

ROCK ISLAND REPORTER



*E-NEWSLETTER FOR ENTHUSIASTS OF THE CHICAGO, ROCK
ISLAND AND PACIFIC RAILROAD*

THIRD ISSUE MAY, 2014

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Transfer caboose RI 19104 sitting at Rock Island, IL between runs to Silvis, IL and Davenport, IA. Summer 1970. Photo by Tom Brugman



East Moline (approximate) WB Extra 435 handling the PM Silvis Shop Train, meeting EB freight. Summer 1970. Photo Tom Brugman

EDITOR'S NOTE

Since the second Rock Island Reporter, much progress has been made and we may be heading for some newsletter stability. Meaning, future newsletters will come from a predictable source, in a predictable format, and possibly more frequently. Once all the bugs are worked out, we will be capable of sending shorter, more timely supplemental issues to suit special announcements, events and products.

On top of that, we have a new website for the Rock Island Reporter (<http://rockislandreporter.com>). OK, so there's not a lot of stuff on the site right now, but it's there and suitable for a number of new purposes. We are soliciting thoughts and ideas from our readers regarding what we could put on the site to make it useful. Send your email comments to editor@rockislandreporter.com. We look forward to hearing from you.

Our email distribution list is now on the service: "Mali Chimp". All of our readers can now add or delete themselves by clicking on the options at the end of this newsletter.

RITS UPDATE:

Not much progress to report on RITS. The nominations process came up a bit short - not enough worker bees to make the hive healthy. Following, we have some indication from Dennis Opferman on the nominations process. Follow-up efforts by the editor to contact Tom Reddin went unanswered.

From: Dennis Opferman
To: Tom <tbrug@aol.com>
Date: Sun, Apr 20, 2014 10:09 pm
Tom,
Thanks for asking.

To the best of my knowledge, we did not receive any nominations for any of the Officer positions--only for Director positions. However, I have not seen the mail myself. If this turns out to be true, we are at a standstill. We can't run an organization with no one willing to do the work--and a whole lot of work is necessary to put this organization back on a solid footing.

If I learn anything more I will let you know.

Dennis

Ed: Thanks Dennis. We hope the RITS Board makes use of this newsletter to communicate with past and future members.

ANNOUNCEMENTS FOR RI FANS

ANNOUNCEMENTS, EVENTS, AND PRODUCTS OF GENERAL INTEREST

N Scale Decals for R.I. Early Black Switchers and Road Switchers

Date: Thu, Mar 20, 2014 5:58 pm

I have available decals for N scale Rock Island black diesel switchers and road switchers. The set covers most if not all (I know, I know :) lettering schemes for units delivered in black with silver lettering and red side panel or silver lettering only. Some of the lettering could work with some later maroon units too. The set includes white solid and white hashed side sill stripes as well as white numbers for units needing them, two pair of red side lettering panel of two slightly different curvature, silver outline striping for the red panel. Numbering included will do at least two units of each class. Also included are motive power classification lettering and three sizes of heralds.

Builder plate decals are not included but can be obtained from Micro scale's data sets and for those wanting to model units with long hood and cab end striping you might try Microscale 8" 45 degree Barricade Striping set # 71152 for white stripes.

I am offering these sets for \$10.00 each + \$2.00 postage and will mail up to five sets at that rate. I will accept PayPal and personal checks. Orders paid by check will be held for check to clear.

Many thanks are due Gary Groat and John Harker for printing the inserts and hours on the phone with Microscale. Gary may still have some HO sets available.

Contact:

Richard Hansen : rmh711@q.com

Orders to :

Richard Hansen
405 Wellons Cir
Ames, IA 50014
Announcement

Date: Wed, Apr 9, 2014 11:49 pm

Tom:

Don't know if this will make your deadline but I have a custom run of decals available in N scale for Rock Island early black switchers and roadswitchers. The decals were printed by Microscale and will cover most if not all of Rock Island's black switchers and roadswitchers and include silver and white lettering, three sizes of heralds, numbers for at least two of each locomotive, two red lettering panels with silver outline stripes for each. I'm asking \$10.00 each plus \$2.00 for postage and will mail up to five sets for the \$2.00.

I can be contacted at : rmh711@q.com

Thanks to Gary Groat and John Harker for their efforts with this project.

Rock Island newsletter update

From: CenturyLink Customer <glgroat@q.com>

Date: Tue, Apr 8, 2014 4:20 pm

Hello Tom, I believe you already know, but Rich Hansen has put out a double sheet "ROCK ISLAND, BLACK SWITCHER AND ROAD SWITCHER" DECAL SET in N scale. I found 5 more of my HO sets of same. The HO set is \$12 plus \$2 shipping and the N sets are \$10 plus \$2 shipping (for up to 5 sets). I have 8 sets of the N scale on hand and can provide mailing info for Rich Hansen in case you do not have it.....Thanks.....Gary Groat, Ames, Iowa

Ross Dando Products Update

Date: Sat, Apr 26, 2014 9:41 pm

Tom,

I have detail parts to build the 40' flour box cars that were in a past rits digest. I also have the roof doors to make the 50' hide service box cars. Sorry no pictures as I am in the process of moving for the second time in 6 months. The new house will finally allow me to unpack and build models again! We also still have a very limited number of Adapt o cars left and will not be rerunning them anytime soon. There is good stock of the 2700 commuter cars, 760 RPO, and ACF baggage cars.

Thanks,

Ross Dando

Ross <roscodando@yahoo.com>

ROCK ISLAND FANS AND PHOTO SECTION

WHO IS DOING WHAT? READERS AND WHAT THEY ARE WORKING ON

Illinois

Dave Street

To: tbrug <tbrug@aol.com>

Date: Tue, Mar 11, 2014 9:19 am

Tom

I read the following and thought it may be of interest

From the local public library, a book titled "The Blue Island Story 1835-1962" written and published as part of the 1962 fourth of July celebration sponsored by The Lions Club of Blue Island. The book is principally concerned with the years after 1935. The Blue Island Sun Standard newspaper was the sole authority for the material written.

The exact date is not given in the book, but due to the chronological order of the book, prior to June 1939, page 108 states the following: "The first trial run of a double diesel type of locomotive, just purchased by the Rock Island lines, was made on the Peoria line with engineer Ernest A. Browner of 2336 Florence Street at the throttle. Engineer Browner said the engine took the curves at ninety miles an hour, drawing a train of three coaches and two express cars. It was so clean that all he had to do was wash his hands when he got back!"

Page 109 narrates: "the old viaduct over the Rock Island tracks had to go to make way for a new one, on which the lowest bid was \$472,338.53." The bridge discussed is the 127th St. (Burr Oak Ave.) which crossed over Burr Oak yard. I believe this is the bridge existing into the 1980s. It has since been rebuilt or altered somewhat. From memory, there were stairs on the north side of the yard office up to the south side of the bridge. Attached to the bridge side, at that location also, was a yard tower looking south over the yard.

Page 142 contains the following paragraph: "U.S. Army troops took over operation of the Rock Island railroad at the order of President Harry S. Truman after the Switchman's union of North America maintained its strike against the road, defying Truman's back-to-work ultimatum. Later after the July 8, 1950 takeover by troops, the union called off the strike. At least 1,000 Blue Islanders were affected by the strike with the city suffering an economic setback. Loss in sales was estimated at \$40,000 to \$50,000 in the striking period."

Page 152 describes the Rock Island 1952 centennial celebration as follows: "In conjunction with the Rock Island railroad celebration, the original Rock Island Rocket was on display in the city. This was the first of the centennial events. Father and son teams manned the old Rocket as well as its modern counterpart which followed it on the trip to Blue Island. The engineer of the old Rocket was Walter Mollenhauer with Walter Jr., serving as fireman. Henry B. Starr was conductor and his son William, was brakeman.

Following the old iron horse was Engineer George Peloquin and fireman son Robert. Howard L. DeVault was brakeman and his son Dan was collector. Another son, Dave, was conductor."

Please feel free to use with the e- newsletter if space permits.

Dave Street

Re: New Member

From: Rick Woods

Date: Fri, Feb 21, 2014 2:16 pm

Rick Woods - I am a big fan of the Rock Island and the Granger lines in general. Currently, I am in long range planning for an HO scale layout based on the New York Central "Kankakee Belt" from South Bend, IN to Zearing/Ladd/Churchill, IL. As most of you are probably aware, the RI interchanged with the NYC K-Belt at Depue, IL. I'm researching operations of the RI as it relates to the NYC at Depue. I'm particularly interested in quantity and types of cars interchanged at Depue and the train numbers and times the Depue interchange was worked.

On a related note, I'm sure that many of you are aware that the RI and NYC inaugurated a joint pool power run-through service in 1966 called "Gemini." These trains originated and terminated at Silvis, IL and Elkhart, IN. I'm looking to learn more about this service including when it started and ended, timetable operations, typical motive power assigned, typical freight car types seen, etc. From a posting on Trains Forum by "rrboomer", the RI "contributed three F7 units, two of which had the NYC ATS installed, I think they were the 114 and 120. A Rock Island unit had to lead between Silvis and Depue account cab signal territory". I am aware that the K-Belt and Gemini was covered in a Feb 1969 Trains magazine article and also in an August 1966 Railway Age article (I'm still trying to get my hands on this one).

Subject: Re: RI Track Charts...

Date: Mon, 21 Apr 2014 19:18:49 -0400

Hello Tom. Thought that i would drop you a line and say thanks for the RI Reporter, it is very enjoyable. I am not sure if you are aware of a website called Multimodalways.org. If you go into railroads and then archives nearly the entire RI system is in PDF form of track charts. It took quite a bit of digging on Google to unearth this info! IIRC, the entire railroad is available with the exception of the Des Moines-Allerton, Allerton-KC and Allerton-Eldon. Iowa segments. Keep up the good work. Darren Hill Augusta, IL

r.i. caboose #17786

Date: Sat, Apr 12, 2014 7:17 pm

hi tom

here are some photos of r.i. caboose #17786 setting in the gravel lot of a trucking co across from glenn yard in chicago, ill
caboose is looking very sad , to bad no one did anything with it in the last 30+ years

david johnson

evergreen park, ill





Iowa

Re: Reporter

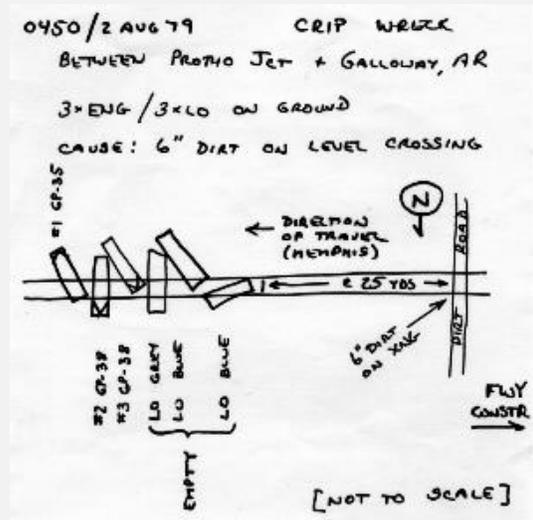
From: welch1003

To: Tom Brugman

Date: Thu, Apr 3, 2014 3:24 pm

These photos were submitted to me by a gentleman whose contact information was lost, and I never got to put them into a publication. I want to credit the person who took the photos Even though their intent was clearly to publish them in RITS publications. In 2010 we were limited to just 8 pages and B&W photography. The 6 photos in the set are best viewed in a color publication. These photos are quite revealing about an incident on the railroad in Arkansas. If we publish one and get the contact information I feel we should publish them all. I received an e-mail back in 2008 or 2009 that was lost in an old computer.

Jim



Oklahoma

RI Reporter

Date: Thu, Feb 27, 2014 8:48 pm

Tom,

My name is Max Patkowski. I am a long-time member of RITS (since 1985 at the ripe old age of 15) and I would like to be included on the distribution list for your newsletter.

I have no memories of the Rock Island while it was alive, but my interest is in the Rock Island from 70s until shutdown. Areas of the Rock Island of particular interest are the Golden State Route, the Southern Division (Oklahoma mostly, and the areas bounded by Enid (north), Elk City(west), Chickasha/Lawton (south), and Shawnee (east), and El Reno of course. I am planning a multi-era (pre-shutdown, and post-shutdown what-if) n scale layout right now that somewhat encompasses the areas above, with El Reno being the centerpiece/focal point. My goal is to faithfully recreate the yard and shops but my research material is sparse. I have a lot of pictures I have pulled from books and the internet but so far I don't have what I really need - a good track diagram or good aerial or elevated pics of the shops/individual buildings.

Anyway, thanks for picking up the mantle of writing a newsletter while things get sorted out with RITS. Not sure what I have to contribute but if I can help in any way let me know.

Thanks again.

Max Patkowski
Mustang, OK
RITS Member, 1985 - ?

HO Models

From: Dean Schirf

Date: Wed, Apr 30, 2014 10:53 am

Here is an example of my HO models that I painted up and took to the back of my acreage here in Harrah, OK to shoot on dioramas blended against the outside landscape(s).....would you be interested in putting these in your newsletter?



Rock Island train 1929

From: Dean Schirf

To: Tom Brugman

Date: Wed, Apr 30, 2014 10:31 am

Rock_Island_train_1929.jpg

Tom, here is a pic of the last Rock Island passenger train passing through downtown Oklahoma City in Nov, 1929 that is headed east bound to Memphis on the ole Choctaw Route....this line, which was always blocking downtown streets by daily freight and passenger trains, was then rerouted a mile south to join the Frisco in serving a newly constructed Union Station.....Dean Schirf Collection



Oregon

Texas

Ed: The following discussion started on one of the online Rock Island chat groups but at least one branch of the discussion went off line. You will want to view the photo in question,

click: <http://www.rpicturearchives.net/showPicture.aspx?id=3786014>

Fwd: [RITSlis] Interesting paint scheme!

From: Thomas Sandlin

Date: Tue, Mar 25, 2014 12:11 pm

Tom - ran into this thing on a CC email from David Engle, he was engaged with others in a discussion of the photo featured in the link, last below, an old F unit with Rock Island type paint job.

I forwarded the thing to my friend old Rock Island hoghead Joe Rayburn for his viewing pleasure. Joe hired out in engine service with the Rock Island in '58, is still running engines for UP outa Ft Worth, still has all of his marbles, and when provoked will share his expertise and personal history with interested parties, see below.

Thought occurred to me - a nice photo with a Rock Island overtone, a rather detailed "take" on the subject of the photo, and events of a related matter on the Rock Island long ago - might be a fit subject for a little short piece in the newsletter.

So here is the whole ball of wax, should you be interested. You have herein Joe's permission to use his text. I'm glad Joe included the bit about Louie LaRotonda, because Louie was a real noted air brake wizard, to include outside the Rock Island. The photo is from a website, some indication of copyright protection, presume some possibility of getting permission (if needed) from photographer Eric Kreszl to publish the photo.

tes

Begin forwarded message:

Tom:

Thanks for the bouquet <grin>.

You may share with Brugman, and no offense will be taken if he cares not to use it. - jtr -

From: Thomas Sandlin

To: J. Rayburn

Sent: Monday, March 24, 2014 2:15 PM

Subject: Re: [RITSlst] Interesting paint scheme!

Joe - your discourse is, at this late date, probably the only place on earth one can still find such commentary on an obscure but then critical series of events on the Late, Great...

Have an idea - any problem with my sharing the photo and your commentary with Tom Brugman, editor of the recently started Rock Island Newsletter, see if he might want to

publish it? Need your approval on the commentary, he can ask the other source for permission to publish the photo.

tes

On Mar 24, 2014, at 12:05 PM, J. Rayburn wrote:

Tom:

Engle is correct. R. I. F's MU connections were high up on the nose (very inconvenient .. made more sense to have them down low as pictured here). R. I. had no winterization hatches. Also, I don't remember seeing a R. I. F with a "firecracker" radio antenna (see center roof line right under pine tree branch). Finally, where the independent air hose bracket is located (see single main reservoir hose hanging down), there is only enough room on the bracket for two other hoses. R. I. F's had four hose connections on their bracket.

The air hose connections is another interesting Rock Island "tid-bit": About the time the F's were in their prime, the mainstay of most railroads' power (including the R. I.) was saturated with F's and GP-7's. On the R. I., the F's had been equipped with 24-RL brake equipment. The GP-7's with 6-BL equipment. I don't know what happened when the Jeeps were ordered (lack of research, I guess), but as it turned out, the 6-BL equipment was not fully compatible with the 24-RL. Bottom line was, when you started hooking engines up for MU operation, on the R. I., neither could lead the other because of missing "actuating action", whereby engine brake cylinder pressure build up is circumvented during an automatic brake application. This deficiency sort of ham-strung the R. I. meaning that all 24 brake equipment would be have to kept together, and all 6 brake equipment together. That would NOT be good, at all, for the operation! So, with their "hat-in-their-hand", the R. I. brass called on their very own air brake wizard, Louie LaRotonda, to see if anything could be done. Louie decided that it could be fixed where an F could lead a GP-7, but a GP-7 could not lead an F. That was good enough for the big boys. F units were then equipped with an additional fourth, MU air hose which would allow venting of brake cylinder pressure on trailing GP-7's, during an automatic brake application. The hose configuration on R. I.'s F's, from the drawbar out, was then "Main Reservoir", "Actuating", "Brake Cylinder" and "Independent Equalizing". The latter line was the magic line that Louie added. You never saw a R. I. GP-7, in an MU consist, leading an F ... would not work. Had to be the other way: the F leading the GP-7. Subsequent locomotive orders (Jeep 9's, 18's, 35's and on and on) had the engines equipped with 26-L equipment (another Louie invention). That equipment featured another "miracle" valve called the MU-2A, up in the

cab, which could be positioned to lead or trail any type of air brake equipment. The 26-L brake is now used universally. In addition to its compatibility during MU-ing, its outstanding feature, as designed by Louie, is that automatic brake operation features self-lapping and pressure maintaining. It offsets brake pipe leakage during any given brake pipe application. Louie's idea and brainstorm entirely. And Westinghouse told him it would not work! I am so proud to say that Louie LaRotonda was my Air Brake Instructor. Rest his brilliant soul. My most cherished R. I. possession is my Engineer's card signed by him.

One more thing about the pictured F in question. I noticed the white stripe, that borders the broader, black stripe; does not go all the way back. This means the engine is not in its original livery. Probably piece mealed together ... a cab from here, a side sheet from there, etc.

Sorry for all the discourse and diversion, Tom. But, you never have told me to shut-up !! - jtr -

From: Thomas Sandlin <high.green@reagan.com>

To: J. Rayburn <RI508@yahoo.com>

Sent: Monday, March 24, 2014 10:32 AM

Subject: Fwd: [RITslist] Interesting paint scheme!

Joe - of possible interest to you, see link in first email at bottom. The Late, Great... lives on.
tes

State Unknown – [please update me – Tom]

HENRY C. CHRISTIE OBITUARY

Henry C. Christie, 79, passed away on Monday, August 7th, 2006, at St. John's Hospital, Tulsa, Okla., after a short illness. A memorial service (will be) at 1:00PM, Thursday, September 21st, at First United Methodist Church in Michigan City, IN.

He was born October 17, 1926, to Robert & Agnes Christie in Newcastle-on-Tyne, England. On December 17, 1976 in Kansas City, Mo., he married Ann Mohegan, who survives in Owasso, Okla.

Henry's career was in the railway industry. He started his railroad career with the Southern Railway in England and continued it after immigrating to the United States in December, 1949. He worked for the New York Central; Chicago Rock Island & Pacific Railroad; Amtrak; Pittsburgh & Lake Erie and Chicago South Shore and South Bend Railroad. After retiring Henry served as Secretary-Treasurer for The Air Brake Association for 11 years, retiring again two years ago.

Mr. Christie's service to the Rock Island included duties as the Assistant Chief Mechanical Officer – Locomotive and Assistant Chief Mechanical Officer – Car. The two positions yielded combined responsibility for 30,000 cars and 605 locomotive units. He also served as the General Superintendent of the Car Department and Manager of Engineering and Research Services. He was a professional member of ASME, AREA, CDOA, LMOA, MENSA, and the Union League Club of Chicago.

The family requests memorial contributions be made to the First United Methodist Church Music Department, 121 E. 17th St., Michigan City, IN 46360, The Railway Supply Institute, Inc., Scholarship Program, 29 W. 140 Butterfield Road, Suite 103-A, Warrenville, IL 60555, Salvation Army or the organization of the donor's choice.

This writer remembers a visit to Mr. Christie's office looking for some RI info, during a visit to college roommates in the Chicago area, summer of 1964, give or take a year. We were ushered into his and Mr. Newton's office at 9AM, and after being advised Mr. Christie had only a few minutes, we quickly covered our research item, and got the info

we needed. We then answered Mr. Christie's questions and otherwise enjoyed a visit with him that lasted until 11:30AM. Some of us in Kansas City also got to visit with him again in the early 1970s. My Thanks to Tom Johnson, President of Branson Scenic Railway, for sending the info that this was written from. DJE

Virginia

Ed: Falls Church, VA, that lonely "Fort Apache" outpost for Rock Island Fans everywhere has been very busy with new websites and newsletters.

ROCK ISLAND ITEMS OF INTEREST

FOUND: Authentic Rock Island Coffee!

Re: Rock Island dining car coffee?

From: Larry Clifford

To: David Engle

Date: Sat, Mar 15, 2014 8:18 pm

Dave,

Sent: Friday, March 14, 2014 9:41 PM

Subject: Re: Rock Island dining car coffee?

Dave,

Thanks for those newsletters. I dropped out of the RITS several years ago and only recently found the Yahoo group. Is there a way for me to subscribe to the RI Reporter?

As for the coffee, I contacted the Phoebe Snow Company directly. Here is what they said:

sales sales@phoebesnowco.com

Mar 14

to Larry, bcc: Phoebe

Larry,

Thank you for your interest in our products.

The way we were able to track it down was by looking through the records of the long defunct American Association of Dining Car Superintendents. There were several meetings over the years where they had discussions over items like coffee. There were a couple that referenced where and what the Rock Island was procuring both before and after WWII. In the years after WWII they were using a roaster named Puhl-Webb. With that information we were able to work with our micro-roaster to come up with the proper mix of beans (South and Central American) and the roasting needed to recreate the blend.

I hope you will consider giving it a try.

Regards,
Tim Stuy
Phoebe Snow Company

I think I am going to order a bag and try it out. Sadly I only had RI coffee in Track One near the end.

Regards,
Larry

ROCK ISLAND HISTORY

Editor: I saved this piece for last. As you all know the men and women who had direct contact with the Rock Island are fading into the past. Along with them, we may be losing details and memories that we all might want to treasure and preserve. The Oral History project that Tom Sandlin has been working on for many years may be one of the most significant efforts in this regard. I personally believe it deserves your attention as a student of that railroad and the era it served.

From: T. E. Sandlin
Liberty Hill, TX
March 11, 2014

Subject: Rock Island Oral History

Since beginning a one man oral history project with former Rock Island employees in 2001, and eventually terminating same in 2009, I have made efforts to interest others in doing railroad oral history, and to this day encourage others to do so, as the opportunities may exist or arise. I consider railroad oral history to be generally an untapped gold mine, just sitting there continuously available. In my view, oral history from railroaders in great measure has had minimal attention from the rail fan and historical community, vis a vis the almost limitless supply of this wealth of railroad history locked up in the minds of mostly old railroaders.

Every person who ever drew a railroad paycheck, not to mention years worth of paychecks, has his or her own slice of railroad history as he or she lived it and worked it. I make no claim to any expertise with oral history, but do have some experience with it. About a dozen years ago I got to thinking about some guys that I had known on the Rock Island, and the fact that every one of them had a bunch of railroad stories, which I love, locked up in his head. At the same time I concluded that likely not one in a thousand of them would ever sit down with a pen and piece of paper, and write some of it, or even sit down with a recorder. Just wouldn't happen, and I understood. On the other hand, with my short experience on the railroad, and long experience with law enforcement guys, in my experience I had rarely met an old railroader or an old cop who, under the right circumstances, wouldn't sit for a spell and talk about what he had done for a living. The fact of the matter is that for the most part, oral history is a form of story telling, and is a generally most pleasant exercise for both the teller and the listener/audience. It in fact is just pure fun.

But it is more than that. It is also educational and informative. And it literally is the oral delivery of real history from the perspective of the teller, most of it being first person, some of it being high quality hearsay. As I thought about my old Rock Island associates (at that time more than 30 years previously), I knew that most of them were older than I, and some of them a lot older. And undoubtedly some of them had already made their final earthly runs. Such a shame that most of those priceless recollections locked up in the minds these guys would be taken to the grave, forever out of reach. The more I thought about it, I started wondering if any of the guys I had known might be willing

to sit down with me and a tape recorder and just run their heads about what they had done for a living for so many years. During this time my wife had passed away, and I had a lot of time on my hands, so I mulled over the idea that maybe I ought to try a couple of these old guys out, see if they would consent to doing a recording or two.

From a trip back east in 2001, on the way back west to my home in Colorado, I made it a point to stop and visit with a couple of old Rock Island hands in Fairbury, Nebraska whom I remembered from when I was assigned to that territory. One of them was an old hoghead and a wonderful storyteller who loved to talk about the railroad, and who had labored on with the UP after the Rock Island crashed and burned. The other man had been the appointive agent at Fairbury. I pitched the oral history idea at them. They both thought it to be an excellent idea, but neither "bought the farm" right then. I told both I would be back in touch, and left town. I motored on over to Belleville, Kansas, an old Rock Island prairie terminal 30 miles away, and contacted a couple of retirees whom I had known, a clerk and a footboard yardmaster. I made my pitch to them, and each said, "Why sure, next time you're coming this way, give me a heads up, and I'll be happy to sit down and talk to your recorder." I told them I'd be back. A few weeks later in a visit to the Little Rock area, I made an effort to locate a man who had been a diesel supervisor at Belleville, but whom I recalled had originally been an electrician at Little Rock. I stirred the pot a bit, and was able to locate and visit with his widow, he having died from a heart attack several years previously.

After we got reacquainted, I told her of my idea for doing oral history. She said, "I know all these old Rock Island guys around Little Rock, let me see if I can help you." A couple of days later she called and said she had someone who was willing to talk to me. Being caught short handed, I had to make quick trips to Best Buy and Radio Shack to buy a Sony cassette recorder and a hand held microphone. I joined my friend the widow in West Little Rock and we drove a couple miles to a nursing home, where we got together with a lady, known as "Miss Ruth," who was 95 years old, almost blind, but still was quite sharp mentally. She had been the superintendent's secretary, and had been married to the division store keeper. Also present was Miss Ruth's 70 year old son, and it was fortunate that Bernard was present. He had grown up in the railroad family, and he had heard a bunch of Rock Island stories over the years. As it developed, Miss Ruth had difficulty in "bringing up" stories to tell, but Bernard made it work, because he would say, "Well, Mother, what about (this)? and Mother, what about (that)?" Then Miss Ruth would lock onto the stories and tell them. The four of us sat and talked and listened and laughed for over an hour, had a lot of fun, and obtained a priceless recording. Several years later I had the privilege of attending Miss Ruth's 100th birthday party. She has since passed away. And the electrician's widow greased the skids for me to get my foot in the door with the Little Rock Rock Island Club, with whom I have done a good handful of oral histories since.

That is how I got started doing oral history, having in mind early that I hoped to do a few of these things if I could find a few people with whom I had worked, who would be willing to talk about the railroad. It did not take long before I exhausted the supply of those whom I had known and whom I now could find, but early on I started asking the guys who else they knew who might be willing to sit down with me and talk to my recorder. This is the primary way, with personal referrals, in which I generated additional prospects. It started that way and just kept rolling along for about 8 years. During each of those years I made from 3 to 5 trips a year, the trips being from 2 to 5 weeks at a time, and was on the road almost exclusively for the purpose of oral history on those trips. I kept a list of prospects, and when I would figure that I had enough potential for a trip in a particular direction or to a certain area, I'd work a trip up on paper, then write letters and send emails to the prospects. Then I would follow up with phone calls.

In that way I would put together an itinerary for a trip, in station order, for me to see each of those who agreed to do a recording, and plugging in specific dates and times onto our calendars. I understood early on that if a guy was not willing to commit to an appointment, with a lead time of 3 or 4 weeks, his interest was insufficient and I would pass. I had quickly found out that if I "bet on the come" and didn't tie a guy down to a date and time certain, by the time I got close or showed up at his town, he invariably had found something else to do or I couldn't find him, and I was stuck paying the freight out on the road with nothing to do. So when I would start a trip, I had all of my appointments cast in concrete, and I would "ride the circuit" until I made all of the appointments and returned home.

Most of the trips were around the old 14 state Rock Island territory, but they did include several trips to the West Coast and two to the East Coast. I never missed an appointment, was late only once, and only got stood up twice. I am grateful to the guys. They were honorable and treated me very well. Although most of the recordings were done with train and engine guys, it literally made no difference to me what craft a person worked in, because I knew that everyone who had been a railroader had something of value to talk about. Early on I figured out that trying to catch up with guys still working was a next to impossible proposition, as I could never make my calendar work with their employment. In all those years I did one recording with a retiree and a working conductor, the conductor having found out about my appointment with the retiree, and he being rested and not called, showed up and gave a fine performance. Otherwise, I made it a point just to stay away from those still on the payroll.

I did manage to get together with a few of them, once they retired. Eventually I experienced difficulty in finding more guys to do recordings, understood that this project couldn't go on forever, and finally for the most part shut it down around the end of 2009. Not too long after I started the project and had had some success, I thought about what to do with the recordings. I saw little if any value in my retaining them, because the point of the project in the first place was to preserve history of the Rock Island, and to have it available to others who might be interested in it. Having been a member of the Rock Island Technical Society for a couple of years by then, I made a proposal to their Board of Directors: I told them what I was doing, and said that I would be pleased to donate the recordings to RITS, if I could have their agreement that I could inform my contacts that RITS, a non-profit railroad historical group, would get the recordings.

For me it was important that I be able to honestly tell my prospects that their stories would go for a good cause, that they would be preserved by an organization dedicated to the preservation of the history of the Rock Island. And further, this would be cost free to RITS. To this the Board readily agreed, and the recordings from those 8 years were donated to RITS. I neither asked for nor received any compensation or reimbursements. There were something over 400 recordings, with probably somewhere between 500 and 600 hours of total recorded time.

Most of the recordings were done with one person, simply by function of luck of the draw and not by design. There were a good handful of recordings with two guys. I particularly liked having two guys, as they invariably had worked together although not always in the same craft, they liked each other, knew a lot of the same or similar stories, were familiar with the same territory, could help each other with recall of details, and they shared the load of doing the talking. I am not unmindful that there is some excess load involved in asking one guy to talk, more or less steadily, for a couple of hours.

Partly by design, and partly by happenstance, not too long after I began doing the travel and the recordings, I figured out that with a few exceptions, most of these guys could and would say what they had to say within about three hours, most recordings being concluded between two and three hours. So I began and continued to plan my itineraries on the basis that I could do a recording in the morning starting around 9am, another starting around 1:30 – 2pm, and another around 6:30 – 7pm. That way I stayed out of their bean periods and in the evening departed before they fell asleep on me. This scheduling also provided time for me to eat between sessions, if I saw fit, but on occasion, if there was travel between sessions, the bean period got postponed or cancelled. I also found that I could do three of these things a day but only for a couple of days running. Being on the road and needing to make contacts ahead of time with upcoming appointments and taking care of other personal and business matters and keeping organized taught me to keep enough space for myself to get everything done, and survive at the same time.

It did not take long before I understood that limiting the recordings to two guys was the best way to do it. Not too long after I started, I acquired a lapel microphone, and then a second one, and a splitter, so that I could “wire up” two guys together. That worked extremely well, and each guy had a microphone attached to his collar, adjacent to his mouth and voice box. Quality of the spoken words with that setup was excellent. Earlier I had experienced difficulty with the hand held microphone, as invariably the story teller would get comfortable and on a roll, and pretty soon the

microphone would be in his lap, giving a less than optimum recording.

I recall from fairly early on of having arranged a pair of recordings that became problematic. On the first one I had contacted an old hoghead and made arrangements to do a recording with him and one of his associates. On the appointed date and time I showed up as expected, was welcomed in, and sat down at the kitchen table and started hooking up my little recording rig. Within 5 minutes, 4 other old hogheads also showed up to participate. I certainly wasn't in a position to "send anyone home," so we cranked it up. And all, including myself, had a fine time for upwards of a couple of hours, them telling stories and ragging on each other, and hooting and hollering. The problem with this situation is that, although the spontaneity cannot be better, the quality of the recording suffers. I'll always remember sitting at the table by the recorder, having a great time listening to an unending stream of railroad stories, but knowing at the same time that the voices of those guys who had migrated to the far reaches of the kitchen would be seriously degraded on the recording. And so they were.

On another occasion at a different location I had arranged to do a recording with an old carman at the home of and with one of his associates. One or both, without my knowledge, had invited 4 or 5 of their fellow retired carmen to participate. At this time I still only had the one microphone, so we parked the recorder more or less near the center of the dining room table, and the microphone was passed around to whomever wished to speak next. This worked, but had an awkward element to it, and slowed things down. So I subsequently made a particular point of trying to limit a recording to two persons, insofar as I could. The ultimate reason for doing the recordings was to preserve the recorded recollections in a form and with quality allowing for the listening to same eventually by complete strangers. I well understood that poor quality recordings would be a serious deterrent to listeners; for myself I knew that if I try to listen to something that is hard to hear or is indistinct, it doesn't take long for me to conclude "To heck with this, it isn't worth my effort," and to pack it in.

A few years back RITS made some effort to reproduce all of the cassette recordings in digital form, and perhaps half of the recordings have been digitized. As of a couple years ago, status of the remaining digitizing effort is unknown. It is understood that at such time as everything is digitized, access to the recordings for several different purposes will be greatly enhanced, as will be the long term preservation of the recordings.

Starting in about 2004 I have used the recordings as the basis of or starting point for 7 or 8 articles for the RITS quarterly magazine, and one recording was the primary source for a story which appeared in CLASSIC TRAINS. I am otherwise aware of only one other member who is believed to have expressed interest in one or more recordings for the preparation of a written piece. I would hope that with greater availability in the future, interested parties will avail themselves of the recordings. There have been a couple of suggestions made to reduce the recordings to transcripts.

Should someone decide to do that, I would not object per se, but have offered the opinion that these raw recordings do not readily lend themselves to becoming words on a page (or even in a computer). These recordings are purely raw, unedited verbal conversations, and mostly one sided conversations. We listen to this material on a recording, and we mostly understand the complete conversation. But there are elements of a raw oral conversation that do not transpose well to a printed version. Human beings do not converse in a "finished" manner, as we have become used to in books and magazines and other printed media, with complete sentences, good grammar, correct punctuation.

Some audible utterances are quite understandable as such, but make quite rugged work for reading "as is." I use the analogy of undercover recordings in law enforcement. Those are usually reduced to transcripts, but eventually if they are used in litigation, experts or the recorded parties testify to them and from them, and all kinds of explanations for what was said is given or is available (and is often quite indispensable). There has been a common presumption that doing oral history, at least insofar as what I have been doing, is doing interviews. I came to understand that what I

did and how I did it, with a few exceptions, was not interviews.

To me an interview has the connotation of seeking specific coverage in a particular topic. It in fact is largely comprised of a question and answer drill. Case in point – I did a recording with an old machinist, age 90 when we got together, and he made sure that he told his favorite Rock Island story, which incidentally took place on the UP between Denver and Limon. When he told the story I thought it was a good one, and told him that I would write it. About a year later I learned that his health was deteriorating, so I got busy writing, as I wanted him to have the opportunity to see it. So I took the recording and reduced it to paper. When I looked at it, I concluded, “That’s a pretty skinny little story, surely we can do better than that.” So I took a few hours, and let my mind run down the same track/territory, and conjured up a whole list of questions related to the story and geography. Then I drove back up to Denver, and he and I spent another couple hours playing question and answer. I went back home, took the new information, and undoubtedly put together a better article. He was able then to see the article in final form, although it was published after he died. (See RITS Digest, Volume 19, “Rockethead”).

This illustrates the way that I have found that the oral history recordings are useful for the preparation of written material, first as the basic information and story. For me I have not found an instance where I could take information “as is” from a recording and use it as the sole basis for a story or an article, even when on a few occasions I had asked some questions when the story was originally being recorded. Because, for me, as it rolls out from the tellers, oral history in fact almost exclusively is an unending stream of short stories, each having happened over the course of a couple of minutes, a couple of hours, a day, or a couple of days. For stories being written, they can all be improved or enhanced with some thought and additional work, and use of several recordings and/or other sources.

In essence in doing the recordings, what I did was to try to get the participants to get comfortable and to talk as long as they would about the railroad. This included trying to get them “pre-loaded,” to have given it some thought ahead of time, to have made some notes if I could get them to do so. Because effectively I had very limited access to almost every one of them, a one-shot deal, I felt I needed to maximize the take from the opportunities. Without being overbearing, I encouraged them to talk as long they were comfortable with what we were doing, and I often told them that it was in fact my intent that they and I have a good time and some fun doing the recordings. If we had fun, the recordings would take care of themselves. And that is literally true.

The way I originally approached doing oral history, and with experience continued to do it basically the same way, was essentially to tell the guys, “I don’t care what you talk about, as long as you talk about the Rock Island Railroad, because if you do that, you are doing exactly what I came here for.” In short the basics of what I wanted from them was what they did, where they did it, who they did it with, how they did it, sometimes why they did it “that way.” My intent was to get each one of these guys to get comfortable with what we were proposing to do, and to get comfortable with me, as to who I am, where I came from, what my motives are, that I was not there to pick their pockets, that I was truly interested in whatever they might say about the Rock Island Railroad, and to record their recollections of the Rock Island, of whatever type and nature.

Most of the guys with whom I did recordings had never heard of me prior to my contacting them initially, and my visit was a one time deal. With most of them I have not had and will not have any further contact, except that every one of them received a “thank you” note from me shortly after doing the recording. I figured they were good enough to take a chance on getting together with a stranger, and I at least owed them an extra measure of thanks. Several of the guys I did a second recording with, as I figured out at the end of the first one that we had not reached the bottom of “their barrel,” and they agreed to do another one later. There is a substantial element of trust necessary to this business, and it is necessary to some degree to get over that hurdle in order to facilitate the free flow of stories. Without this trust/acceptance, it either isn’t going to happen, or it will not happen nearly as well as it could. These guys will not completely bare their souls for me or anyone else regarding what they did for a living, but if they come to have some trust of me, they generally will talk about a whole lot of things.

Oral history in essence is contrived storytelling, storytelling “on demand,” and it is somewhat more difficult than storytelling in a more relaxed, natural setting. For that reason it is necessary for the storyteller and the recording person to work it together, with the storyteller being given plenty of room to go at his speed, and to take breaks occasionally. Many breaks occur naturally, as when the storyteller temporarily can’t think of anything to say, or needs a potty or water break, at which point the recorder is shut off. Often he is just being human, as I have done only one recording with a guy whom I think had a good enough mind and was a world class storyteller, so that had I not suggested taking a break a couple of times in the four hours we spent together, he would have happily just kept chugging and having a great time doing it.

As mentioned above, a real interview is the tool used when specific information is being sought. I have generally used it when I’m looking for additional information for a piece in the process of being written, or if the storyteller is known or believed to have some specific information of interest. And I think generally a good interview should include preparation, to include on the part of the interviewee but particularly by the interviewer. This preparation is an investment for a better result. Well thought out questions and plenty of them will result in a much better and larger “take.” And speaking of preparation, I always encouraged the guys, before I showed up to do the recording, to give this thing some thought, and when they would think of a story they could tell, an incident they recalled, maybe a couple of things they could recall about one of the “characters” they worked with, that they jot down a note for reference when doing the recording. I knew that if they would do so, they would be able to in fact tell more stories, because the notes locked down those stories, and they would not be forgotten during the recording session. I knew this effective shortfall, and tried to overcome it, but results were disappointing. I don’t think more than a dozen guys actually showed up with any notes. But to some degree proving the point, in some subsequent contact with a few guys, they would tell me that after I had little more than vacated their place, they began to think of other things to talk about, but those things just had not come up in their minds while we were “going at it.”

And then there was the old Oklahoma conductor who took my request to make some notes literally, and when a fellow retired conductor and I sat down with him to get started, he pulled out a spiral notebook, which was substantially filled, front and back of the pages, with his notes. His wife was out shopping, so we just “kept on keepin’ on,” finally winding the gig up after almost 5 hours. This guy did almost all of the talking, his associate chipped in here and there, and I walked away with right at 4 hours of recorded railroad stories. Exceptional, but it just proves a couple of points – the individual reservoirs of recollections are deep indeed, and with the overt connivance of the old railroader, the “take” can be greatly increased. As I did every bit of this project on a road trip basis, and paid all of the expenses myself, within reason I made an effort to maximize the gain. Without being overbearing with my collaborators, I encouraged each of them to talk and tell stories for as long as they were having a good time and were comfortable. I frequently laughingly would say, “I can buy more tapes than you can fill, just keep talking.”

I should mention quality of the recordings which I obtained. In my mind there are basically two categories which resulted: 1) Just outstanding, world class storytelling, both as to volume and quality, a fairly small number; 2) good, substantial, very worthwhile material over all, made up the bulk of the recordings. A few of the guys struggled to do the recordings, and I concluded that the “on demand” aspect could be a real impediment. One case in point – I did a recording with a man whom I knew from several prior contacts to be an excellent and very motivated railroad storyteller, but he struggled with the recording. As it was that day, there were a very few occasions when “it just didn’t happen.” Other than travel expenses, which was a fair amount of money over the 8 years of the project, amazingly my costs directly for the project, except for several hundred dollars for blank cassettes, was minimal.

I ultimately purchased a total of two Sony cassette recorders (one as backup), a handheld microphone, and two lapel microphones, all for less than \$150. I am still using the original Sony recorder, including for a lot of “back and forth” use when reducing portions of recordings to handwritten notes necessary for story writing. It has never skipped a beat. I should state that the best reason for doing railroad oral history is the preservation of the individual human slices of it, which for the most part cannot be obtained anywhere else. But I will also honestly state that my personal

driving motivation for doing the project for 8 years was the fact that I love to sit and listen to an old railroader talk about what he did for a living for a lot of years. Just fascinating. My actual payoff for all of the time, effort and money spent on the project took place when I would turn on the recorder, and my new friend would commence the "entertainment." It doesn't get much better than that.

There were several byproducts of the project. I met and have become real friends with a handful of my collaborators, with whom I maintain contact, and whom I tend to regard as my "hip pocket experts" on various railroad matters. I also did business with at least three guys whom I recognized as having some extra potential, and each subsequently at my request wrote an article for the RITS magazine. One of them has additional intent to prepare a couple more articles. And, again at my request, two other guys drafted up proposed articles, one of which was published as written, and I collaborated with the other to get his piece ready for submittal to the editor.

It was not infrequently that while I was with one of the guys, he would have some materials, typically paper and photographs, which he had retained from the railroad, and which he would happily make available for my perusal. For me this was a bonus and privilege, and on several occasions I borrowed some of their materials for use in article preparation. All of this is material which, without the project, likely would never have seen the light of day outside of the owners' families and close circle of friends. This brings me to perhaps the most important point of all of this – not one of us will be here forever, many have already made their final runs, and the clock is still running.

A few years back I actually found a very few old Rock Island hogheads who had had a bit of steam experience, but they were few and far between. I did a recording with an old hoghead in Wyoming who was both a UP and Rock Island veteran. The recording was about his Rock Island time, but he also mentioned that he started his career in engine service on steam on the UP. I don't know if he ever recorded his UP experiences prior to his death, but hope that he did so.

There likely are still a few old Rock Island veterans whom I never ran across who, if afforded an opportunity, could and would talk about their long ago endeavors. These opportunities will not last forever. And make no mistake, I by no means limit my views only to engine service. Trainmen, switchmen, clerks, operators, signalmen, B & B guys, MOW guys, traffic guys, machinists, electricians, laborers, and not least the ladies. I will throw out one other suggestion as a compelling reason for doing an oral history project, and in particular doing it now, rather than later. It is a matter of fact that in the "good old days," railroads, like a lot of other businesses and enterprises, were people places. Around railroad properties, one did not have to look far to spot one or lots of employees doing company business. But beginning perhaps after World War II, and escalating greatly with the advent of the digital age, railroads have become something else. For this, I don't have to draw a picture. You know it.

Nowadays being around a railroad is likely to reveal the presence of few, if any, employees. They have largely been replaced with black boxes driving gizmos that do the work. This is not criticism, only statement of fact. As I have long viewed railroads until recently, I considered that a railroad consisted of two primary elements: the property and the equipment, which are the things which originally drew most of us to our interests in railroads; and the people who continually did the work and made it happen.

Either one, without the other, was of no significance, no reason for being there. Now, the property and the equipment are still there, bigger and better than ever; but the humans have largely disappeared. But the good part is that the people who were taking care of business for the Company at the end of steam and into the early and mid diesel eras are in considerable numbers still with us.

Those are the people who were down in the yards and shops, and out on the road every day, doing the work. Those who are still here have a great reservoir of recollections from their employment, and generally are quite pleased with an opportunity to provide those recollections for historical preservation. They in fact are the primary witnesses, and frequently the only ones. Once they are all gone a few years down the road, oral history from railroaders in large

measure won't be very appetizing outside IT and sophisticated mechanical and electrical matters. These employees were the heart and soul of the railroad, they "made it happen," they were the glue that held it together, and they are close to being the sole remaining source for railroading "from the inside."

Should anyone wish to contact me about this, I would be pleased to talk or email on the subject.



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128 Whittier Circle, Falls Church, Virginia 24046

Thomas Brugman, publisher and editor – Email: editor@rockislandnewsletter.com

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