

# *THE SWITCHLIST*

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## October Meeting

*Between the featured steam and rare mileage, this year's National Railway Historical Society convention was an especially appealing one for many, including our own John Sokash. He will bring us his coverage of the trips he participated in. You'll have to join us to learn more about the convention from one who was there. Knowing John, we'll enjoy good photos and great insights. Do join us on 12 October, our regular second Tuesday.*

*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.*

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## September Meeting Report

As promised, Frank Scheer did bring us an historical overview of the Railway Mail Service. He did so by sharing two films dealing with service, with both filmed on the Baltimore and Ohio, and both involving Railway Postal employees, not actors. Frank indeed knew the men in the films and knew the operations in great detail. Thus, he was able to give us a narrative that complemented the stories of the service.

For some in the audience, there were scenes that brought back good memories, including the beautiful B&O station-hotel at Cumberland, Maryland. For all of us, the demands of the Railway Postal clerks jobs were astonishing. At the outset of their service, they needed to know 800 delivery points in order. Over the years, some came to know up to 10,000. Thanks so much for coming, Frank!

## OF INTEREST

**Amtrak**, as we learned last month, implemented an experimental service between Kalamazoo, Michigan and Chicago over the Labor Day weekend. The experiment was a resounding success, and many of the passengers indicated they would use it as an ongoing travel option if it were to become a regularly scheduled train. That possibility is now under study.

In other Amtrak related news, the New Jersey Transit tunnel under the Hudson River is “on hold” because of concerns over a possible \$1 billion overrun. While the project halt is based on budget concerns, it is another chance to get the project right. Many are urging New Jersey governor Chris Christie to restore a connection between the new tunnels and New York’s Pennsylvania Station, and to consider abandoning plans for a separate, \$3 billion NJT terminal that would not connect to Pennsylvania Station.

To date, only one small contract – for construction of a New Jersey road underpass, has been let. New Jersey does not have its share of funding in place, so the Federal Transit Administration has not issued a Full Funding Grant Agreement for \$3 billion. Rethinking the tunnel and terminal to both expand Penn Station and continue east to Grand Central has both long range benefits and significant cost savings. Beyond this, the tunnel links would improve the overall reliability of both Amtrak and New Jersey Transit. Money spent here, now, has a long-range environmental benefit, too.

Finally, new intermodal terminals are in the works for Pontiac, Michigan and Niagara Falls, New York. Both stations will serve Amtrak along with intercity and local buses, and should open in two to three years. “Pontiac is a key transportation crossroads,” Michigan DOT Director Kirk Stuedle told the assembled crowd at the July groundbreaking. Pontiac mayor Leon Jukowski said, “I’m looking forward to buying the first ticket at the new station.”

**Southern Railway** H-class No. 401 moved under its own power for the first time in nearly 50 years recently. The 1907 Baldwin was restored under the tutelage of the good folks at the Monticello Railway Museum, who began the restoration work in 1995 with wheel work. They contracted for a new boiler, and dedicated themselves to bringing the slide-valve equipped, 82-ton locomotive back to service. Their dedication paid off when the beautiful locomotive starred at their annual Railroad Days on 18-19 September. And, yes, the Southern did run in Illinois.

**David Plowden** has an exhibit of his steam train photography that opened at the California Railroad Museum in Sacramento. Titled “Requiem for Steam: The Railroad Photographs of David Plowden,” the exhibit features more than 25 photos from an upcoming Plowden book.

The book, to go by the same title, will go on sale 9 October, Plowden’s 78<sup>th</sup> birthday. It features 134 photographs, many of which have not been previously published.

Plowden’s work is not as familiar to many railfans as it ought to be. He worked on railroads in the days of steam, commenting that he should have been paying them instead of vice-versa.

# Station Bulletin Board

**Charleston, WV's** former Chesapeake & Ohio station has been sold to General Corporation, one of West Virginia's largest commercial property owners. Having sold the City Center West office tower to the state Lottery Commission for \$21.5 million, the corporation needed someplace else to go, and the 105-year old depot was a bargain at \$1.2 million.

The station's current occupants, Laury's Restaurant and Amtrak, will continue to lease space. Amtrak, with stimulus funds, is planning a substantial restoration. Laury's, a fine-dining French-American restaurant, will continue to operate on the station's first floor. General Corporation will take over the 3,400 square-foot second floor.

The Chesapeake & Ohio opened the depot in 1905.

**Meadowview, VA**, on the Norfolk & Western, is an old farming community that has kept its original station, which was and is on the town square. Right now it is slowly moving some 29 feet further from the tracks. The \$60,000 move will be a long, slow process, not unlike the community's efforts to refurbish, revitalize and re-invent itself.

Thus far, a community center and clinic owned by community association Meadow View First has been built on what was, four short years ago, a weeded lot on the town square. A separate effort, spearheaded by others in the community, established a restaurant and a general store next door.

Norfolk Southern is helping the community to progress with its plans by ceding property for the depot to be sited on. Their only requirement is that the building remain a community building. A new use for the station hasn't yet been decided, but several suggestions have been made, including a retail venue and a performance venue; all are geared toward economic development.

**Tunnel Hill, GA's** Western & Atlantic depot, built in 1850 has seen a long and bumpy road to being secure, but city leaders are optimistic about the future.

For years the depot was buried in the midst of a feed mill. Happily, the feed mill's agreement with the railroad stated that if it ever left the property, it would have to leave the property as it found it. Unhappily, once the then-current occupant determined the cost of tearing down all the buildings surrounding the depot, they talked the railroad into allowing them to sub-let the property, as it was, to a recycling company.

The agreement worked fine for a while, but then the recycling company went out of business, leaving an eight-foot high stack of trash covering virtually the entire site. The owner, a gracious man, offered the city seven acres of adjoining land if the city would clean up the property. They did so, but ran into another glitch when the railroad began tearing down structures on the property; a business that would run 5,000 trucks a month out of the property was planned. Fortunately, the VP of community relations knew the area well, so he came to discuss matters with local leaders. Not only was he able to squelch the arrangement, he got CSX to deed the depot property to the city.

One upside for the city was that the railroad had torn down all the structures surrounding the depot. Now they face only the work of restoring the station building. It's a challenge they are looking forward to.