

THE SWITCHLIST

OLD NORTH STATE CHAPTER
NRHS

Volume 25 Number 9

September, 2010

September Meeting

One of the glories of railroading is the now vanished Railway Mail Service. We say "is" not "was", because there are still some of the remarkable men who manned the Railway Post Offices still with us and Frank Scheer has founded the Railway Mail Service Museum to make certain that the history of moving the mails by rail is preserved. We have prevailed upon Frank to bring us a program on this topic, and happily, he will bring us one dealing with it on the New York Central. Do join us on 14 September, 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.

August Meeting Report

We did indeed get to see the K5 on Horseshoe Curve, along with much of the Pennsy's steam variety. There were classes familiar to some of the seniors among us (Pennsy steam did disappear from regular service 53 years ago!), and there were those we knew existed, but never did experience live. Thus, the great show via DVD was a learning opportunity for all of us.

The audience was, as always, very appreciative of the slides that Art Peterson shared — PRR steam in New Jersey. Between the main line, New York & Long Branch and Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Lines, we got to see many classes and some historic locomotives, including the "Lindberg" locomotive, E6s 460! Art does have more to share in the future and promises to do so.

OF INTEREST

Amtrak has placed an order with CAF Ltd, a Spanish firm with a US plant in Elmira, New York, for 130 single-level cars that will supplement or supplant existing equipment on its eastern services. There will be 55 baggage cars and 25 baggage-dormitory cars; they are needed to replace existing baggage cars, which are the oldest cars in the fleet. Having this number will also enable Amtrak to provide baggage service on some trains that do not currently have it.

There are 25 sleepers in the order. These will be similar, but not identical to the current Viewliners. One primary difference will be that roomettes in the new cars will not have bathroom facilities within the roomette. Instead, there will be bathrooms down the hall. This change was occasioned by problems that Amtrak encountered with holding tanks on the current fleet. Apparently the bathroom facilities within the bedrooms will not be eliminated.

There are also 25 dining cars on order. Amtrak has done an excellent job of rebuilding older diners, creating esthetically pleasing and efficient cars. However, these are old cars, and ultimately they will need to be replaced. The Amtrak shops at Beech Grove, Indiana have the original Viewliner diner; they have totally gutted the car and have modified the underframe to accommodate new trucks. The shop crew has sketches that they are critiquing, with a view to producing a prototype that will give the builder a design to work from.

In other news Amtrak, together with the Federal Railroad Administration and key state departments of transportation, has approved a design for a new hi-level intercity passenger car. The new design is the third generation of the "California" car, which comprises a large fleet in that state's Amtrak service. While the new design targets state-supported corridor services, it will also serve as the basis for design of long-distance cars that will eventually replace the Superliner.

Yet more news for passenger train enthusiasts comes as Amtrak adds Chicago-Kalamazoo round-trips for the Labor Day weekend. This rare addition of service requires not only unprecedented cooperation from Norfolk Southern, but available crews and equipment and demand for service. Amtrak was able to pull all the disparate arrangements together; now they await the results. And, while this weekend experiment may not answer all the questions sufficiently to justify another Kalamazoo-Chicago frequency, Amtrak is to be applauded for taking the initiative.

Gulf & Ohio Railways has announced that it has acquired the Lancaster & Chester to its stable of short lines. Pete Claussen, G&O's president, has said that the blue color and the Springmaid logo will stay, though the leased EMD fleet will be returned to the lessor when the current term ends. Few, if any changes are envisioned in personnel or operations.

Gulf & Ohio currently operates the Conecuh Valley, Three Notch and Wiregrass Central in Alabama; Laurinburg & Southern, Nash County, and Yadkin Valley in North Carolina; and Knoxville & Holston River in Tennessee.

North Wales, PA had an eyesore in its former Reading station. The peeling red, white and blue paint and the “Barbecue Pit” sign didn’t endear the structure to anyone. Then SEPTA, the commuter authority, got a grant to restore the building, and residents got a surprise at its appearance after sand blasting.

The handsome red brick exterior harmonized so beautifully with other turn-of-the-century buildings, that folks wanted to leave the restoration right there. Unfortunately SEPTA says that the conditions of the \$600,000 federal stimulus call for the station to be restored to its 1900s appearance. At that time Reading Railroad structures were painted cream and brown.

The decision to paint the station is not SEPTA’s call. Their intent was always to restore the station. The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 required SEPTA to check with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission for compliance with federal rehab standards. The commission’s Bureau for Historic Preservation decided in early July that the building should be painted.

Ray Tschoepe, a member of the borough’s Historical Architectural Review Board, believes painting with cream-color mineral silicate would best protect the exterior. Putting a clear seal on it would necessitate putting another coat on in a few years. Locals are writing letters, but it is doubtful that will change minds at the level where the decision is made.

Turbotville has been missing a piece of its history for the last five decades, and is hard at work to bring it back home. The Pennsylvania Railroad depot from the borough was moved to the Magee Transportation Museum in 1964. Happily, although the museum has been closed for years, the station building is in good condition, and can be purchased for \$10,000. The locals have that, but moving the building will cost some \$21,000, which they don’t yet have.

One of the reasons the move is so expensive is that there is a close-clearance bridge in the way. That means the station will have to be dismantled, transported and then reassembled. Turbotville’s heritage committee is selling commemorative afghans and distributing donation jars at area businesses to raise the money to bring the depot home.

Middlebury, VT has an 1891 Rutland depot that is getting a major facelift. The historic structure was purchased by Steve Dupoise in August 2009. “It’s a classic structure,” said Dupoise. “and we’re renovating it to rent as retail and office space.”

Dupoise is including renovations to the station’s second-floor tower room which was long closed and off limits to tenants. In the days of passenger service the station agent could look up and down the line to check for approaching traffic.

There is the possibility of an extension of Amtrak’s Ethan Allen Express from Rutland to Burlington with a stop in Burlington. If that comes about, Middlebury may well be ready with a beautifully restored station to serve the trains.