

THE SWITCHLIST

OLD NORTH STATE CHAPTER
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January Meeting

There have been, over the years, a variety of films that involve trains in one way or another, and, generally, once a year the Old North State Chapter has had a movie night so that we can bring someone special and enjoy one of those films together. The film we'll be watching as we start 2010 will be "The Station Agent", the winner of the 2002 Sundance Film Festival awards. This is a film that has been acclaimed by many and which promises to give us a delightful evening together. For a most enjoyable start to the new year with good friends, do join us on January 12.

Our location will be our regular venue, Red Hot and Blue at 6615 Falls of the Neuse Road in the Falls Village Shopping Center on the west side of the road. It is 2.4 miles southwest of I-540 and 3.5 miles northeast of I-440 (exit 8) If you are coming from I-440, you will find it easier and less congested to turn right onto Sandy Forks Road, the second right after Millbrook, then left into the Falls Village parking lot. Our meeting room has been reserved from 6:00 PM, but is typically available around 5:30 PM. After dinner together, the program will start at 7:00 PM.

December Meeting Report

It's always delightful when a meeting turns out to be even better than any of us had hoped it would be. That was certainly the case in December when we met at Ken and Juanita Ross' home for superb pizza with grand accompaniments, an all New York Central revue of both steam and electric locomotives done by Art Peterson with supporting commentary by Ken, and our introducing ourselves to one another with something of our life stories. That was a very creative touch by our hosts. We did have dessert and, then, a very special tour of Ken's train room. Ken gave us an overview of his collection before running some specially selected trains around the loop. A definite favorite of many was *The Twentieth Century Limited* in HO scale with full sound, from pumping up the air brakes to whistling for the crossings and, of course, the inimitable sounds of a steam locomotive in motion.

All of us had a most delightful evening. Our heartfelt thanks go to Ken and Juanita for hosting this Christmas party for the chapter!

Of Interest

Rail freight congestion was certainly voiced as a concern when Allan Paul spoke to us in November; Matthew Rose, CEO of Burlington Northern Santa Fe expanded upon that when he spoke before a gathering of fellow industry leaders. Pointing to a map meant to tell the future of the U.S. rail freight network, he called attention to the red that drenched it throughout.

The numerous red blotches illustrated areas where, by 2035, traffic jams could be so severe that trains would grind to a halt for days at a time with nowhere to go. "For those of you who've never seen a good rail meltdown, this is what it looks like," said Rose, as those in the crowded hall shifted uncomfortably in their chairs, "It's literally chaos in the supply chain."

While the nation's attention is focused on air travel congestion, the high cost of fuel for highway driving and reduction in greenhouse gases, a crisis is developing under the radar for the freight trains used to deliver the goods that keep the U.S. economy humming.

Burlington Northern Santa Fe is encouraging Amtrak to consider rerouting the Chicago-Los Angeles *Southwest Chief* away from its current route over New Mexico's Raton Pass to the route through Amarillo, Texas that was once used by Santa Fe's *San Francisco Chief*. Before any reroute can take place, Amtrak management would discuss the information with the states and cities involved and make a determination on the impact of revenue and ridership of a new routing and proposed scheduling alternatives. After their recommendation, the Amtrak Board of Directors would then get involved, weighing the pluses and minuses of the reroute in light of any additional funding that would be involved.

Amtrak has released feasibility studies on several routes that have long been without train service. The happy conclusion is that these trains are feasible pending the availability of funding.

The first study looked at restoring the *Pioneer*, a train that would have its eastern endpoint at either Denver or Salt Lake City, and its western endpoint at either Seattle or Portland. The train would provide service to Pocatello and Boise, Idaho, and enjoys support from the Idaho and Oregon congressional delegations. It would use Union Pacific trackage and connect with the *California Zephyr* on its east end and with state-supported *Cascades Service* on its west end.

The second study examined restoring the *North Coast Hiawatha* that connected Chicago and Seattle under a different route west of Fargo, ND serving Bismarck, ND, Billings, MT and Yakima, WA, cities that the *Empire Builder* misses. A restored train would utilize a slightly different routing than its predecessor. Because Burlington Northern closed the route at Montana's Homestake Pass, a restored train would instead operate via Mullan Pass and Helena instead of via Butte.

There was also a study that looked at expanding New York to Pittsburgh service. It examined 90-mph operations and a second daily train between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, plus a third train as far as Altoona. This study concluded that the additional services would add 140,000 riders annually.

Chicago's Metra ran a study on proposed service between Chicago and Crete, IL on the ex-Chicago & Eastern Illinois line and found that the service would be well patronized, with 18,700 riders daily. Under the plan, trains would operate between Chicago's LaSalle St station and Balmoral Park in Crete, where an end-of-the-line station and maintenance shop would be built. The 30 mile operation would join some Amtrak service on a portion of the former C&EI.

Station Bulletin Board

Grand Junction, Colorado is the home of an elegant former Denver & Rio Grande station that dates to 1905 and is currently vacant. The Friends of the Depot have been working with a host of owners and community members to restore the building and put it to a long term viable use. Part of the current issue is that the real estate market in Grand Junction, as in many places, is sagging.

"The downturn in the real estate market has just totally killed us," said station owner Lynn Greenwald of Fort Collins, who once expressed interest in converting the station into a brew pub and restaurant. "We were using money from another source to keep this dream alive, and we can't do it anymore." As a consequence, the property has gone into foreclosure. It will be auctioned in December.

The station's yellow brick exterior is in good condition and the roof was retiled in recent years. The original oak benches and ticket counter are intact, but significant restoration work needs to be done. Perhaps that can proceed after the depot is sold.

Hyde Park, New York is the home of a noteworthy New York Central station. Built in 1914 to replace the wooden 1851 Hudson River Railroad station, it was designed by the same architectural firm that designed Grand Central Terminal in New York City.

One significant regular visitor was New York Central president Frederick Vanderbilt who lived part-time in the community and frequently traveled to and from Manhattan.

Following the 1939 visit of England's king and queen to President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Hyde Park home, the royal couple left by train from the station. "My parents were at the station when the king and queen left for Canada," town historian Patsy Costello said. "They had a special car that was painted blue and gold. A crowd gathered to see them off and sang 'Auld Lang Syne' as the train pulled away."

The last dignitary to use the station was President Harry S Truman who, after accompanying Franklin D. Roosevelt's casket on a train back to Hyde Park, disembarked there to prepare for Roosevelt's funeral.

Service at the Hyde Park station dwindled over the years and regular train service ended in 1953. Five years later, its whistle-stop status was terminated. The town then purchased the station and put it to community use. Vandalism took its toll, and by the early 1970's the building was in rough shape.

"In 1975 there was a bulldozer next to the station ready to take it down," said Jeff Armstrong, vice-president of the Hudson Valley Railroad Society. "Our group came in with an 11th-hour proposal and signed a 40-year deal with the town to rent and restore

it.” It took the society 15 years to accomplish the restoration; it now uses the station as a museum that includes a scale model railroad layout.