

# Turntable Times

Volume XXX

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March 1998



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**Volume XXX    March 1998    Number 3**

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## Cards and Flowers

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If you know of a Chapter Member who is sick, lost a loved one or has a new birth in the family, please contact Elizabeth Leedy. Elizabeth is responsible for Chapter cards and flowers and can be reached at 389-5274.

## Meeting Notice

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The Roanoke Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society will hold its next general meeting on Thursday, March 19, 1998 at 7:30 pm. The meeting will be at the First Presbyterian Church on the corner of McClanahan and Crystal Spring Avenue in Roanoke.

## Cover Photo

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Great Northern Railway steam locomotive No. 2584 stands on permanent display at Havre, Montana. The date is Friday, June 13th, 1997, and to the left of the steam engine in the background is Amtrak's eastbound "Empire Builder". Photo by Kenney Kirkman.

## Deadline for Turntable Times

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The deadline for the next issue of Turntable Times is Wednesday, March 25. Please send articles, information and exchange newsletters to: Kenney Kirkman, Editor, Turntable Times, 590 Murphy Road, Collinsville, Va. 24078-2128.

## Reminder

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To those who have not paid their dues, they are now past due! See Karl Oehring for how you can be reinstated. If you have not paid your dues within a calendar year, your membership will not be counted as continuous by the National for recordkeeping.

## Mixed Freight - March

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by Mr. Robin Shavers

Gondola cars, often some of the most dilapidated members of this nation's freight car fleet, are making for a strong resurgence in areas of the country where traffic for these cars had greatly diminished or disappeared altogether. The railroad industry as a whole has brought over 9,100 gondolas of all types into service over the past two years and that number is growing. A total investment of \$55 million has been invested in metal carrying rolling stock. Steel production and total shipments are expected to increase over 20% of what was hauled in 1998 by the year 2001.

Those of you whom keep up with what's happening with the railroad scene have probably read about or seen in person, the new 6 x 12 inch signs affixed to signs which warn motorists of a grade crossing on CSX. The information found on the signs include milepost location, the crossing's U.S. Department of Transportation I.D. number and a toll free number to call in the advent of an emergency. Norfolk Southern has had this idea put at its grade crossings for years.

Last month I mentioned that Norfolk Southern Corporation has plans to sell its North American Van Lines subsidiary. I failed to mention that the buyer is Clayton, Dubilier & Rice Incorporated, an investment firm. The transaction should be finalized by May 31st of this year. CD&R has agreed to pay \$200 million for NAVL.

Norfolk Southern has announced that it will be spending a record \$903 million during its fiscal year. Trackside you might see part of \$237 million earmarked for 116 new high adhesion six axle locomotives, new multilevels for increasing

automotive traffic, high cube boxcars for auto parts, covered gondolas, billet flatcars for steel, centerbeam flatcars and small cubic capacity covered hopper cars. Rockwell International subsidiary TSM, Inc., based in Kansas City, Missouri will be equipping both sets of Amtrak's Auto Train with electronic air brakes. The advantage of electronic air brakes over conventional air brakes is the uniformity of breaking. The entire train brakes uniformly thru out providing a smoother stop. The required stopping distance is reduced too.

Model railroaders and collectors of railroading will have two choices at hand the first weekend of April, 1998. The Great Scale Train Show will be going on up at The Maryland State Fairgrounds at Timonium, Maryland on the 4th and 5th starting at 9 a.m. on Saturday and 10:00 a.m. on Sunday. That same Saturday, April 4th, The Carolina Model Railroaders will hold their annual Swap Meet and Open House at the former Southern Railway depot located at 300 East Washington Street in downtown Greensboro, N.C. The event is open to the public from 10:00 a.m. til 3:00 p.m. For more information, call 336-668-3642.

### **Small Rails - March**

by Dave Meashey

The Big Lick Boomers have voted to change the club's name to Roanoke Valley Model Engineers. The new name may prove helpful should the club acquire permanent quarters with a local organization. Presently the membership is working to ready the modules for a mid-March toy and train show at the Salem Civic Center. Presently space is available in the former Roanoke Rails retail store to allow work on the modules as an assembled layout.

We have some hope that the club will be invited to move to a permanent facility sometime within calendar year 1998. If that hope becomes a reality, we will need to build a permanent layout at our new facility and use the modules as a type of branchline, which can be taken else-

where for public shows. The Big Lick Big Train Operators met on January 31st at the home of Rick Anderson. Members shared new items that they received for Christmas, and showed off some of their latest projects. Bill Sours brought a beautiful model of a snow flanger that he had just scratchbuilt. The club decided to skip a February meeting, just in case more bad weather came this way. The next meeting will be March 28th, again at Rick Anderson's home. This time we will be helping Rick lay track for his next garden railway.

According to their newsletter, the Stack Blaster, The Blue Ridge Live Steamers have been quite busy this winter. Several improvements to the track have been made and tested, a plan for improving the drainage at the grade crossings has been approved, and a new slate of officers were elected for 1998.

### **Another Trash Train**

by Dave Meashey

From 1969 until 1973 I lived in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania. This area is sometimes referred to as the hard coal region of Pennsylvania. For many decades the area had enjoyed prosperity due to the nation's demand for Anthracite coal as a preferred home heating fuel. By the time I lived in the area, the prosperity was only a memory, and civic leaders were seeking to induce other industries to move there. Some coal was still being mined, but it was nothing like the heyday of the Anthracite mining industry.

The heyday of coal mining had left other mementos throughout the region, open pits. Scars on the face of the land, left over from a time when the federal government did not require strip mine operators to back-fill the huge holes they made while harvesting the "black diamonds."

Around 1970 or 1971, the officials of the Reading Railroad presented the citizens of Schuylkill County with what they perceived was a "win/win" situation for the citizens of Schuylkill

County, the citizens of Philadelphia, and the Reading Railroad. Philadelphia needed a place to dump its trash. Schuylkill County had ample open pits. The Reading Railroad would haul the trash from Philadelphia to Schuylkill County and dump it in the open pits. In time the open pits would be filled and topped with soil, and turned into usable land, perhaps Christmas tree farms or sod farms. It seemed like a good idea, except for one problem. The technology of the time had no economical way to prevent the garbage from mingling with the ground water - and then the drinking water supply. The people of Schuylkill County were adamant. "No Philadelphia garbage leaches in our drinking water!" The plan was not approved. Before long the Reading Railroad itself was no more, absorbed as a part of Conrail. The basic idea was good, but another railroad at a later time would become the first to haul garbage long distance.

## **Amtrak Vacation**

by Kenney Kirkman

**W**ant to take a vacation by rail across America for about two weeks? That's the question I put to my longtime friend, Mike Goad in early January, 1997. It didn't take Mike long to reply with a enthusiastic yes of course, and so down to Greensboro I drove on a cold late January day to make plans for a cross-country trip by Amtrak that would begin and end at Clifton Forge in June, 1997. Our trip began at 4:10 pm., on Friday, June 6th, when Mike and I boarded the westbound "Cardinal" at Clifton Forge. Train No. 51 had arrived on time, but Train No. 50, the eastbound "Cardinal", was running several hours late. Waiting patiently at Clifton Forge for the eastbound train was Julien Sacks who had arrived to pick up a niece.

After getting ourselves momentarily acquainted with our sleeping car compartment, an economy room, Mike and I headed for the lounge car, where we propped our feet up so

to speak and began to enjoy the ride towards Chicago.

Just west of Covington, the eastbound "Cardinal" passed by us, and after the stop by our train at White Sulphur Springs, Mike and I decided to have supper aboard the full service dining car which had been added to the "Cardinal" consist just a few days earlier.

Our two companions at the dining table that evening were a couple on their way home to New Orleans via Chicago aboard Amtrak.

The gentleman, who's name I unfortunately can't remember now, talked about his days as a professional boxing referee. Altogether this gentleman had refereed some 1500 matches around the world he told us, including an Ali-Spinks fight at the Superdome in New Orleans.

Saturday, June 7th began at 6 a.m. for Mike and I as we joined a couple from Charleston, West Virginia for an early breakfast. Normally, I'm not a big eater at breakfast, but I've found that something about traveling aboard a train just seems to make me more hungry.

Shortly before 10:00 a.m. we arrived at Union Station in Chicago. The trip from Clifton Forge had been very pleasant and we found our sleeping car host to be most accommodating to the basic needs of all who were on board.

Following a visit to the 110-story Sears Tower and a walk around the downtown area of Chicago, Mike and I boarded the westbound "California Zephyr" at Chicago Union Station bound for Sacramento, California. Our "home" aboard this train would be a deluxe bedroom space.

Rainy skies accompanied us as we sped west through the farmland of western Illinois. As we crossed the Mississippi River into the state of Iowa, a tremendous thunderstorm with strong winds and lightning took place as the train made its first stop in Iowa at Burlington. At that moment it was kind of scary in the lounge car as we sat at the big windows watching the lightning flash all around us while rain fell so hard

N&W Photo

that I wondered how the engineer could even see where we were going. Shortly before midnight on Saturday June 7th the "California Zephyr" arrived at Omaha, Nebraska. Mike had already gone to bed when we reached Omaha, but I had stayed up in order to get off and take a brief look at the little Amtrak station building and then survey so to speak the former passenger station which was being converted into some type of shopping complex I was told.

Our first stop on Sunday, June 8th was at Fort Morgan, Colorado where one person got off and no one got on. At 9 a.m. we arrived at Union Station in Denver. Located adjacent to the station in Denver is the Colorado Rockies baseball stadium. Following a stay in Denver of about an hour, our train then began to climb over the Continental Divide and through the 6-mile long Moffatt Tunnel to Glenwood Springs, Colorado. For those of you who have traveled this route from Denver to Glenwood Springs over the former Rio Grande Railroad line, you know the spectacular scenery that is to be seen here. And, although I had already seen it a couple times before, the sights were just as breathtaking this time around for me since so much snow was still in evidence following a hard winter during the early months of 1997.

At 12:30 a.m. on Sunday, June 9th, we arrived at the station in Salt Lake City where Mike and I got off to walk around during the scheduled hour long stay here. It had been 19 years since my last visit to Salt Lake City, so the brief stay this night brought back a lot of memories. Mike and I finally hit the beds so to speak about 1:15 a.m., having no idea of course at the time we went to sleep that June 9th was going to prove to be quite a day with several surprises.

"Wake up, Kenneth, and look outside and see if you know where we are", Mike said as I arose from what seemed like the quietest night of sleep I'd ever had on a train. "We haven't moved for a while", Mike said as he stood in the hallway outside our bedroom. "Freight train after freight

train has been going by us", Mike went on to say. Behind Mike I could see nothing but water outside the train. As I slowly opened the curtain over our bedroom window I saw more water on that side of the train. During the night the "California Zephyr" had traveled north from Salt Lake City to Ogden, Utah, and then turned west. All that water on both sides of our train was the eastern edge of the Great Salt Lake.

Was the "California Zephyr" supposed to travel this way between Salt Lake City and its next stop, Elko, Nevada? "Nope," stated a crew member as Mike and I made our way to the lounge car. It was only 6:30 a.m., and the train was now running some 6 hours behind schedule. But no one seemed to mind as the lounge car was filling up fast with those who wished to partake a rare daylight view of the Great Salt Lake from a passenger train. And what a view it would turn out to be as the early morning sun presented a blue sky across the lake with snow covered mountains dominating the distant horizon.

Shortly after 11 a.m., we finally arrived at Elko, Nevada. Here, the train was met by the local fire department and rescue squad who were called upon along with the police to remove two passengers from one of the coaches who were coming down so to speak from a drug overdose and needed help. A fellow passenger had told Mike and I about these two young folks and went on to say that he knew those folks would never make it all the way to California from Chicago.

Shortly before we reached Sparks, Nevada we ran into a hail storm with hail the size of golf balls. The accompanying lightning knocked out the signal system along the railroad, so once again we were slowed. Would we make it to Sacramento before midnight, I began to wonder. Oh well, the motel room there is already paid for, I thought, so why bother to worry. After all, our Amtrak train crew had gone far out of their way to accommodate everyone because

N&W Photo

of the various delays. After we left Reno, all the first class passengers as well as any coach passengers who so desired, were treated to a free supper consisting of beef, creamed potatoes, tossed salad, bread, tea, and apple pie and ice cream. What a way to end the day as we crossed Donner Pass amidst a fresh snowfall before finally reaching Sacramento at 10:30 p.m., some 7 hours behind schedule.

Early on Tuesday morning June 10th, Mike and I walked from the Holiday Inn downtown in Sacramento to the California State Railroad Museum and Old Sacramento. The California State Railroad Museum was born in 1937 when railfans in the San Francisco area formed the Pacific Coast Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society. The museum features a depiction of railroad history in California and the far west through a presentation of various pieces of rolling stock from steam and diesel locomotives to passenger and freight cars as well as historical displays of how the people themselves worked on railroads in past years. The Museum also features a railroad-only-research library which is used by more than 5,000 folks a year. Future plans call for the new Railroad Museum of Technology which will be built just south of the Old Sacramento Historical District along the route of Museum excursion trains. This 114,000 square-foot facility will present visitors with the opportunity to actually see railroad equipment being restored. The California State Railroad Museum hosts some 600,000 people each year and is definitely worth a visit if you are ever in the area.

Shortly after midnight or early on the morning of Wednesday June 11th, Mike and I boarded the northbound Amtrak "Coast Starlight" at Sacramento. The train was running an hour or so late, so our sleep that night in the deluxe bedroom was brief as we wanted to be awake and in the first class parlor car when the train passed by Mt. Shasta in early daylight. And what a view the mountain presented as we sat in the parlor car enjoying an early breakfast.

At Klamath Falls, Oregon we had the opportunity to get off for a while as the train was serviced and take photographs. Upon arrival at Portland, Oregon we made a brief visit inside the station where a jammed packed crowd was waiting to board our train. Time to grab a few souvenirs for special friends and relatives back home was the thought here as we entered the station's gift shop. Passing through Vancouver, Washington we tried to catch a glimpse of Mount St. Helens to the east while enjoying an evening meal in the dining car. But a persistent fog shrouded all the higher peaks including Mount St. Helens.

Leaving the train station at Tacoma we noticed as our train passed through the freight yard that many Burlington Northern cabooses were still quite common on the rear of many trains, perhaps because of the terrain these trains have to go through in the Pacific Northwest.

At approximately 9:30 p.m. on June 11th, we arrived at King Street Station in Seattle, about an hour and a half late. Like the crew aboard the "California Zephyr", we found the Amtrak folks on the "Coast Starlight" to be most accommodating and very friendly. And as for the food, well we had been on the rails for nearly a week and had gained a pound or two from the meals and needed to do some exercising. And most of the next day, Thursday, June 12th, would provide us with such an opportunity.

After a good nights sleep at the Mayflower Park Hotel, Mike and I were up early on Thursday morning June 12th. We began our day by walking around the downtown area of Seattle. My last visit here was in 1979, and much had changed downtown as many new skyscrapers were evident. To get a better view of the changes, Mike and I headed back to our hotel where we boarded the Monorail for the ride out to the 600-foot high Space Needle. Although I had been to the Space Needle twice before in 1978 and 1979, the view from the top was just as breathtaking this time around as we viewed not only Seattle itself but the surrounding snow

capped mountains and Puget Sound as well. Following the return to the Mayflower Park Hotel aboard the Monorail we took a taxi to the train station where we deposited our luggage before walking over to the adjacent Kingdome stadium for a tour. The Seattle Mariners baseball team was set to play a home game that night and we wished we could have stayed as we were allowed to walk down onto the playing field while some of the players participated in a little practice in the outfield. But back at the station our next train, the eastbound Amtrak "Empire Builder", was waiting.

At 5 p.m. on June 12th, we departed Seattle aboard the "Empire Builder", bound for Chicago. Just prior to our trip on this train, it had begun operating daily between the two cities. On this night, No. 8 was packed with every sleeping berth sold out and most of the coach seats occupied when we left Seattle. This trend, an overflow crowd, would continue throughout our journey to Chicago.

Our companions for the evening meal on June 12th aboard the "Empire Builder" were a school teacher from Seattle and a librarian from Greensboro, N.C. The gentleman from Greensboro was very familiar with 611 and 1218 having ridden some the trips powered by these locomotives and was most happy to be able to share in conversation with Mike and I his experiences with Norfolk Southern excursions.

Another sunny day dawned on Friday June 13th as we watched the sunrise in western Montana. Like the "California Zephyr" and "Coast Starlight" we had to make reservations at a certain time aboard the "Empire Builder" when it came time to eat. And the announcer on the "Empire Builder" with his dominating voice made sure that everyone aboard this train, be it sleeping car or coach passenger, was always aware of what of what was going on, be it time to eat, get off, or whatever. This fellow was really enjoying his job we could tell.

Following the stop at East Glacier Park, Montana the snow covered mountains gave way

to gently rolling prairie country as we continued our way eastward towards Chicago. Upon arrival at Minot, North Dakota at 9:30 p.m., just a few minutes off schedule, we noticed ice laying around here and there. The winter and early spring had been very rough in this area, and you will recall the stories about the city of Grand Forks, North Dakota during the spring of 1997. So, while Mike had called it a day when we left Minot, I decided to stay up to see firsthand what it looked like at Grand Forks. Upon arrival there shortly after 1 a.m. on Saturday, June 14th, I couldn't see much aside from the crowded Amtrak station except lots of darkness. But my thoughts were with the folks of this area as we slowly pulled out of the depot. They had suffered much through the harsh weather and subsequent fires that destroyed much of the downtown area of Grand Forks. Life is so fragile when you really think about it. And how often we take so many things for granted.

Daylight on Saturday June 14th found us rolling through the farmlands of central Minnesota. Almost on time at 7:10 a.m. we arrived at the St. Paul-Minneapolis station where it was time once again for phone calls and pictures.

After leaving St. Paul-Minneapolis we began riding on the rails of the Canadian National Railway on our way to Milwaukee. While passing several Canadian National freight trains I began to somehow imagine myself suddenly going from America to Canada after we had left St. Paul-Minneapolis. With all the rail mergers going on today along with locomotive lashups that feature engines from numerous rail lines, no wonder it's hard to tell sometimes without first-hand information just what railroad you really are on.

At 4:15 p.m. just five minutes late, the "Empire Builder" arrived at Union Station in Chicago. Another great train ride with a very courteous crew and plenty of memories to last, including numerous conversations with two railroad men from Australia who were spending six weeks

traveling by train through the United States and Canada.

Right on time at 7:40 p.m. on Saturday, June 14th, our final train, the eastbound "Cardinal", began rumbling out of Chicago.

Almost immediately we noticed that this train wasn't quite as full as say the "Empire Builder", so it was definitely a different pace so to speak to be in the lounge car with only a handful of other folks. But this trend so to speak would change as we rolled eastward with stops overnight in Indianapolis and Cincinnati.

Breakfast on Sunday June 15th found us in eastern Kentucky in the vicinity of Catlettsburg. Upon arrival at Huntington, we noticed the weather had become very hot and humid. We had not had to endure the high humidity for almost two weeks, but now it was hitting hard and it would be another day or two after we got home before we would become adjusted to the heat.

At approximately 3 p.m. on June 15th we arrived in Clifton Forge. Like the other trains we

found our crew aboard the eastbound "Cardinal" to have been very courteous.

Five trains, 19 states, and nearly 7,000 miles aboard Amtrak Superliner trains. When do you want to go on another trip I asked Mike as we watched the eastbound "Cardinal" slowly pull out of Clifton Forge. "I'm ready whenever you are, Kenney," was Mike's reply.

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