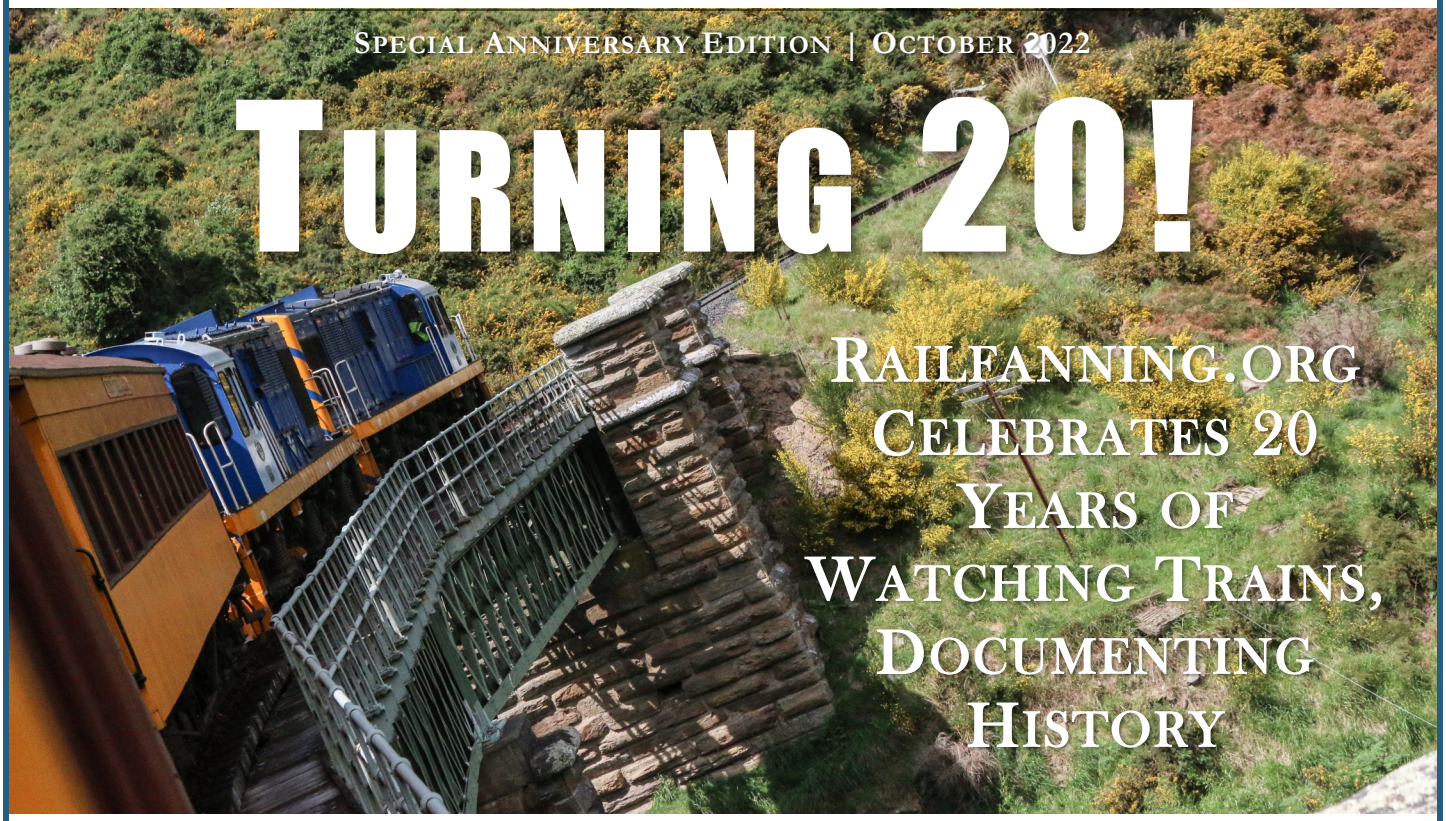
RAILFANNING.ORG

THE CROSS-TIE

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY EDITION | OCTOBER 2022



TURNING 20!

RAILFANNING.ORG CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF WATCHING TRAINS, DOCUMENTING HISTORY

Railfanning.org is celebrating 20 years of watching trains and documenting the nearly forgotten stories from history.

Internet records show the pioneering website was registered on October 7, 2002. But the site's history dates to January 27, 2002, when an earlier iteration launched on another site, which evolved into Sightseers' Delight.

To celebrate 20 years, Railfanning.org has launched a special section that includes recreated versions of former designs. The section also includes a timeline highlighting some of the pivotal moments in the site's history.

To celebrate, the site plans to publish exclusive content in honor of two decades of documenting railroad history. It also republished some content that was inadvertently removed over the years as the site moved platforms and changed from a site with each page manually coded to a content management system.

Railfanning.org tells the story of the railroads, both past and present. The site, formally launched in 2002, includes news and information about the railroad industry, vignettes about well-known and obscure moments in railroad history and details about communities the railroad has shaped.

The site is published and edited by Todd DeFeo, who has written multiple books about railroads, including the first-ever complete histories of several lines. He also hosts the Railfanning Review podcast, which includes interview guests, a rundown of headlines and in-depth examinations of railroad history.

NOTEWORTHY

- *Railfanning.org was registered on October 7, 2002*
- *The first edition of The Cross-Tie published in January 2003*
- *The first Railfanning Review podcast appeared in June 2006*
- *The site led to the first-ever complete histories of several railroads*

Did Sabotage Cause the Budds Creek Disaster of 1869? We May Never Know

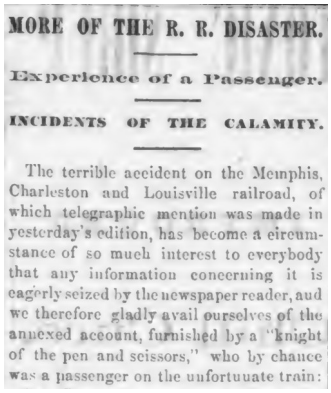
DREADFUL RAILROAD ACCIDENT.

A TRAIN BREAKS THROUGH TRESTLE WORK.

CARS WRECKED AND BURNED.

Three Persons Killed and a Number Wounded.

THE NAMES OF THE VICTIMS.

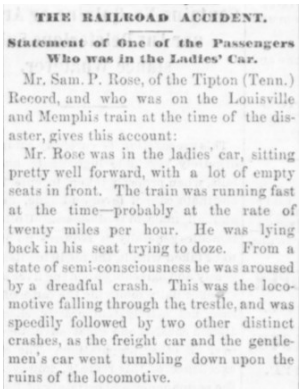


MORE OF THE R. R. DISASTER.

Experience of a Passenger.

INCIDENTS OF THE CALAMITY.

The terrible accident on the Memphis, Charleston and Louisville railroad, of which telegraphic mention was made in yesterday's edition, has become a circumstance of so much interest to everybody that any information concerning it is eagerly seized by the newspaper reader, and we therefore gladly avail ourselves of the annexed account, furnished by a "knight of the pen and scissors," who by chance was a passenger on the unfortunate train:



THE RAILROAD ACCIDENT.

Statement of One of the Passengers Who was in the Ladies' Car.

Mr. Sam. P. Rose, of the Tipton (Tenn.) Record, and who was on the Louisville and Memphis train at the time of the disaster, gives this account:

Mr. Rose was in the ladies' car, sitting pretty well forward, with a lot of empty seats in front. The train was running fast at the time—probably at the rate of twenty miles per hour. He was lying back in his seat trying to doze. From a state of semi-consciousness he was aroused by a dreadful crash. This was the locomotive falling through the trestle, and was speedily followed by two other distinct crashes, as the freight car and the gentlemen's car went tumbling down upon the ruins of the locomotive.

Newspapers carried news about the Budds Creek tragedy, and at times, their stories ran rampant with speculation about what actually happened. It was akin to the Twitter of the day. (Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

It was about 1 a.m. on July 28, 1869, when the No. 2 express train was steaming toward Clarksville, Tennessee, when it approached a bridge crossing Budds Creek.

Exactly what happened in rural Montgomery County, Tennessee, was the subject of considerable debate.

The train crashed into the creek bed below. A fire began to consume the train's cars. Only the sleeping car at the rear of the train did not fall into Budds Creek. Five people ultimately died as a result of the wreck.

The question that remains more than 150 years later: Was sabotage to blame for the wreck? Like so many stories from history, the truth is hard to discern.

A few days after the wreck, a correspondent for the Cincinnati Commercial, who coincidently rode over the spot of the crash four days before the tragedy, returned to the scene to inspect it.

"There seems to have been a systematic attempt to conceal the real facts in the case, and to set afloat fictions in their place. The facts seem to show culpability on the part of the directors of the road; the fictions seem intended to throw the responsibility anywhere but where it should rest."

The writer claimed the bridge's timbers were "water soaked, split and rotten in many places." The writer also said the bridge's timbers were made of poplar, not oak or red pine that was readily available in the area and claimed a "reliable officer of the company" maintained the railroad's chief engineer previously reported the trestle to be unsafe.

Despite his speculation, the writer seemed unaware of a December 1866 wreck in roughly the same location. Otherwise, the newspaper would have had a vast conspiracy to promote in its pages. Curiously, the writer also indicated the $100,000 of specie — or coins — allegedly on the train was not on board at the time of the crash.

In a newspaper interview following the wreck, Conductor Lowe felt the train "check up from the reduced pressure of steam as the engine approached the structure over Budd's Creek."

Lowe was confident the engineer was not to blame and believed defective timbers were to blame.

However, an inspector checked the bridge a few days before the wreck. Lowe refuted the assertion the train was speeding, saying the train was running its usual 15 miles per hour for that section of track.

In September 1869, F.O. Anderson, an assistant attorney general, had summonses served on several Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville employees, including the railroad's leadership.

News reports published following the wreck pushed a narrative that some level of nefarious actions played a role in the wreck.

By November 1869, following a "careful and full investigation," Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville Superintendent Robert Meek and the railroad's leadership "were entirely exonerated from all blame."

Because the wreck happened on its line, the Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville was financially liable for damages, which amounted to more than $25,000, including $11,241.91 to passengers who lost their luggage in the disaster.

In 1870, a Tennessee committee looking into the Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville blamed defective rolling stock belonging to the Louisville and Nashville was to blame. Perhaps the actual cause of the disaster is likely lost to history. Regardless, the railroad quickly rebuilt the bridge and returned the line to service.

Fact or Fiction? The Myth of the Hobo Riding the Rails

The hobo is one of the most enduring myths of the railroad. But how much of the hobo's story is fact, and how much of the legend is fiction?

Like many stories throughout history, the story has been glorified over the years.

A hobo is someone who travels looking for work, and according to Merriam-Webster, the word first appeared in 1888. The first hobos probably emerged in the years after the Civil War.

"The hobo is perpetually travelling long distances, not because he has to go anywhere particularly, but because he has to get out of somewhere else," an article in Everybody's Magazine read. "Under pressure of extreme necessity he walks; as a rule, whether he has a short journey in view or whether he intends to cross the entire continent, he goes by train.

"How he does this is interesting," the author noted. "He pays no fares at all; unlike people who do, he does not travel from station to station, but joins trains after they have left one depot and before they have arrived at another. He travels on all parts of the trains except inside the passenger coaches."

While they are sometimes used interchangeably, some said a hobo is different from a tramp or a bum.

"A hobo is an honest man, temporarily embarrassed financially, who finds it necessary to travel in order to find work," *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper in 1913 quoted H. B. Kenny, conductor of the International Workers' Union of America, as saying.

"And a tramp is nothing but a guy who roams around, won't work and lives by begging, while a bum is just a bum sets around the saloons and the curbs and hasn't got ambition or nerve enough to tote a grip," *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper in 1913 quoted C.W. Trenary, warden of the union, as saying.

While hoboing might seem like fun, it was in fact dangerous. Tens of thousands of hobos were killed or injured, and railroad discouraged the practice.

"Our chief objection to the presence of hoboes on our trains is the great danger to life and limb," a railroad inspector wrote in *The Daily News-Journal* of Murfreesboro, Tennessee, in 1932.

Mulligan Stew is a Hobo Essential. But What Exactly is It?

Mulligan Stew is one of those railroad myths that has made it into everyday parlance. It's an essential for hobos riding the rails, but what exactly is it?

According to legend, Mulligan stew is a dish hobos prepared in their camps during the early 20th century.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Mulligan stew as "a stew made from whatever ingredients are available" and its first-known use dates to 1894. The stew was traditionally created using ingredients hobos begged, borrowed or stole and shared among their group.

"A hobo stew, or Mulligan, has great staying qualities," the *Evening Star* newspaper in Washington, D.C., noted in its September 30, 1899. "An Irish stew is a Mulligan. But a Mulligan is not, necessarily, simply an Irish stew. Anything goes in a hobo Milligan, even if it is paid for. It is generally cooked in a five-gallon coal oil can and eaten from tomato tins."

Because of its history, there is no formal recipe for Mulligan Stew.

"You put in everything in mulligan stew but your socks," *The Associated Press* in 1980 quoted hobo king Gordon "Bud" Filer as saying. "And those you keep to strain your coffee. You put in anything at all — potatoes, onions, maybe chicken or meat if a butcher gave you some. You didn't buy any of the ingredients. You got them from gardens or farms, or worked for people who would give them to you."

Learn the Hobo Lingo

- **Accommodation Car**: Caboose
- **Bindle Stick**: The sticks hoboes carry with their belongings wrapped in cloth
- **Big House**: Prison
- **Bull**: A railroad officer
- **Flip**: Board a moving train
- **Hot**: Either a hot meal or a hobo who is a fugitive
- **Jungle**: An encampment where hoboes stayed
- **Nickle Note**: A $5 bill
- **On the Fly**: Jump from a moving train
- **Rum Dum**: A drunkard
- **Sky Pilot**: A preacher or a minister

The Caboose is a Beloved Rail Car, But How Much Do You Know About It?

The caboose may be the most recognizable railroad car, but they are rarely seen on the rails today. That's true even if they haven't been a fixture of the American railroad for decades.

Interestingly, the word caboose may derive from the Dutch word "kombuis." It originally referred to a galley on a ship.

Since they first appeared on the railroad scene, "the caboose has been the post for those monitoring the air pressure in braking systems, watching for dragging equipment, looking out for hazardous load shifts and, most important, checking car axles for overheated bearings that can lead to derailments," The New York Times reported in 1985.

According to estimates, there were approximately 2,700 cabooses in use on American railroads in 1870. By 1900, there were more than 17,600 on the rails.

For starters, one of the most prevalent misconceptions is that all cabooses are red. In fact, cabooses appeared in various colors, including green, blue and yellow, depending on the railroad.

Here are five lesser know facts about cabooses (for the record, the plural is cabooses, not cabeese).

On the previous page, a Norfolk & Western caboose built in 1940 sits at the Southeastern Railway Museum in Duluth, Georgia, on April 1, 2017. To the left, a Family Lines caboose built in 1970 is on display at the museum on October 7, 2018. (Photos by Todd DeFeo/The Cross-Tie)

Mysterious Origins

Cabooses probably date to the 1830s, but the precise details of their history are uncertain. According to one theory, Auburn and Syracuse Railroad Conductor "Uncle Nat" Williams set up an office in an empty boxcar at the end of a freight train. He used a wood box for a chair and a barrel for a desk where he completed his paperwork.

Repurposed Cars

Railroads often repurposed old railcars into cabooses.

At the Southeastern Railway Museum in Duluth, Georgia, Georgia Railroad Nos. 2866 and 2489 are two such examples. The railroad used old boxcars to create these cabooses. The railroad built Number 2489 during World War II when there was a steel shortage.

Different Designs

One common misconception is that all cabooses have cupolas. History credits Chicago & North Western Conductor T. B. Watson with creating the cupola caboose in 1863.

Another common design is the bay window caboose, allowing conductors to watch trains from the side. Some sources indicate the Akron, Canton and Youngstown Railroad first used the bay window in 1923.

As trains grew larger over the years, railroads turned to extended-view cabooses. In this configuration, the cupolas are wider than the body of the caboose, giving conductors a better view of their trains.

Home on the Road

For workers on the railroad, the caboose was home. Initially, the rear brakeman, responsible for applying the handbrakes to the freight cars on the train's rear, worked out of the caboose.

While cabooses might seem like a fun place to work, they were lonely as crews were away from their families for extended stretches. They could also be dangerous. In addition to derailments and train collisions, excess slack in the train could throw workers from their positions.

Undone by Technology

Until the 1980s, laws mandated that freight trains have cabooses. However, several changes signaled the end of the line for cabooses.

New labor agreements reduced train crews' hours of service requirements. With the change, crews no longer needed cabooses for lodging, and computer record-keeping meant crews did not necessarily need rolling offices.

"Well, there are romantic things always going out," Union Pacific railroad spokesman told *The Associated Press* in 1985. "There are no more gas lights on the streets. It's a matter of economics and crew safety. The caboose simply has outgrown its usefulness. It's outmoded."

Also, remote radio devices named "End of Train" devices (EOTs) attached to the last car of the train measure the train's air brake pressure and alert the train crew at the front of the train of any problems, and scanners along the tracks monitor passing trains for problems.

(Photo by Todd DeFeo/The Cross-Tie)

Transporting Vehicles Via Rail Dates to Earliest Days of Railroading History

Autorack cars are a staple of railroads today, transporting everything from new cars from ports to military equipment. What many people may not know is they have a unique history that dates back to the earliest days of railroading.

The modern autorack cars were introduced in the 1960s. However, railroads have transported vehicles — initially wagons — for decades.

In 1964, the Association of American Railroads (AAR) said railroads had at least 10,000 autorack cars. That represented an increase from the 7,730 the year before.

In 1959, the year before the modern autorack car debuted, railroads moved about 538,000 new motor vehicles from manufacturing plants, representing about 8 percent of the cars produced. In 1964, AAR predicted railroads would move about 3 million cars, roughly one-third of the new vehicles produced.

In 2019, railroads moved about 75 percent of the 17 million of the new cars and light trucks purchased in the United States, according to numbers from the AAR.

On the previous page, a train pulling autorack cars passes through Smyrna, Georgia, in January 2017. To the left, a train with autorack cars passes through Manchester, Georgia, in September 2012. (Photos by Todd DeFeo/ The Cross-Tie)

The Early Years

Joseph Ritter von Baader (1763-1835), a German engineer, is an oft-overlooked railroad pioneer. Circa 1822, he proposed hauling wagons on flat cars, much like the piggyback shipping process of the 20th century. However, it doesn't appear that his idea gained much traction initially.

The Liverpool & Manchester Railway likely hauled coaches on flat cars when it opened in 1830. In the United States, the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) similarly transported coaches in the 19th century.

Around this time, in the United States, former President John Quincy Adams traveled on the B&O between Baltimore and the "Relay House," a former eating house on the railroad. For the journey, the railroad loaded Adams' wagon onto a "four-wheel platform-car."

More Recent Developments

Autorack cars similar to the ones that glide up and down modern railroads entered the scene in the 1920s. But, railroads did not experience a proliferation of such cars until the 1950s, and the modern iteration of the rail car appeared in 1960.

At the same time, as truck traffic increased, railroads developed a way to haul trailers.

By the late 1960s, piggyback cars were increasingly appearing on the nation's railroads. By 1967, railroads carried half of all vehicles produced in the country to distribution centers.

That same year, railroads carried more than 1.2 million trailers, an increase of 3.8 percent over 1966, according to an *Associated Press* report.

Specialized Designs

In the latter half of the 1960s, General Motors and Southern Pacific partnered to develop a car to haul the new compact Chevrolet Vega. The new railcars, known as "Vert-A-Pac," could hold 30 Vegas, which Chevrolet produced from 1970 to 1977, in a vertical, nose-down position.

General Motors and Southern Pacific also teamed up on the Stac-Pac. The specialized railcar was designed to haul a dozen Oldsmobile, Buick, and Cadillac models.

The cars traveled in an enclosed tri-level container. An 89-foot flatcar could carry four of these containers.

Most people consider autorack cars to be freight cars. However, one railroad famously adapted them for passenger service.

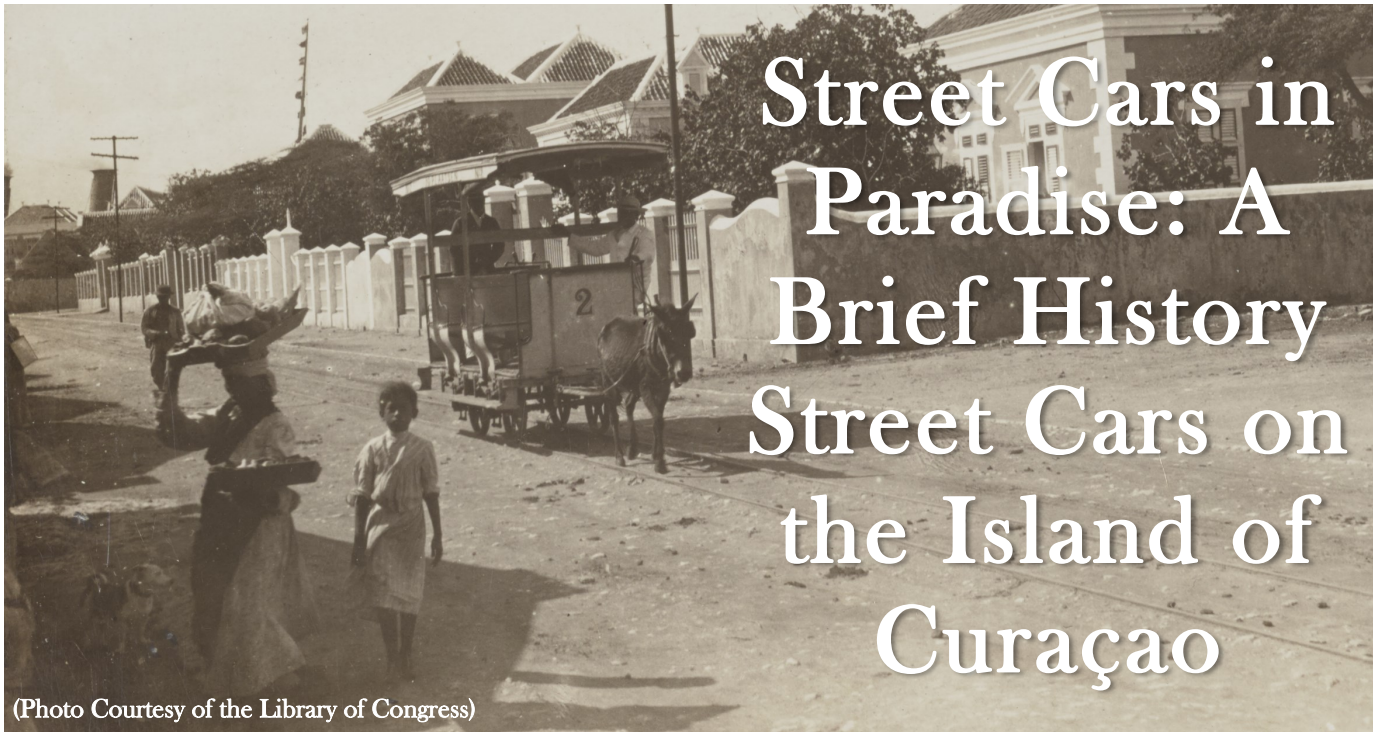
On December 6, 1971, Auto-Train Corporation launched a new form of passenger rail when it began the original incarnation of the Auto Train between Lorton, Virginia, and Sanford, Florida, allowing passengers to drive to one terminal, ride the train to the other and continue their road trip.

Amtrak runs the Auto Train today.

Today's Autoracks

Early autorack cars were open-air, making them susceptible to vandalism and theft, and vehicles transported by rail often arrived damaged or missing high-end accessories.

Today's autorack cars feature closed sides and interior adjustable decks, allowing the cars to handle automobiles with different body styles and heights.



Street Cars in Paradise: A Brief History Street Cars on the Island of Curaçao

(Photo Courtesy of the Library of Congress)

Curaçao is not a railroad hotspot today, but the island does have a railroad history. Over the years, local mine trains and streetcars operated on the island.

The island's first railroad likely opened in 1874 on Curaçao's southeastern coast to transport phosphate from local mines. A tramway transported materials from Table Mountain (Tafelberg) to Fuik Bay.

The operation lasted for more than a decade and shuttered circa 1887. It apparently re-opened in 1910 and operated until about the mid-1970s.

The island's passenger streetcar system dates to April 1884, when Abraham Salas received a concession to build a tramway. The Curaçao Streetcar (or Tramway) Company was likely founded in February 1886 and apparently was capitalized with 23,750 florins (the local currency).

On April 20, 1887, a mule-drawn tramway opened in Punda in the capital city of Willemstad, running from the intersection of Breedestraat and Herenstraat through Pietermaai and Julianaplein to Scharloo. The 2-kilometer, U-shaped line running around the Waaigat harbor was single-tracked and included a passing track in Julianaplein.

Casper Perret Gentil later took over the tramway.

On June 1, 1896, a second tram line, the Curaçao Horse Railway Company (Curaçaosche Paarden Spoorweg Maatschappij), opened on Breedestraat in Otrabanda, across Sint Annabaai from Punda. However, the line was short-lived, and by December, after just a few months, the Otrabanda tram ceased operations.

There was a significant change in 1910 when the first vehicles appeared on the island.

The following year, the local government ordered the Punda tram to stop running, saying it wasn't meeting its obligations.

In the fall of 1911, the Curaçao Motor Tramway Company (Curaçaoschen Tramwegdiens) began operations on a newly rebuilt mile-and-a-half line in Punda, which more or less followed the former horse line.

The new system relied on two cars built by British-based Sidney Straker and Squire that could each carry 30 passengers.

The cars were powered by a six-cylinder 40- or 60-horsepower gasoline engine mounted to the front of each car. The motorman could control the cars from either end of the car.

The line had 1-meter gauge tracks, its 60-pound rails imported from Germany. Interestingly, each car only ran about half the distance, and passengers transferred at the midpoint.

In 1920, the Curaçao Motor Tramway ended operations.

Editor's note: There is a lot of conflicting information about streetcar lines in Curaçao. The article pulls together the most reliable information possible.

A Closer Look at the Once Important Railroad Hub of Kingston, Georgia

While its streets are quiet today, Kingston, Georgia, was once a busy borough railroad interchange, and at least four hotels operated in the town.

Even before the railroad bisected the community in the mid-19th century, Kingston was a stagecoach stop. The community, named for John Pendleton King, a long-time president of the Georgia Rail Road, was once described as a "wicked" town.

However, by 1852, it was "improving in morals." The wye — or "Y" — where the Western & Atlantic and Rome railroads interchanged is still visible in the heart of the downtown district. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the city was "where you change cars."

Today, the town is likely best remembered for its role in the Great Locomotive Chase of 1862, when Union spies stole a locomotive in the hopes of destroying the Western & Atlantic. However, they were delayed here by rail traffic, and the town is known as a turning point in the raid.

The first depot pre-dates the Civil War, but Sherman's troops destroyed it in 1864. A second depot was erected circa 1870, but it burned in December 1892. A replacement structure burned in July 1974. Its foundations are still visible.

One of the most foreboding landmarks in town — the DeSoto Hotel, or at least the remnants of the building that once housed it — dates back to 1911 amid the railroad's heyday.

The original incarnation of the DeSoto was a 20-room building, and a newspaper account suggests it was built on the site of the former Cloud House, one of several hotels that once operated in the town.

Accounts suggest it opened in about early February 1911. However, a March 15, 1911, fire that destroyed much of the city claimed the new hotel.

By May 1911, the city was being rebuilt, and a new 14-room DeSoto Hotel opened in November 1911.

By October 1920, the hotel was renamed the New Kingston Hotel.

Over the years, the hotel was a favorite "haunt" of traveling salesmen, known as drummers, who would arrive in the city via the railroad. The hotel had a "special sample room" where salesmen displayed wares.

In addition to passenger trains connecting here, freight trains would often lay over in town. However, by the 1970s, the city was in decline.

The trains no longer stop in Kingston, and Interstate 75 bypassed the town. But for anyone looking to learn more about how communities staked their fortunes on the railroad, start with a visit to Kingston.

Editor's note: The above was adapted from "The 'Crookedest Road Under the Sun': A Driving Tour of the Western & Atlantic Railroad."

Clarksville, Tennessee, Railroad Workers Strike After Money Tightens

When the money ran out on the Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville Railroad, employees refused to work, and a nearly two-week strike began on February 6, 1868.

The Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville Railroad was chartered on January 28, 1852, and ran from Paris, Tenn., to Guthrie, Ky. The road connected with two other routes — the Memphis & Ohio Railroad and the Louisville & Nashville Railroad — to provide rail service from Memphis to Louisville.

The tracks were laid on the eve of the Civil War, and the first train rolled down the line from Clarksville to the Tennessee-Kentucky state line on October 1, 1859, according to newspaper accounts of the time. Laying tracks between Clarksville and Paris began on October 24, 1860, and construction was completed on March 21, 1861. However, a bridge crossing the Tennessee River, west of Dover, wasn't yet finished and by the time trains running between Memphis and Guthrie were operational, the Civil War had started.

After a five-year lull, post-war train service resumed on August 13, 1866. However, by 1867 both the Memphis & Ohio Railroad and the Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville Railroad were on the verge of bankruptcy after they defaulted on their state bonds. Salaries and bills went unpaid, eventually leaving the railroads unable to operate.

On February 6, 1868, trains on the Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville stopped operating "due to an unwillingness on the part of its employees to work without being paid," historian Kincaid Herr noted in his 1960 chronicle of The Louisville & Nashville Railroad.

For 11 days, the Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville Railroad was dormant, and trains were rerouted via the Nashville & McKenzie and the Nashville & Northwestern railroads. The Clarksville Chronicle, on February 21, 1868, printed a statement from then-Tennessee Governor William G. Brownlow, who opposed the railroad's strike.

"I regard to the whole affair as a regular conspiracy against the State authorities and the road," the governor said. "I do not propose to yield to the mob spirit of any combination, monstrating to these men that the State can do as well without the advantages of the road, as the employees can without the employment, or the citizens without the active operations of the road through its disloyal territory."

The newspaper condemned the governor, whom it referred to as the "imp of darkness," for his remarks, calling them a "slander against the men who are superiors in his everything."

"(The governor) professes to see it in a huge rebellion against the State and his imperial power and scruples not to charge said strike upon our citizens and the rebellious district through which the road runs," the paper said. "The charge is grossly false and as malicious as it false. – Petty tyrants see rebellion in every manifestation of private or public virtue; it is the result conscious guilt which makes cowards of the boldest."

Instead of selling the road to the larger Louisville & Nashville Railroad, the Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville Railroad sought to lease the company. That action essentially extended the life of the railroad by about three years.

"Some Memphis merchants continued to fear that L&N domination would result in commercial discrimination against their city," wrote Historian Maury Klein in his 1972 history of the Louisville & Nashville.

"Goaded mainly by public clamor over this anxiety, the Clarksville rejected every L&N overture and vowed to operate the road free of outside control. While this stance met with popular approval, it led to financial disaster. The Clarksville lacked any resources to rehabilitate its line, and earnings failed to pay even operating expenses."

When the Louisville & Nashville Railroad leased the Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville Railroad in 1868, it supported it financially and helped improve its infrastructure — including its 86 miles of track. Despite the improvements, the Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville Railroad couldn't operate self-sufficiently and finally folded on September 30, 1871.

The Louisville & Nashville Railroad merged with the Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railway on August 30, 1957. In 1972, the railroad was incorporated into the Family Lines, which ultimately folded into CSX on July 1, 1986.

CSX today operates the former Louisville & Nashville Railroad, which runs through Guthrie, Ky. R.J. Corman, a short line based in Nicholasville, Ky., operates a section — from Cumberland City, Tenn., to Guthrie, Ky. — of the Memphis, Clarksville & Louisville Railroad's former main line.

A version was published in the January 2003 edition of The Cross-Tie.

Open Cumberland River Swing Bridge Led to an 'Appalling Catastrophe'

It was an "appalling catastrophe," the newspaper headlines proclaimed.

At about 8 p.m. on Sept. 29, 1906, a northbound Louisville & Nashville Railroad passenger train — No. 102 — steamed towards a swing bridge crossing the Cumberland River. Near the overpass, a glowing red light broke the night's darkness, signaling for an approaching train to stop.

The swing bridge was open, waiting for the steamboat Buttorff to pass through the open swing bridge on its way to Paducah, Ky.

Suddenly, engineer Frank Porter yanked on the Johnson Bar, trying to reverse the locomotive before the train reached the open bridge.

Sparks flew from the engine, and the train jolted but could not stop before plunging into the Cumberland River.

The train's locomotive, its tender, a mail car and a baggage car plunged into the Cumberland River. The train's passenger coaches, however, remained on the trestle with the passengers inside, panicking and trying to find a way out of the cars.

"It seems a cruel irony of fate that after the fearful disaster, immediately the draw was closed, and the steamer passed under the bridge without any trouble or hindrance, showing that there was no necessity for an open draw," an article appearing in the Oct. 1, 1906, edition of *The Clarksville Leaf-Chronicle* reads.

Porter and the train's express messenger — Will T. Wood — were the only two fatalities in the wreck. The train's fireman — John S. Moran — survived and "found himself clinging to an iron spike fastened to the masonry of a bridge pier," Dennis Mize wrote in his 1999 book, L&N's Memphis Line.

"My first impression was that the train had stopped very suddenly and violently," said R.L. Morris, baggage master on the train. "I knew distinctively that this meant danger of some character. ... At the moment that I sensed danger, I ran to the back end of the car and started to jump, thinking that a terrible wreck was imminent. Then the car turned turtle and went down. It was all over so quickly that I have little recollection of subsequent events."

In an interview with The Clarksville Leaf-Chronicle, Moran "had little to say, however, for he had no coherent recollection of anything from the moment the locomotive took the fatal leap until he found himself struggling for life in the deep, treacherous and swirling waters," the newspaper wrote.

"The last time I saw engineer Porter he was sitting on his seat box," Moran told the newspaper shortly after the wreck. "I was shoveling in coal, getting ready for the hill, doing this after we had blown for signal. No word was spoken by Porter or myself. I was not looking for or paying any attention to the signals and hence did not see them. We could not have been going more than four or five miles an hour when the engine went down."

The newspaper credited the train's air brakes for preventing a far worse catastrophe. If not for the system, the publication predicted, perhaps all of the train's cars would have plunged into the Cumberland River.

A version of this article was published in the February 2004 edition of The Cross-Tie.

The Civil War's 'Most Extraordinary and Astounding Adventure'

The General steamed into town early on an April morning more than 150 years. Its abrupt departure marked the start of the "most extraordinary and astounding adventure" of the Civil War, the *Southern Confederacy* newspaper exclaimed.

It was April 12, 1862, one year after the first shots had been fired on Fort Sumter, marking the start of the Civil War. Deep in the heart of the Confederacy, Union spies under the command of James Andrews rode into town on the morning passenger train. Their motive was the destruction of the Western and Atlantic Railroad.

"Big Shanty, 20 minutes for breakfast," conductor William A. Fuller told the train's passengers. Rolling to a stop, most people disembarked from the train's coaches and headed for the Lacy Hotel, a railroad stop where a 25-cent breakfast was waiting for them.

Andrews and his 19 raiders slowly made their way towards the General, uncoupling the engine and three boxcars from the rest of the train. With a pull of the throttle, the General was off, and the Great Locomotive Chase was underway. About two miles north of Kennesaw, the General stopped at Moon's Station to pick some tools from a track crew.

Fuller chased the raiders on foot, by handcar and by commandeering three different locomotives, finally catching them about two miles north of Ringgold, Ga. If successful, the raid would have left the Western and Atlantic Railroad in ruins. Instead, the raid became a race for life.

Today, the raid is a mere bookmark in the history of the Civil War, and the General sits idle, an exhibit in the Southern Museum in Kennesaw, Georgia, yards away from where she was stolen 14 decades ago. The museum, a Smithsonian Institution Affiliate, chronicles the chase through film, reproductions and exhibits, including the famous locomotive.

But, the museum's exhibits focus on more than the Great Locomotive Chase. Other exhibits include the Civil War, industry in the South and archives of one of the region's most influential railroads.

Glover Machine Works

Glover Machine Works was a high point in the history of the industrial South, often noted for its agricultural economy.

The company, established in 1888 by James Bolan Glover, built an estimated 200 steam locomotives during a roughly 30-year run of production. The company started out building steam-driven machinery, and its first steam locomotive was shipped to the Stratton Brick Company of Macon, Georgia, on May 6, 1902. The last steam locomotive was shipped on April 19, 1930, but through the 1950s, the works continued to repair the engines they built.

Luckily for historians, the wood patterns used in designing the locomotives weren't discarded. Instead, the works held on to these artifacts, and today they are housed in the museum. Two of the works' locomotives are also on display in a section of the museum mocked up as the company's assembly line.

Glover's building in Marietta, Georgia, was demolished in 1995. Pictures of the structure and a model depicting the factory in its heyday are also on display. Most of the museum's exhibits came from the factory.

Andrews Raid Collection

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Great Locomotive Chase, the Louisville and Nashville Railroad refurbished the General to working order. In 1972, the engine was given to the city of Kennesaw and placed in the Kennesaw Civil War Museum, which was renamed the Southern Museum after a renovation.

In addition to the General, the museum houses assorted memorabilia related to the raid, including the Medal of Honor of John Morehead Scott, one of the raiders.

Seven raiders who were captured near Ringgold, Georgia, were later hanged, including Scott. They were awarded the medals posthumously.

Across the railroad tracks from the museum, a historical marker erected in 1901 by the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway denotes the stretch of track where the General was parked when she was stolen.

Today, the 87-mile route of the Great Locomotive Chase can be easily retraced. The Western and Atlantic still largely follows the same route it did on April 12, 1862.

A version of this article was published in the December 2003 edition of The Cross-Tie.

‘Fanning the Funnel: Folkston, Georgia, is More Than the Gateway to the Okefenokee Swamp; It’s the Trains

FOLKSTON, Georgia — I stood with camera in hand, ready for whatever might come around the curve.

A man drove up, stopped in front of me, and asked a simple, albeit complex, question.

“Why do you take pictures of trains?”

Without hesitation, I replied: “For fun.”

The answer, I realized in hindsight, didn’t explain why I was standing in the hot summer sun waiting for a train to speed through this south Georgia town. And really, it didn’t explain why I would try to snap a few pictures as this happened.

Nonetheless, I was standing in the hot summer sun, waiting for trains to pass through town and having fun.

About the Funnel

Often known as the Gateway to the Okefenokee, Folkston sits in southeast Georgia, just a few miles from the Florida line.

The county seat of Charlton County, Folkston, has a population of about 3,300 people.

Railfans are attracted to the city because of the volume of trains that pass through the city. Just north of town, two lines — CSX’s Nahunta and Jesup subdivisions — merge and trains funnel through the town.

The city is located at milepost 602.2 on the Nahunta Subdivision. A train-viewing platform, located at milepost 602.6, is open to the public and has built-in scanners tuned to railroad frequencies, ceiling fans that are a must during the hot summer months and lights for viewing trains at night.

At least 60-80 freight trains — including intermodal, coal and autorack — pass through town daily. In addition, a half-dozen Amtrak trains travel along the tracks, including the Auto train running between Sanford, Fla., and Lorton, Va.

Railfans will be treated to a diversity of motive power and rolling stock traveling along the line on a typical day. Plenty of film, compact flash or SD cards for the modern photographer are necessary.

The former Seaboard Air Line train depot is within walking distance of the viewing platform. The building’s grounds are also a viable spot for train-watching, depending on the time of day and sunlight.

Lodging in town includes a few motels and the Inn at Folkston, a bed and breakfast.

A restored home, the Inn at Folkston features a quaint and cozy lodging environment for the weary railfan. The inn has four rooms and is located about a mile from the viewing platform.

In the morning, there is breakfast, and in the evening, guests are treated to wine — or beer — and cheese. There are rocking chairs and a hot tub on the inn’s front porch — which can be used when not spending time on the viewing platform.

A Brief History

The first train of the Savannah, Florida & Western Railroad passed through town in June 1881, marking the beginning of an industry that would change the city’s history forever, a change that is still visible.

More than 120 years later, the town is still known for its trains, as dozens pass through the Charlton County, Ga., seat daily. And railfans from around the country gather on a viewing platform downtown to catch the action.

The Savannah, Florida & Western Railroad completed two railroads — the Waycross & Florida Railroad, which was built from Waycross, Georgia, to the Georgia-Florida state line and the East Florida Railroad, running from Jacksonville, Fla., and connecting with the Waycross & Florida Railroad at the Florida -Georgia state line.

Later, the Atlantic Coast Line built tracks through town. The line, now a part of CSX’s Jesup Subdivision, from Jesup, Georgia, to Jacksonville, Florida, also passes through town.

The Atlantic Coast Line probably built its tracks through Folkston because of the nearby Okefenokee Swamp. As a result, trains from the two railroads — today, two CSX subdivisions — come together into a funnel just north of town and head into Florida.

A third railroad — the Brunswick and Pensacola Railroad — was built in 1894. The line, built by the Suwanee Canal Co., ran from Folkston to the nearby Suwanee Canal, but the line did not significantly impact the city.

Today, dozens of CSX trains pass through the Folkston Funnel, running along the former Savannah, Florida & Western Railroad and the Atlantic Coast Line tracks.

The city of Folkston has embraced the railroad that passes through town daily and welcomes railfans from around the country who want to watch trains in this south Georgia town. In 2001, with the help of a $30,000 state grant and inmate labor, the city opened a train viewing platform in downtown Folkston.

The platform has fans, lights and a scanner that allows railfans to listen in on railroad radio traffic.

A version of this article was published in the July 2005 edition of The Cross-Tie.

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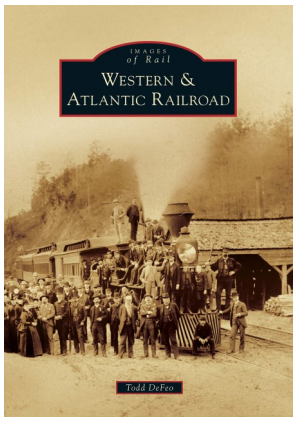

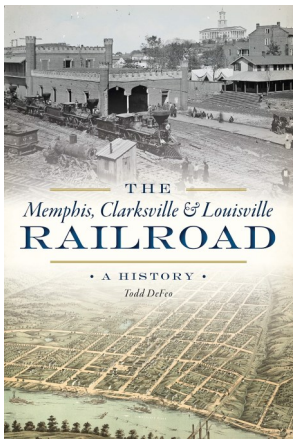

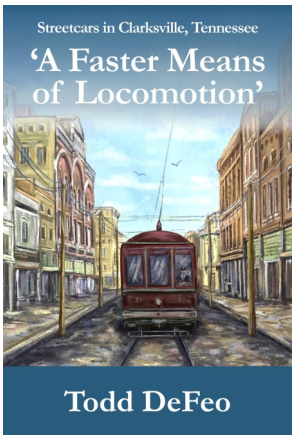

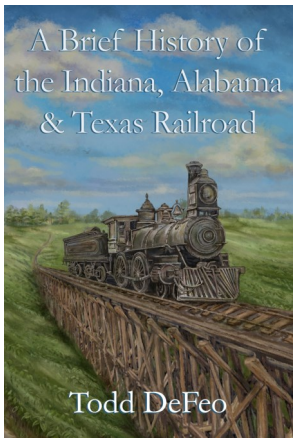

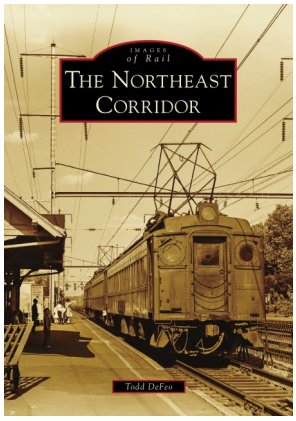

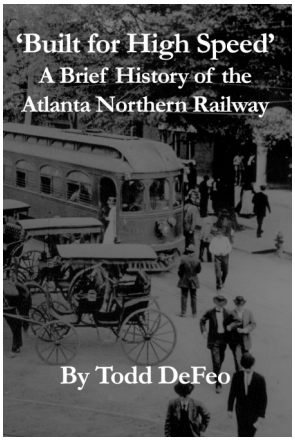

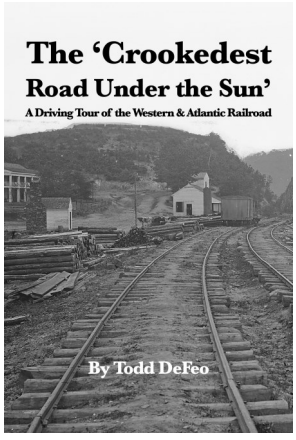

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Make the ATL a Railroad Hub Again?

An October 2011 view of the Amtrak station on the border of the Midtown and Buckhead communities in Atlanta, Georgia. The station serves one Amtrak train, the Crescent, running between New York City and New Orleans, Louisiana. (Photo by Todd DeFeo/The Cross-Tie)

Amtrak is looking to make Atlanta a railroad hub again, but the quasi-federal agency can't say how much it will cost to run new routes across the Peach State and the region.

Last year, Amtrak released a $75 billion passenger rail proposal. The plan calls for a new Atlanta rail hub with routes connecting the city with Birmingham, Alabama; Charlotte, North Carolina; Macon, Georgia; Montgomery, Alabama; Nashville, Tennessee; and Savannah, Georgia.

The proposed Atlanta-to-Nashville train would take 6 hours and 34 minutes to complete the 280-mile-long journey via Chattanooga, Tennessee.

The Center Square has asked Amtrak for a dollar cost on the Georgia portion; at time of publishing, the rail company had not provided one.

One Amtrak train currently serves Atlanta, the New York City-to-New Orleans Crescent. The Gate City's former railroad stations downtown were razed decades ago, and Amtrak uses a station Southern Railway constructed more than a century ago as a commuter stop.

According to the Federal Railroad Administration, the Crescent had a 56.8 percent on-time performance rate during the first quarter of 2021. It marked the sixth-best on-time performance rate for an Amtrak long-distance train.

Marc Scribner, a senior transportation policy analyst for the Reason Foundation, told *The Center Square* that Amtrak's forecasts show the railroad believes it will continue losing money on existing long-distance routes that serve Georgia.

In fiscal 2027, Amtrak's forecasts operating losses of $204.90 per passenger for the Crescent, $51.50 per passenger for the Palmetto, $156.50 per passenger for the Silver Meteor and $155.40 per passenger for the Silver Star. Those numbers are for the entire route, not just the Georgia segment.

The federal government has sent billions of dollars to Amtrak, including $66 billion in last year's infrastructure bill.

— *The Center Square*

(The Back of) The Cross-Tie

The Marlborough Flyer, pulled by the Passchendaele steam locomotive, departs from Blenheim, New Zealand, in December 2017. New Zealand Railways built the locomotive Passchendaele in 1915 at its Addington Workshops in Christchurch. The steamer entered service in October 1915 and is dedicated to the "memory of those members of the New Zealand Railways who fell in the Great War." Of the 100,000 New Zealanders who fought in World War I, about 5 percent worked on the railroad. Of those 5,000 railway workers, 444 were killed. The locomotive was named for the Battle of Passchendaele, also known as the Third Battle of Ypres. Today, the locomotive runs as part of the Marlborough Flyer heritage steam train between Picton and Blenheim. (Photo by Todd DeFeo/The Cross-Tie)

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