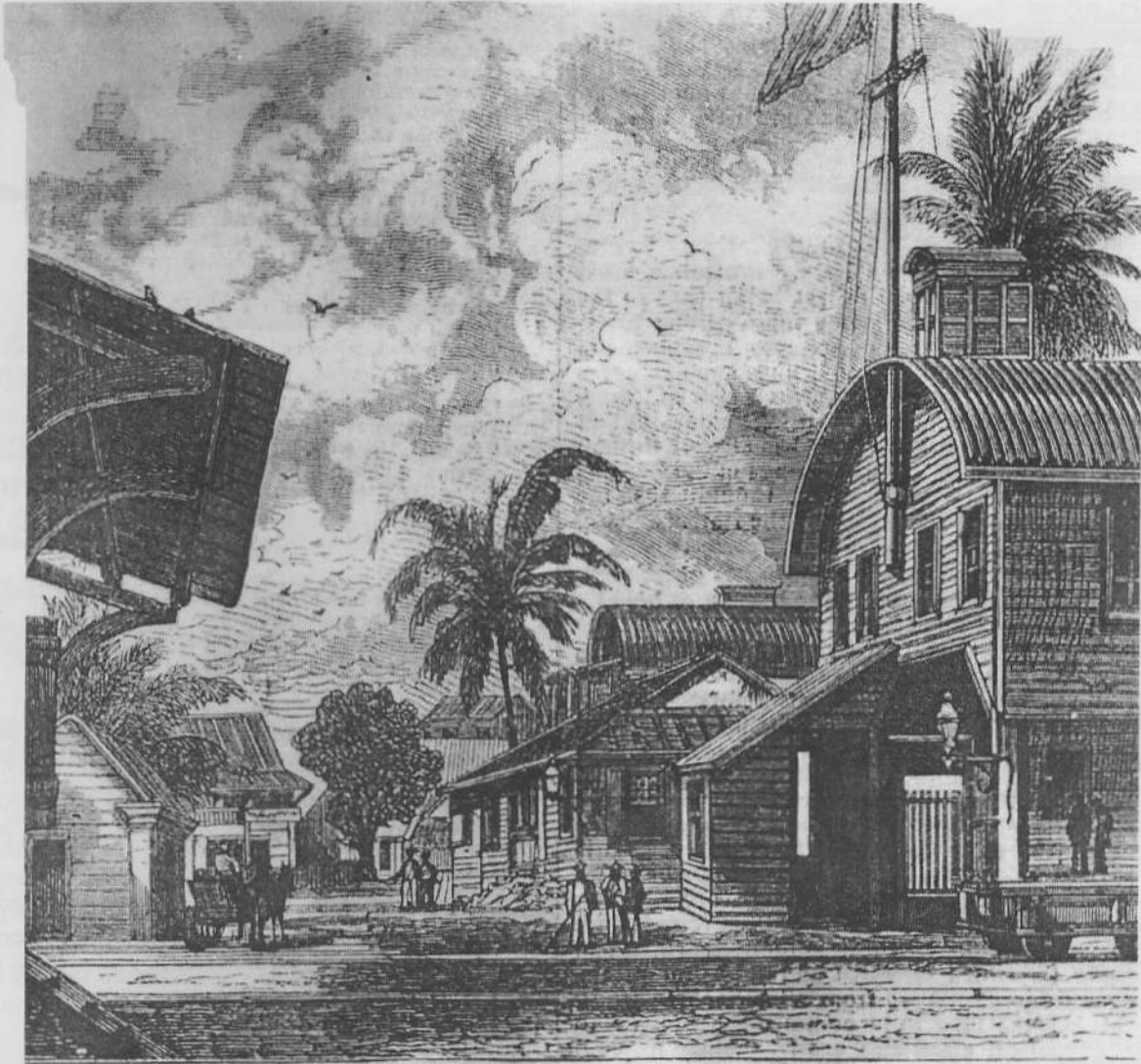
The people of France quickly bought \$6 million worth of stock. Graft and corruption were rampant. The French engineer arrived and the first thing he did was build a mansion near the crest of the Divide for \$150,000. There were 1,000 SNOW SHOVELS shipped to this tropical area. Shiploads of cement were stacked outside because no warehouses had been built. Torrential rains converted the stuff to concrete monuments.

When huge piles of supplies accumulated at the wharves, de Lesseps asked the Panama Railroad to haul the freight across the isthmus, but was amazed at the exorbitant freight rates.

It would be cheaper to buy the railroad!

Yankee entrepreneurs sold \$70 stock to the Frenchmen for \$250. Some Yankees demanded positions on the French board of directors. The Frenchmen paid \$17 million for stock and an extra \$1,102,000 to assure the "good will" of the new directors. The Panama Railroad cost the Frenchmen \$25 million - one-third of the amount of stock subscribed by Frenchmen!

A company chartered in New York, almost totally owned by Frenchmen and managed and directed by a minority of Americans was going to dig a canal across Panama AT SEA LEVEL with a cut through the cordillera more than 300 feet deep. A catastrophe waiting to happen.



PANAMA STATION, PACIFIC TERMINUS: 1877

(Courtesy National Archives, from Gene Hull collection)

CONTINUED NEXT MONTH

1999 OFFICERS/POSITIONS OF THE ARKANSAS RAILROAD CLUB

PRESIDENT - Leonard L. Thalmueller, 21 Hanover Dr, Little Rock AR 72209-2159 (501-562-8231)
VICE-PRESIDENT - John Hodkin, Jr., 506 Gordon St, N Little Rock AR 72117 (501-945-2128)
TREASURER - Walter B. Walker, 8423 Linda Ln, Little Rock AR 72227-5983 (501-225-0826)
SECRETARY - Carole Sue Schafer, 103 Thayer St, Little Rock AR 72205-5951 (501-371-0034)
EDITOR - Ken Ziegenbein, 1023 Claycut Cir, N Little Rock AR 72116-3728 (501-758-1340)
NRHS DIRECTOR - Jim Bennett, 1002 South Leslie St, Stuttgart AR 72160 (870)-673-6753)
PHOTOGRAPHER - John C. Jones, 117 Cottonwood, Sherwood AR 72120-4011 (501-835-3729)
TRIP ADVERTISING - David P. Hoge, 3721 Idlewild, N Little Rock AR 72116 (501-771-1025)
BOARD '99 - Stanley Wozencraft, 108 N Palm, Little Rock AR 72205 (501-664-3301)
BOARD '00 - Gene Hull, 3507 E Washington #31, North Little Rock AR 72114-6455 (501-945-7386)
BOARD '01 - Tom Shook, 1716 Alberta Dr. Little Rock AR 72227-3902 (501-225-8955)
BOARD '02 - Bill Bailey, 8318 Reymere Dr, Little Rock AR 72227-3944 (501-224-6828)
BOARD '03 - Robin Thomas, 10980 Rivercrest Dr #26, Little Rock AR 72212-1412

NEXT MEETING/PROGRAM

The next meeting of the Arkansas Railroad Club will be on SUNDAY, APRIL 11, 2 p.m. at our usual meeting place, Mercantile Bank on Main Street in North Little Rock (just across the street from the Riverfront Hilton). The program will be 16mm movies of various films we've obtained recently, all rail-related. Be sure to come and bring a friend. Refreshments will be served.

"SHORTLINES" BOOK FOR SALE - Gene Hull's reprinted book, *Shortline Railroads of Arkansas* is for sale for \$24.95 plus \$5 shipping (save the shipping costs by picking up your book in person at the meeting). It is over 400 pages long, hardbound, 6" x 9" format. Send orders to: White River Productions, Inc., 24632 Anchor Ave, Bucklin MO 64631. For Visa/Master Card orders, call: 1-877-787-2467.

OTHER BOOKS FOR SALE: The Arkansas Railroad Club's hardbound, 120-page book called *Railroad Stations and Trains through Arkansas and the Southwest*, also by Gene Hull with help from Tom Shook, among other club members. You can order from White River Productions, 24632 Anchor Ave, Bucklin MO 64631. Cost is \$29.95 plus \$4.50 postage and handling (total of \$34.45 if you're having it mailed). MasterCard or Visa accepted. You can call White River Productions at 816-695-4433.

AND Club Member James R. Fair's new book *The Louisiana & Arkansas Railway*. This 176-page clothbound book has 80 black and white illustrations and covers the Louisiana & Arkansas Railway from its beginning to the modern era. YOU CAN NOW ORDER DIRECTLY FROM MR. FAIR. He'll even autograph it for you. Cost directly from him is only \$34. His address is: James R. Fair, 2804 Northwood Rd, Austin, TX 78703-1630. Call 512-451-6194 or 512-471-3689.

DEADLINE FOR THE MAY NEWSLETTER will be April 15. Also, remember that because of Mother's Day in May, our May meeting will be held May 16 instead of the 9th.

APRIL BIRTHDAYS - RUBY HOLT (4, no date); DON J. OTTENS (4/01), WEYMAN G. SIMPKINS (4/10 - passed away March 4, 1999 in Napa, California); CLIFF FERRELL (4/20); MICHAEL D. THOMSON (4/29); KEN ZIEGENBEIN (4/30).

NEW FAX NUMBER - The Arkansas Railroad Club now has a new 24-hour fax number: 501-758-4301. This would be a great way of sending news items.

2000 CALENDAR PHOTOS WANTED - We are now accepting Arkansas railroad-related photographs for our year 2000 calendar. They can be color or black and white, 3 1/2" x 5" or larger. Only photos accepted - if you have slides, please have a print made and then send us the print. Photos can be of any era, past or present. Please send to our address: Arkansas Railroad Club, PO Box 9151, North Little Rock AR 72119. Please have the pictures in by April 15. We want to have the calendar ready for our June 19th Show & Sale. Thanks.

MEMBER NEWS - Naomi Hull reported that JIM BENNETT is now at home after spending some time in therapy after his June 1998 accident. His address is: Jim Bennett, 1002 South Leslie St, Stuttgart AR 72160-5352, 870-673-6753, email: jimdon1@juno.com

WEYMAN GUS SIMPKINS

Born April 10, 1926

Died March 4, 1999

Weyman G. Simpkins, a very long-time Arkansas Railroad Club member of Napa, California, died March 4. He was born April 10, 1926 in Shirley, Arkansas and was reared and educated in Harrison, Arkansas. He served in the Air Corps during WWII and worked for the Southern Pacific out of Carlin, Nevada after discharge. He worked for SP 39 years. He moved to Napa, California in 1987, where he was conductor on the famous Wine Train until 1997. He enjoyed woodworking, building birdhouses, travel, riding trains. He was a member of Napa First Baptist Church. He is survived by two brothers, "Boomer" Simpkins of Carlin, Nevada (also a club member) and Luke Simpkins of Sparks, Nevada.

WANTED : FOR SALE OR TRADE

The following is for those who want to find certain railroad-related items, information, or want to sell or trade such items with other railfans. We reserve the right to refuse listings if deemed inappropriate. The Arkansas Railroad Club is not responsible for misleading ads.

WANTED - Photos, information on the Cotton Belt Hospital in Texarkana. Contact Wanza Good, 1501 Quintana Rd, Morro Bay CA 93442.

WANTED - John Jones wants photos of any Jacksonville, Arkansas depot. He thinks they've found a former depot being used as a residence and need to confirm if it really is the old MoPac depot. If you have one, call him at 501-835-3729.

FOR LEASE - Alco locomotives of the Arkansas & Missouri Railroad. If you'd like

to rent one or more, contact the Arkansas & Missouri Railroad, 306 East Emma Ave, Springdale AR 72764, 501-751-8600 or 800-687-8600, email: arkmo@ipa.net.

WANTED - The Steam Department of the Illinois Railway Museum pressure tested the boiler on GNA #26 in early December to see if the locomotive can be rebuilt. The locomotive needs all its exterior woodwork replaced as much of the woodwork is missing. They need information on the cab woodwork, the cab windows, cab doors and any drawings, pictures or diagrams of this locomotive. They are willing to pay costs of reproduction. If you can help, contact Jim Opolony at jopolony@hotmail.com or write to: Steam Department, Illinois Central Museum, PO Box 427, Union IL 60180.

WANTED - Membership in the Arkansas & Missouri Fan Club, sponsored by the

railroad itself. You get a membership card, monthly newsletter, A&M baseball cap, 10 percent off excursion tickets and a certificate. Dues are \$29 for individual, \$39 family. For information call 501-751-8600 or email at arkmo@ipa.net

FOR SALE - The Incomplete All-Time ALCO Diesel roster. It lists about every diesel manufactured by American Locomotive Company and its many partners and subsidiaries from 1925 to 1984. It is more than 500 pages long and details the ownership history of more than 10,000 locomotives. For ease of handling, the material is broken into 5 volumes, each of which is available separately. The roster contains more detailed information in one place than any other source available.

Volume 2-A 65979 to 75996; Volume 2-B 75997 to 79000; Volume 2-C 79001 to 82000; Volume 2-D 82001 to 84911;

Volume 2-E 3362-01 to 6128-05.

Normally \$25 each, they are only \$20 each if you mention the Arkansas Railroad Club. All 5 together normally is \$100, but again if you mention the Arkansas Railroad Club the price is only \$85. Postage for one is \$3.50, 2 is \$5.00, 3 or more \$6.00. Send orders to: Barton Jennings, PO Box 32424, Knoxville TN 37930-2424.

HELP WANTED - The Historic Pullman Foundation is asking for help in rebuilding the historic Pullman Clock Tower and Factory complex near Chicago. This tower was deliberately set on fire December 1, 1998, but engineers say the structure can be saved and rebuilt. They need your help in doing so. They are asking your help by writing the President, Congress, the Illinois Governor and state legislature, urging them to give the needed historic-preservation money. For more information, contact the Historic Pullman Foundation, 11111 S Forrestville Ave, Chicago IL 60628 or call 773-785-8181.

WANTED - Will purchase or trade train orders from various railroads - worldwide - and employee timetables. Dr. Edward Metz, PO Box 523, Crawford NE 69339, 303-665-1546.

WANTED - Help restoring Boston & Maine steam engine #3713, a 4-6-2. You can help by ordering "The 3713 Boston & Maine" theme song cassette for \$9.95 postpaid. Send checks to: Locomotive Restoration Fund, Lackawanna & Wyoming Valley Railway Historical Society, PO Box 3452, Scranton PA 18505-0452.

FOR SALE - PULLMAN CHINA, limited edition reproduction of the Indian Tree Pattern, made by the original manufacturer, Syracuse China. Cost for 5-piece basic place setting \$79; full place setting, which includes the basic plus breakfast and bread & butter plates \$109; coffee mug \$8.95. Postage is \$18 for the first place setting, \$10 for each additional setting. Postage cost per mug \$6.50. Order from Washington DC Chapter NRHS - Pullman China, c/o Henry Bielstein, 13425 Reid Circle, Ft Washington MD 20744-6522.

WANTED - Standard gauge hand car. Advise price, condition and location. Peter Smykla, PO Box 1892, Pine Bluff AR 71613 or call 870-535-4724.

FOR SALE - Amtrak's 1999 wall-hanging calendar with a watercolor of the *Texas Eagle* in Fort Worth on the front. Price is \$6 for one, \$10 for two, \$14 for three and

down to \$2.25 if you buy 26 or more. Make checks to Amtrak and mail orders to Amtrak Calendar, PO Box 7717, Itasca IL 60143.

FOR SALE - The Arkansas Railroad Club's hardbound, 120-page book called *Railroad Stations and Trains through Arkansas and the Southwest*. It was written by Clifton Hull with help from Tom Shook, among other club members. Kevin EuDaly of White River Productions did the graphic design and artwork. You can order from White River Productions, 24632 Anchor Ave, Bucklin MO 64631. Cost is \$29.95 plus \$4.50 postage and handling (total of \$34.45 if you're having it mailed). MasterCard or Visa accepted. You can call White River Productions at 816-695-4433.

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RAILROAD ABANDONMENT PROPOSALS

The address of the Surface Transportation Board is: Office of the Secretary, Case Control Unit, 1925 K Street, Washington DC 20423. The STB phone number for abandonment procedures (Office of Public Services) is: 202-565-1592. If you contact them, it would be handy to use the Docket Numbers. Their Web address is: <http://www.stb.dot.gov> if you'd like the complete listings.

These abandonment proposals have been printed in the Federal Register or have come directly from the Surface Transportation Board. They will go in effect unless one of the following occurs: 1) an offer of financial assistance is received; 2) a request for public use of the land is received (for instance, rails-to-trails); 3) petitions to reopen the case is filed. Railroads, before they can file these "notices of exemption under CFR 1152 Subpart F," must certify that 1) no local traffic has moved over the line for at least 2 years; 2) any overhead traffic can be routed over other lines; 3) no formal complaint filed by a user is pending and; 4) environmental reports, historic reports, transmittal letter, newspaper publication, and notice to governmental agencies have been met. Even though approval is granted for the railroads to abandon, it may be months or years before track is actually taken up.

ARKANSAS - DONIPHAN, KENSETT & SEARCY RWY - To abandon a portion of its line known as the DK&S Branch from m.p. 299.12 to the end of the line at m.p. 300.40 in Searcy, Arkansas, a distance of 1.28 miles. The

ARKANSAS RAILROADER - Little Rock Chapter NRHS

non-agency rail station is located at m.p. 300.14 in Searcy. The land has been transferred to Harding University for use in campus housing. Final decision by May 17, 1999. (STB Docket No. AB-558X, decided February 4, served February 16, 1999)

FLORIDA - FLORIDA MIDLAND RAILROAD CO. - To abandon 0.18 mile of line on the Lake Wales Spur from m.p. SV-967.47 at Scenic Highway to m.p. SV-967.65 at Fourth Street in Lakes Wales, Florida. Effective March 20, 1999. (STB Docket No. AB-325, Sub No. 1X, decided February 12, served February 18, 1999)

TEXAS - UNION PACIFIC - To abandon a 3.17 mile line known as the Popp Industrial Lead extending from m.p. 12.57 near Arcola to the end of the line at m.p. 15.74 in Fort Bend County, Texas. Effective March 25, 1999. (STB Docket No. AB-33, Sub No. 133X, decided February 17, served February 23, 1999)

NORTH DAKOTA - RED RIVER VALLEY & WESTERN RAILROAD CO. - To abandon 18.4 miles from m.p. 18.7 near Alice to m.p. 0.3 near Casselton, North Dakota. Effective April 3, 1999. (STB Docket No. AB-391, Sub No. 6X, decided February 26, served March 4, 1999)

OHIO - CSX - To abandon a portion of its line known as the Louisville Service Lane, Central Ohio Division, from m.p. BPB-4.9 near Byesville to m.p. BPB-18.23 at the end of track near Cumberland, a distance of 13.3 miles, including the station of Cumberland. Final decision by June 4, 1999. (STB Docket No. AB-55, Sub No. 569X, decided February 24, served March 8, 1999)

ARKANSAS RAIL NEWS

CREOSOTE ODOR

(North Little Rock) - Koppers Industries of North Little Rock preserves railroad ties with creosote and people living in the Poe Addition are beginning to complain about it, even though the plant has been there and employed hundreds of people for decades. They are working on preventing some of the odors from escaping. (*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, February 11*)

GENERAL RAIL NEWS

SIGNAL COMPANY GROWS

(Kansas City) - Harmon Industries near Kansas City makes signaling and communications equipment for railways and has seen a resurgence in business recently, due in part to renewed emphasis on crossing safety. It not only sells signal equipment but has become a training ground for railroads to send their signal personnel to. (*Kansas City Star, February 16, 1999 via Jim Johnson*)

SHORT LINE GROWS

(Dallas) - RailTex's Dallas, Garland & Northeastern Railroad has leased another 89 miles of track from Union Pacific and DART and obtained trackage rights over BNSF in the Dallas area to now serve nearly 200 customers, including Coca-Cola's syrup operations. The newly leased tracks go from downtown Dallas northwest to Carrollton along UP tracks and from Carrollton to Addison to Plano and Wylie

along the old Cotton Belt line. (*Dallas Morning News, February 6 via Dan Barr*)

FAMOUS ROUNDHOUSE RAZED

(Hagerstown, Maryland) - The Hagerstown roundhouse of the CSX was torn down in March, 1999 after years of trying to save it by the Hagerstown Roundhouse Museum, located next to it. The CSX would have given the roundhouse to the museum if someone would underwrite insurance for it, preventing future lawsuits for CSX, but nobody or government did. CSX did give the old turntable to the museum, however, which is 100 tons and the second largest still in existence (120 feet wide). The Hagerstown Museum would like to thank the many people who worked to save the structure. The museum will continue. They can be reached at: <http://www.roundhouse.org> (*Via Douglas White*)

KCS REVENUE RECORD

Kansas City Southern reported record 1998 revenues of \$551.6 million, an increase of 7% over 1997. KCSI subsidiaries Gateway Western also had record earnings of \$45.2 million, up 6% over 1997, and Texas Mexican Railway, also a subsidiary, had a record \$49.2 million, up 46% over 1997.

"ROCK" FINALLY DEAD?

(Kansas City) - Missouri Central Railroad's hopes of reopening the old Rock Island line between near St. Louis and Kansas City died in mid February when Union Pacific broke off negotiations to sell the line. The future of the long-unused line is uncertain.

AMTRAK NEWS

Nothing to report this month.

EXCURSIONS/SHOWS/EVENTS OF OTHER CLUBS

NATIONWIDE - 18 months, 1999-2000 - The U.S. Postal Service will operate the *Celebrate The Century Express* specially outfitted four-car train throughout 1999 through the summer of 2000. It will host tours, including railroad organizations such as ourselves, at each of its stops. It's purpose is to celebrate the rich history of the 20th Century documented by stamps and trains, through the 1940s. It will consist of an Amtrak Genesis P42 engine painted yellow with stamps on it, an Amfleet car #21044, a restored RPO car of the Southern Railway (#36), a carbon steel baggage car (#1252) and a historic railroad business car. It was scheduled to start in Tampa, Florida March 11. The nearest it will come to Little Rock will be on April

30-May 2 when it will be in Memphis, at least on its first two legs. For more information, call the USPS, Janice Yu, at 202-268-4604. Their web site is: <http://www.usps.com/ctc>

VARIOUS PLACES - Various times of year - Trains Unlimited offers many railfan tours across the country and the world. To get a colorful brochure, call 530-836-1745 or write Trains Unlimited, PO Box 1997, Portola CA 96122.

OAK RIDGE, TENNESSEE - Various days - Arkansas Railroad Club member Bart Jennings and the Southern Appalachia Railway Museum will operate Secret City

Scenic Excursion Trains at the East Tennessee Technology Park near Oak Ridge on various dates. New this year will be a former Southern Railway dining car. The trips will run through the park and along the Poplar Creek watershed. Days of excursions: March 19, 20; April 10, 11, 17, 18, 24,, 25; May 15, 16, 29, 30; September 4, 5, 25, 26; October 16, 17, 23, 24, 30, 31; November 20, 21; December 18, 19. Cost is \$10 coach, \$15 dining car. Caboose is rentable for up to 10 people for \$125.

Information on the trips: Send a stamped, addressed envelope to SARM, PO Box 5870, Knoxville TN 37928. Use this address to join or volunteer, also.

ARKANSAS RAILROAD CLUB MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership renewal New Member Change of Address

Send membership renewal, application, change of address, etc. to: **Arkansas Railroad Club, PO Box 9151 North Little Rock AR 72119.** Phone: 501-758-1340; Fax: 501-758-4301. e-mail: ken.z.rw@ix.netcom.com

Date: _____ Your birthday (optional - no year needed) _____

Name: (last) _____ (first) _____ (init) _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone: (____) _____ e-mail address: _____

Membership dues information:

Membership: **\$20.00** per year, Arkansas Railroad Club only; **\$37.00** per year if you join or renew National Railway Historical Society membership through our Club. Dues are payable/due by January 1 of each year. If we don't have your dues by March 1, you will be dropped from the membership rolls.

Membership in the Arkansas Railroad Club entitles you to a membership card and the monthly *ARKANSAS RAILROADER* newsletter. Meetings are held monthly, except December, on the second Sunday of the month. We usually meet at 2 p.m. in the Mercantile Bank main building on Main Street in North Little Rock, just north of the Arkansas River. Interesting programs are presented each month and refreshments (cookies, sandwiches) are served. We are a non-profit organization and member of the NRHS. Officers are listed in each newsletter.

WHITE RIVER PRODUCTIONS INC

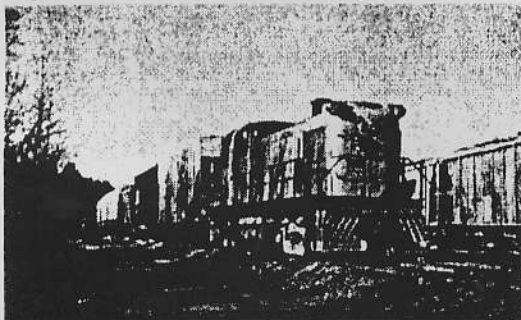
24632 Anchor Ave, Bucklin, MO 64631
(660) 695-4433

Shortline Railroads of Arkansas



Clifton E. Hull

Cover: "The Narrows," the gateway to Eureka Springs on the original Missouri & North Arkansas. For a short time a tourist operator ran this diminutive 0-4-0 in short trips across Beaver Lake from Beaver, Arkansas, allowing one to take in the spectacular scenery along the old M&NA right-of-way in northwestern Arkansas. This view was taken on September 4, 1981. *Kevin EuDaly photo*



Above: Bauxite & Northern's RS-3 13 in action near Bauxite in February, 1972, complete with Razorback herald on the nose. The Alco was later replaced with EMD MP15's. *Bill Ray photo*



Don't Miss Shortline Railroads of Arkansas

This Arkansas Railroad Club reprint of the 1969 classic by Clifton Hull is sure to be a popular book. This is an extremely limited run - so don't miss your chance to add this valuable book to your library.

Features in the book cover nearly every shortline railroad that operated in Arkansas, including the Missouri & North Arkansas of Ozarks fame. A new all-color dust jacket adorns the foil-stamped hardcover. Includes detailed maps, exciting railroad stories, and historical accounts of railroads existing now only on film and in memory. This book preserves for the future the Shortline Railroads of Arkansas!

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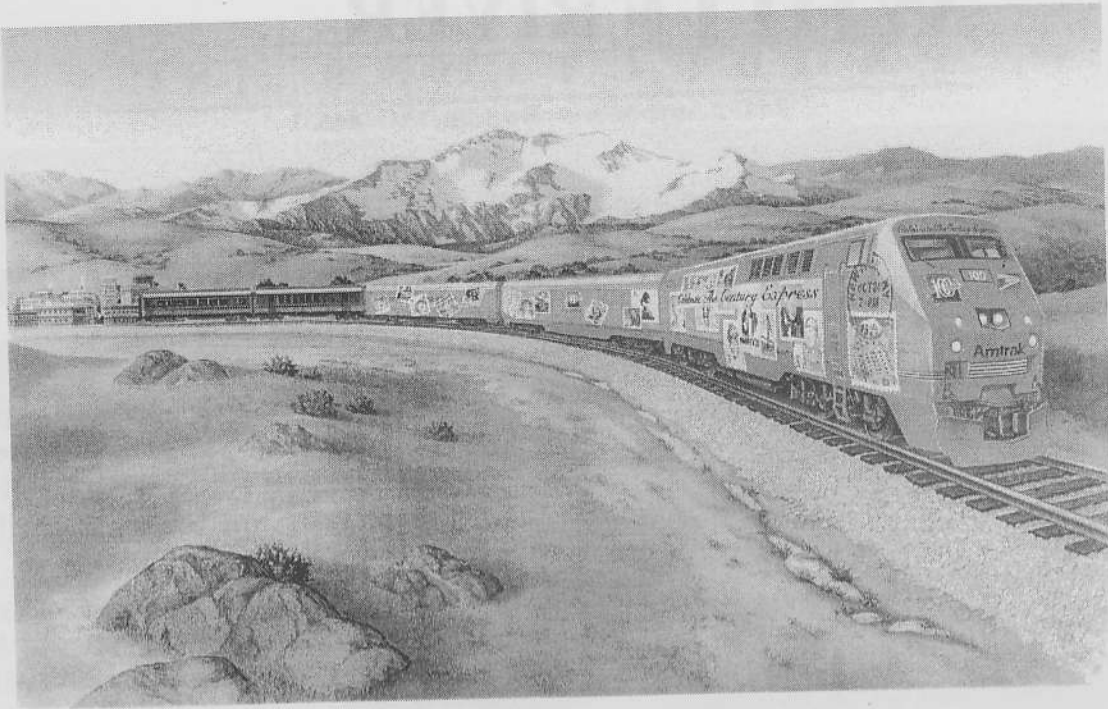
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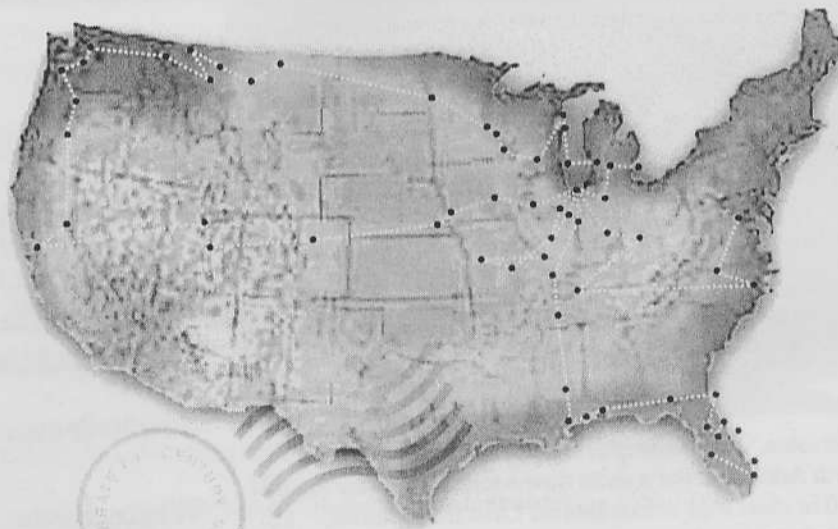
Call Toll Free:

1-877-787-2467





CELEBRATE THE CENTURY EXPRESS



The U.S. Postal Service is running a special train in 1999 and early 2000 celebrating the history of the 20th century documented by stamps and trains. It's first two legs left Tampa, Florida March 11 and will go through Hollywood, Lakeland, Ocala, Jacksonville, Lake City, Florida - Atmore, Alabama (4/09) - Meridian (4/23), McComb (4/27), Mississippi - Memphis (4/30-5/02), Tennessee - Jefferson (5/07), Independence (5/12), St. Louis (5/15-5/17), Missouri - and Springfield (5/20), Illinois. For more information, call Janice Yu at USPS, 202-268-4604.