

The Scrambler

Volume 19, Number 1

October 2005

Monthly Newsletter of the
Arkansas-Boston Mountains Chapter, National Railway Historical Society

Opinions expressed in the *Scrambler* are those of the Editor and/or contributors. They do not represent the official view of the Arkansas-Boston Mountains Chapter, its members, officers or directors or the National Railway Historical Society, Inc. unless otherwise stated.

Tom Porter of Fort Smith – Frisco Operator

Tom Porter of Fort Smith enjoys retirement in Fort Smith. He accepted a voluntary buyout from the Burlington Northern in January 1982, at age 58, after the Burlington Northern began to downsize Fort Smith operations. He took early retirement after 40½ years credited service to help family men with less seniority.

Porter was born on January 23, 1923. He graduated from high school in 1941 and entered Frisco Railroad service on the extra board on the Eastern Division. He recalled his first job as night trick operator at Dixon, MO. Dixon was the site of a helper district where steam engines stopped to take water. Porter recalled it was a challenge making sure messages were hooped up to each engineer and to the conductor when the trains did not stop. As low man on the seniority board Porter frequently rode cabooses at night to the scene of his next job.

In 1942, a slot opened up for Porter at Springfield, the hub of the Frisco system. He worked the lobster shift and relayed telegraph message within the Frisco. The telegraph relay office, located on Olive Street, was a busy place as both freight and passenger traffic exploded due to World War 2. In March of 1943, the long hours ended when Porter joined the U.S. Army. He was sent to India's Bengal and Assam Provinces where he worked as an operator on the narrow-

gauge network operated by the 745th Railway Operating Battalion.

Back in Springfield, Porter returned to the Relay Office. In addition to relaying railroad telegraphic traffic, Porter also monitored sensitive instruments that identified faults in the iron telegraph wires. The instruments could identify the approximate location of a fault so that linemen could be dispatched to fix the problem. He mentioned that breaks were more common in the fall, in times of high wind and of course during ice storms. Mr. Porter did not know why iron lines were used although of course, iron is much less costly and less attractive to vandals compared to copper.

In December 1961, Tom Porter moved to Fort Smith as Manager & Wire Division Chief. The Frisco's Central Division, in common with other Frisco terminals, still employed telegraph communications extensively. Porter's job title belied the fact that much of his day to responsibility was similar to an operator. His work entailed testing of lines and relaying messages to and from places such as Monett, Hugo, Ardmore and Hope on the Central Division and to non-Central Division points such as Springfield, St. Louis, Amory, MS, Fort Scott, KS and Tulsa. Typical traffic consisted of train and car (wheel) reports) that in some cases originated from operators at Central

Tom Porter – Frisco Operator (Continued)

Division stations. One busy operator was Miss Frances at the Hackett depot on the Mansfield Branch. The Mansfield Branch still had some coal traffic, and some five to seven mines according to Porter's recollection, were still in operation. Each day Miss Frances, the only agent on the branch, would telegraph information, mine by mine, on loaded and empty coal cars to Mr. Porter, in Fort Smith. The coal car data was used by the Fort Smith yard clerk to create trains. The Central Division headquarters at Fort Smith also had had teletype that was used for train consist information involving trains at Fort Smith and Hugo. The office also had telephone service that was installed in accordance to a 1901 *Frisco Man* issue. Porter was a union member and personnel at Fort Smith tried to have Porter send traffic during normal business hours. For extra traffic, the union agreement required that Porter receive time and one-half with a minimum call of two hours.

Tom Porter used a bug to send messages; Vibroplex was the best-known U.S. bug maker, rather than the telegraph key so often seen in movies. He said that slow senders were called "snails" while fast operators were characterized as "machine guns". He also mentioned that Frisco superintendents were required to be Morse code proficient as the skill would be handy at the scene of a wreck.

Mr. Porter said that he recalled Morse Code as being in use at Fort Smith for five to ten

years after his arrival in 1961. In an unrelated matter, he thought the Burlington Northern RR was only interested in through business. The Central Division had some local business but not a lot of through business. Porter's comment sounds correct as the rail link between Fort Smith & Paris, TX was severed in 1982.

The procedures for sending traffic via telegraph involved sending the telegraphic address for a station three or four times. Once the receiving responded, it would send "GA" meaning Go Ahead. For example if an operator wished to contact Rogers he or she would send "R " several times until the Rogers operator responded with a GA . The operator would then send the traffic. Each manned office on the Central Division had a unique letter or letters for telegraphic operation.

(Editor's note-The use of telegraph on the Frisco lasted until 1967 according to Jim Thompson a former Frisco telegrapher, in an article on Frisco telegraphy in the Fall 1993/Winter 1994 Ozark Watch. The Vibroplex was widely used from 1905. The principal advantages of the Vibroplex were semi-automatic operation-(an important consideration when operators were paid by the word) and reduction of repetitive stress injuries compared to the telegraph key.

The railroad use of telegraphy survived into the early 1980s according to an article in Trains. As I recall the article, the last users were remote granger branches located in the Midwest.)

Minutes of the Arkansas-Boston Mountains NRHS Meeting
September 15, 2005

The regular scheduled meeting of the Arkansas-Boston Mountains Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society was called to order at 7:00 p.m. on September 15, 2005 by President Bob Stark, at the Shiloh Museum General Store in Springdale, AR. There were 23 members and 3 guests, Jack Browne, Christopher Nally (David McDonald's railfan grandson), and David Ware, present at the meeting. Minutes from the August 17, 2005 meeting were approved as stated in the *Scrambler* dated September 2005.

David Ware, Arkansas State Capitol Historian, spoke to the membership about the idea of an exhibit in the state capitol in Little Rock for Arkansas railroad history. Limited space is available. This will require but a sampling only of railroad materials from the entire State of Arkansas. The idea is to promote an interest in railroad history to school age children. The State Capitol is requesting artifacts or anything of interest that is railroad related. Photographs are welcome, railroad imprint items such as plates, mugs, etc., anything except modes of power. The exhibit will run from the middle of January 2006 through middle of May 2006. The loan period for the items will be January to May, 2006. All materials are insured for a members stated value. Exhibits will be behind glass cases and under guard. Mr. Ware asked for any suggestions. Lenders can have their names on exhibit and will be given the appropriate credit if they wish. The exhibit design will be completed by the State Capitol with any suggestions of displays. Mr. Ware stated he wants

representation from the Frisco, Ft. Smith Railroad, and other Northwest Arkansas Railroads. Mr. Ware wanted one person from the membership to serve as a point person. Bob Stark appointed Tom Duggan to the north part of the territory and Chuck Girard for the Ft. Smith Railroads. The Chapter would be allowed to keep any graphics made by the State Capitol used on the displays.

National Director, Tom Duggan, stated no new business for this month.

Scrambler Editor, Tom Duggan, stated error in *Scrambler* as to the value of the gasoline.

The financial report was read by Tom Duggan in Katherine Mindoro's absence. The report was approved as read.

Membership Chairman, Chuck Girard, announced 3 new members, Cleo Matter, Dr. S. Herbert Shawver III and an associate member, Andrew Williams, had paid their membership dues. After the meeting, Mr. Jack Brown paid his membership dues and was added as a new Chapter member.

Programs and Activities Chairman, Al Kaeppl, asked the Chapter members to check the *Scrambler* for listings of new programs. Bob Stark praised the excellent turn out of Chapter members that helped with Frisco Fest. George Allison and Bill Usserey put the tracks together. Rose Ann and Bob Hofer gave tours though the old Frisco Caboose. Gary and Clare McCullah, and Katherine Mindoro helped with the booth and merchandise displays.

The Chapter's next outing will be Frontier Days in Ft. Smith on Saturday and Sunday of October 22 and 23, 2005. Mr. Kaepfel stated he will need assistance with the displays as well as the G and N scale layouts. He will need any materials for display such as maps, time tables, etc.

It was suggested by Barbara Gavron that the Map Committee Chairman, Gary McCullah, speak with Tractive Effort hobby shop in Fayetteville, AR e about displaying some of the Chapter's maps to make them available for donations to the Chapter. Mr. McCullah stated he would inquire with Tractive Effort and report back to the Chapter.

Sign Committee Chairman, Chuck Girard, stated he needs a couple of weeks with Graphic Services to have the signs ready. Mr. Girard stated he will keep checking with them. He is still hoping to get the signs placed this fall.

Old Business: Bill Merrifield would be willing to take then *Manitou* parts to the Colorado Railroad Museum at the end of October 2005. Since the parts weigh about a ton, the rental of a trailer is necessary. The Chapter will pay for trailer and Mr. Merrifield's gasoline for the trip. Bill Ussrey made the motion to support and cover the expenses from Lowell to Colorado. The motion was moved by David MacDonald and Barbara Gavron seconded.. The entire Chapter approved the motion.

New Business: Prior to the regular

scheduled meeting, the NRHS Chapter directors, Bob Stark, Fred Lewis, Chuck Girard, Tom Duggan, Bill Ussrey, and Steve Tharp met to discuss several financial issues. All decisions were brought before the remainder of the membership. Chapter President, Bob Stark introduced the idea of making changes in the Chapter's investments policy to increase the interest made on each account. The increased income would cover the printing costs for two issues of the Scrambler newsletter. The motion was made by Bill Merrifield and seconded by Gary McCullah. It was approved by the general Chapter membership. It was further agreed to reduce the amount in the checking account and invest the excess funds in a Vanguard money market account.

Chapter President, Bob Stark, appointed David McDonald, Bob Hofer, and Bob Oswald to a new nomination committee for the purpose of nominating new officers for the 2006 membership year.

Tonight's fascinating presentation was by Bill Merrifield on The Colorado Railroad Museum. Mr. Merrifield is a native of Boulder, Colorado and is familiar with Colorado narrow gauge railroading. His father and grandfather worked on Moffat Tunnel west of Denver, Colorado. Over the last several years, Mr. Merrifield has spent a great deal of time at the Museum.

Clare McCullah
Secretary of the Arkansas-Boston
Mountain Chapter

Programs and Events

by Al Kaepfel

Programs

20 Oct. Mike Syput; the Reader, a small railroad

17 Nov. Bob Oswald; steam in the Andes, revisited; part 1

15 Dec. Annual Christmas Supper at Fred's Hickory Inn

19 Jan. Bob Oswald; Steam in the Andes; part 2

We thank the members for providing these interesting programs. Right now, we are looking for a 30-minute program to supplement another short program. If you would like to present a short program please let Al know at 927-3163.

Special Events

22 and 23 Oct, Saturday and Sunday. We will be in the hundred year old Frisco Station. The hours are; Saturday 9:00 to 4:00; Sunday 10:00 to 3:00

The Fort Smith Frontier Days

by Al Kaepfel

This will be our second annual appearance. Our presence last year was so much appreciated and admired that we were offered additional space in the Frisco Depot.

We accepted the offer and I have surveyed the space, and found a substantial increase. In addition to both the G and N gauge trains we will have 6 to 8 tables and about 15 feet of permanent shelves on which to display items of historical interest. Those of you who have historical items please plan on having them on display. Whatever arrangements become necessary to transport them will be made. Please contact Al.

3 December The Children's Christmas Train, a worthwhile charity function, at the A & M Depot property in Springdale.

It should be apparent that we need your help in Fort Smith for setup, operation during the day, and takedown. You will be needed on Saturday, the 22nd, from 9:00 to 4:00, with setup starting at 8:00 if you can. And again your presence will be useful and desirable on Sunday the 23rd from 10:00 to 3:00, with takedown commencing at 3:00.

Please reserve these times and participate in the chapter's activities in Fort Smith. Let Al know if you can provide artifacts and displays. Let Al know what times you can be present; Al will have a signup sheet at the Thursday, 20 Oct, meeting.

The Searcy Branch Railroad

by Ray Toler

In 1870 the Cairo and Fulton Railroad was being surveyed between the Missouri-Arkansas borders, northeast of Corning, AR, towards Little Rock. A straight line was proposed from the Little Red River southwest to Beebe, AR leaving Searcy, AR four miles west of the track. The Searcy Town Council met November 21, 1870. It appointed a committee of three to confer with the President of the Cairo and Fulton Railroad (C & FRR) on what terms a railroad could be brought to Searcy and a depot established within a half-mile of the courthouse square. The committee met four days later in Little Rock with the C & F RR Board of Directors. The Directors asked the committee to propose a route to Searcy. If the route were acceptable to the railroad, the Searcy City Council would be asked to pay the difference in construction costs between the two routes plus an unspecified bonus to the railroad.

For more than eighteen months, the railroad refused to quantify the bonus. When the C & F RR finally set the amount of the bonus, the precise amount is lost in history, the Town Council was shocked and dismayed. On July 5, 1872 the Town Council formed and capitalized the Searcy Branch Railroad (SBRR). At the first board meeting the SBRR authorized construction of a line to connect Searcy to the Cairo & Fulton RR at Kensett using 3" by 5" white oak rails of thirty-six inch gauge on crossties spaced thirty-six inches apart. White oak 2" by 5" planks, thirty-six inches long and secured with ½ " diameter iron rods, maintained the track gauge. One passenger coach and one freight car were purchased. Prime movers were to be horses but this plan changed later to mules.

A passenger making the four –mile trip on July 14, 1877 left a permanent record enabling us to catch a glimpse of bygone days. He wrote: "*From Kensett to Searcy connection is made by a wooden tramway, dignified by the name horse railway. It is s very rough, shake-up and jugglety affair; an excellent remedial agent for dyspepsia but withal a pleasant route of travel and of great convenience to those who wish to transport goods from the depot at the station to town four miles away, to those who wish to come out from their bird's nest and see the world . The rolling stock of this road consists of one passenger coach and one freight car. The engines consist of three mules, named respectively Madam, Muggins, and Hun. We had the pleasure of riding behind Madam, a brownish sun-colored animal with a gait like that of an old clothes peddler, a paintbrush tail, and look of wicked intelligence. Madam is honored by being a passenger engine and is kept in a little better repair than Hun and Muggins, who being compelled to haul fright, feel their humiliation...*"

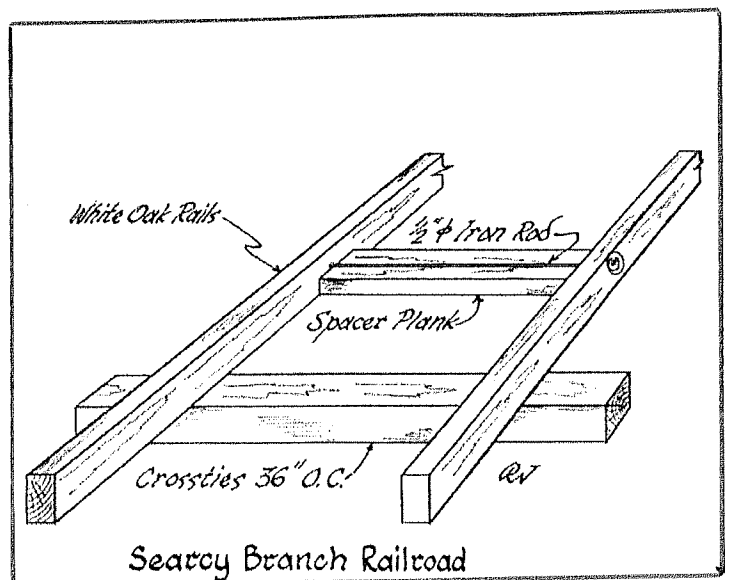
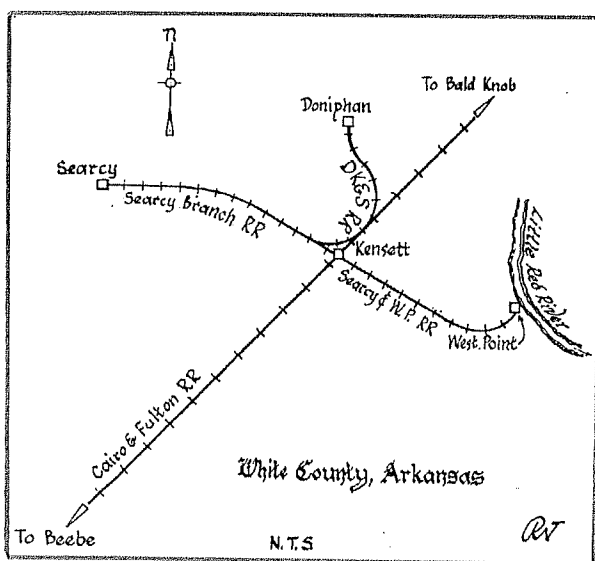
There was one rather serious accident on the railroad at the Gin Creek bridge. Ninas Hardy was driving a team of mules pulling a heavy load of freight from Kensett to Searcy. There was a slight downgrade approaching Gin Creek, and the mules had to trot to keep ahead of the coasting car. Just as they hit the bridge, a herd of cows on the west end decided to cross it. The ensuing calamity is left to the imagination. The driver and his mules made it through the wreckage without too much injury, but the cows were not nearly so fortunate. On downhill grades, the drivers often unhitched the mules and coasted into town using a long sapling as a "rub brake" against the ground to bring it into town without a jolt.

The Searcy Branch Railroad gave the citizens the connection, however crude, to the ever-expanding network of railroads nation-wide. Although the Cairo and Fulton Railroad did not favor Searcy with a main line station, its successors did pay a unique tribute to Searcy many years later. Galloway College ,now Harding University , and Searcy’s academics generated enormous traffic revenue as out of town boarding students arrived for school terms and departed for home for summer vacation and Christmas holidays. On Wednesday evening, April 20, 1927 the Missouri Pacific’s crack passenger train the *Sunshine Special* proudly strutted down the Missouri and North Arkansas Railroad tracks to the Searcy depot to accommodate the transportation needs of hundreds of students . To many people of Searcy who remembered the struggle to get the town on a main railroad line this was a moment of triumph.

In due course, the Cairo and Fulton Railroad was folded into the St. Louis Iron Mountain & Southern which became the Missouri Pacific and which is now the Union Pacific. At some point the Searcy Branch Railroad was extended four miles east to West Point, a steamboat landing on the Little Red River .Oddly West Point is not in the western part of White County nor is it on a point. It was named for J.M. West who surveyed the town in 1850. West Point was the farthest point upstream that remained navigable during all seasons of the year. The railroad’s ownership changed and the line was renamed the Searcy and West Point Railroad. In 1887 the new owners rebuilt the roadbed , installed steel rails, and bought a steam locomotive which was named “Louise” after the daughter of one of the owners.

In time the Searcy & West Point RR was extended to Doniphan to serve a large lumber mill , and later the Carter Blox-On –End flooring mill. The Kensett-West Point portion was abandoned and the surviving line was re- named the Doniphan, Kensett and Searcy Railroad that survives to this day as part of the Union Pacific.

(Reference : Raymond Lee Muncy, Searcy, Arkansas –A Frontier Town Grows Up With America,Harding Press , 1976.)



Programs & Events

By Al Kaepfel

Programs

15 Sept. Bill Merrifield; Summer and Steam

20 Oct. Mike Sypult; the Reader, a small railroad

17 Nov. Bob Oswald; Steam in the Andes, revisited; part 1

15 Dec. Annual Christmas Supper at Fred's Hickory Inn

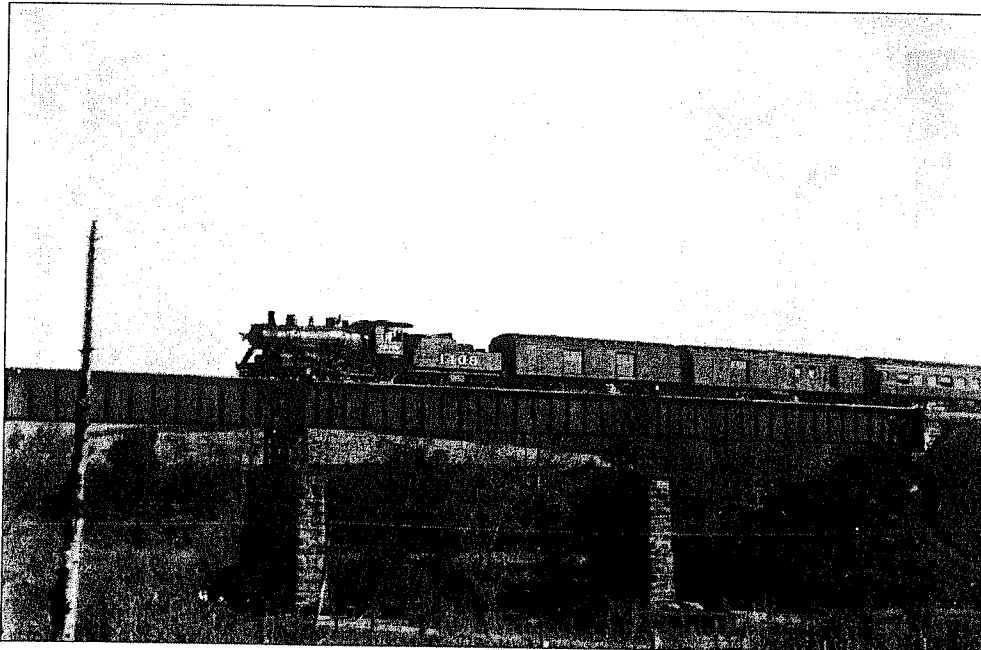
19 Jan. Bob Oswald; Steam in the Andes; part 2

The whole membership appreciates the programs: keep them coming.

Special Events

22 and 23 Oct, Saturday and Sunday. Frontier Fest, Fort Smith. Our displays and presentations will be in the century-old Frisco Station.

3 Dec. The Children's Christmas Train, a notable charity, at the A & M depot property



Left- This picture was taken Sunday April 4, 1925. It was sold by Art's Photo Shop in Rogers, AR.

Based on information in a June 1925 Frisco passenger timetable in the Editor's collection the train is the southbound Texas Limited, No. 5. It is crossing Brightwater Creek Trestle in Benton County. The train had a Fred Harvey operated dining car to Fort Smith, coaches and sleepers from St. Louis to Fort Smith and Galveston. (Editor Collection)

n.e.c. (not elsewhere classified)

The Saturday, August 27 Frisco Fest event was enjoyed by the 12 Chapter members who assisted at the Frisco caboose and the Chapter booth. The weather mainly was scattered clouds with a much-appreciated breeze for much of the day. Everyone was happy to see George Alison, as he had not been to recent meetings. George spent most of the day helping children operate the G sale setup while David Mac Donald of Fort Smith issued Engineer Certificates. Events Chairman Al Kaepfel, who was away in Chicago, will be pleased to learn that most of the 200-certificate allocation was used.

Chapter member David Denman of Rogers and Jim Plumlee of Bentonville stopped at the booth. Jim works at night in a Wal-Mart warehouse that prevents meeting attendance. Donations of \$25 included \$15 for a laminated Missouri Pacific 1922 system map that "Map Team McCullough" brought to Frisco Fest. One member even sold an exhibit only timetable.

The Arkansas & Missouri operated a three-car shuttle train between Springdale and Rogers. The consist included the new lounge car. The shuttle operation ran late all day. Several thoughtless Frisco Fest attendees parked their vehicles so close to the track that the locomotive was unable to do a run around move. The Rogers Police had the cars towed away. The owners must have had a rude shock when they discovered their vehicles were missing.

Chapter members Tom Duggan and Gary McCullough helped A & M Passenger Train Manager Brenda Brown with ticket sales. Ridership was very strong with the 1:30 southbound run effectively maxed out at about 150 passengers. There was even had a standby line for one run. This year's brisk

business may make up for the modest 2004 Frisco Fest results when high winds and rain in the morning created disappointing afternoon attendance.

Chapter members should be enjoying volume 3 of the 2004 *National Railway Bulletin*. The Editor enjoyed both articles. The Prescott, AZ article brought back memories of the afternoon passenger train that passed by the Glendale, AZ public tennis courts a little after 3:00 PM. I always lost a point as I stopped to stare at the two or three car lightweight consist as it slowly headed north to a connection with Santa Fe mainline at Ash Fork, AZ. The train was a convenient excuse for lousy tennis skills.

The West Virginia logging railroad article was excellent although a map would have been helpful. The colors in the pictures were superb and no doubt reflected careful storage of the 1958 era slides. It is a shame the *Bulletin* is still in the small format as the pictures would have been superb in the new 8 ½" by 11" format to be used with 2005 issues.

Please mark your calendar for Wednesday, November 16. Greenway LLC will be sponsoring a day-long commuter rail forum at the Northwest Arkansas Convention Center in Springdale. The forum will include officials from other commuter rail lines, and Federal and State officials will be invited to attend. In recent days Rodney Slater, Transportation Secretary in the Clinton Administration, has been added to the list of attendees.

The purpose of the forum is to create support for a federally funded feasibility study costing an estimated \$350,000 for a Greenland, AR to Bentonville, AR commuter rail line.

ARKANSAS-BOSTON MOUNTAINS CHAPTER NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Chapter No. 188 founded November 1987

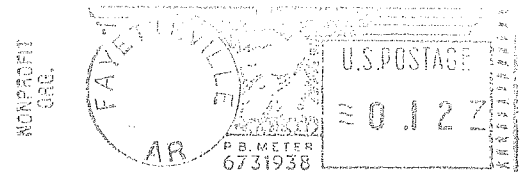
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Editor	TOM DUGGAN

The Chapter meets the third Thursday of each month (except December dinner meeting) at 7:00 PM Meetings are held at the Shiloh Museum's General Store, 118 West Johnson, Springdale, Arkansas. Visitors are welcome at all meetings. Annual dues for 2005 are \$35.00 for individuals and \$38.00 for a family. Dues include membership in the National Railway Historical Society. Please call 479-750-8165 for directions to the Shiloh Museum General Store.

Editor note- There will be no November 2005 issue of the Scrambler as I will be away for two weeks .Please look at Programs and Events in this issue for information on the November program by Bob Oswald.

ARKANSAS-BOSTON MOUNTAINS CHAPTER
NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 1303
SPRINGDALE, AR 72765-1303
Address Service Requested



Thursday, October 20 Mike Sypult presents a program on the Reader Railroad. See you at 7:00 PM at the General Store of the Shiloh Museum, 118 West Johnson, in downtown Springdale

