

Our Museums

Clean up your displays. In 1982 I was in Bellevue, Ohio, photographing ex-NKP 2-8-4 765, and spent a few moments around the Mad River & NKP RRHS grounds. No operations, strictly a static exhibit. But every string of cars had an engine at one end, and strings of freight cars had a caboose. In a small space the Mad River group manages to convey quite a lot. Compare this to some of the more notorious collections in the Deep South, where there's no rhyme or reason to the arrangement of equipment.

Show the entire environment. Interpretation is the not-so-new standard in the field. Don't just display a switcher; switch some cars from the proper era, with roofwalks. (And not with radios - make the crew learn proper hand signals.) Don't just offer a train ride - show life at the station as it was, with baggage handling, mail exchange, orders being delivered, a couple of retirees loafing at the depot. Atmospheric, not antiseptic, should be the goal.

Our counterparts in England excel at this. Visit the Ramsbottom station on the East Lancashire Railway, or Damems on the Worth Valley, or Horsted Keynes on the Bluebell. The station area reeks of a period, be it Victorian, Edwardian, or post-war. When trains meet, batons are exchanged, baggage carts are rolled to the guard's van, crewmen share a quick conversation. You feel like you're a part of the period - and you learn a little about the context in which the railroad was a large part of daily life, a context now changed by Motorways, television, and urban sprawl.

And on selected weekends, these lines (and most other "preserved railways" in the UK) pull out all the stops for a "Gala." Extra passenger services are laid on, freight trains are run, sometimes locomotives are hired from other lines or private owners. (Imagine what kind of gala the C&TS could put on with a K28 borrowed from Durango.)

Interpretation and education should be the reason that any museum exists today. And education does not have to be stuffy or classroom-based. It's not giving the construction details of Ol' Number 999, or dry statistics about corporate entities and dates. Explain WHY the East Tennessee & Virginia was built, not just when. Relate WHERE Ol' Number 999 worked, WHAT she hauled, and WHY she was replaced. Note that our agricultural society rapidly became an industrial one after 1918, and that this change fundamentally affected the railroads. Look to Old Stourbridge, Plimouth, and Williamsburg for inspiration.

Let me close with a concrete example. The Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum in Chattanooga, Tennessee, operates a steam-hauled passenger train daily during the tourist season. Both ends of the short run feature stations; crewmen are properly attired in white shirts and black hats and trousers. It's one of the better train rides. But a few of the above ideas - offering a demonstration of the RPO and baggage cars as well as the turntable demonstration, comparing orders at the operator's window - would raise the TVRM experience a notch or two on the Interpret-O-Meter. Maybe many people wouldn't notice - but many would.

And isn't it important that we educate as well as enjoy?

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WPRRHS

By Thom Anderson

Here is an update on the status of the Headlight magazine. Mike Mucklin has completed the work on issue #17. It will go to press in March and be in your hands by early April, if not sooner. I apologize for the extreme tardiness of this issue, and extend my thanks to all of you for your patience.

There are also some changes taking place on the staff. Frank Brehm is assuming the Production Manager duties effective with issue #18. Dave Pires is moving into the Editor position. I am confident these gentlemen will keep the magazine on schedule in the future.

As you read in the previous Train Sheet, the FRRS has acquired the WP hospital site near the Museum. This presents an opportunity to the Historical Society to find a permanent, non-rolling location for the archives that are less subject to weather conditions of the seasons. Anyone with input or assistance on this should contact Director Frank Brehm or Archive Curator John Walker. Your participation is most welcome.

Steve Hayes has the 2001 Convention set to go. Presentations include such subjects as the Nevada Northern Ry., WP 50' PS-1 double door boxcars, a history of the Highline, the Tesla District, the Tidewater Southern, slides, movies, research techniques, and more - don't miss it! The date is April 27-28 at the Modesto Holiday Inn. Additional information and a registration form can be found at the WPRRHS website (www.wprrhs.org), or by contacting Steve at P.O. Box 1083, Soulsbyville CA 95372 (209)536-1847.

Donations, New Members

We would like to thank the following individuals and families who made donations to our Society and Railroad Museum. Your support is appreciated very much.

Frank Aguilar, James D. Anderson, Norman E. Anderson, Dean Billing, Kent & Gail Brezee, Robert L. Brown, M.D., Bob & Beverly Campisi, Michael Capolupo, Edward J. DeLozier, Esq., Jerry Esmay, Ken Falconer, Steven & Judy Fauth, Jason Ferreira, Barry Garrett, John J. Grasso, Wilson Harkins III, Philip Heckmann, Josiah F. Jenkins, Darel Johnson, Robert J. Kirker, Fred & Margaret Klyver, Jerry Mittelholtz, Lynda Monger, Margaret A. Mustard, Tomas Parra, Andrew & Julia Petersen, Robert Pires, Jay & Julie Sarno, James Schindler, Ralph E. Shafer, Terry & Susan Taylor, David, C & E Thompson, Steve Van Denburgh, and Mark B. Williams.

Tim Sweeney of Sweeney-Rose Architects made a special donation as a memorial to Katharine Myra Coleman McNeill.

We would like to welcome our newest life and family life members to the Society.

Patrick Bartlett, Noel D. Thomas, Thomas Mabie, and Wayne Monger.

Joel Louis Salmons - Family Life.