

Wisconsin Chapter National Railway Historical Society

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October 2020

SPARKS AND CINDERS

Our purpose as members of Wisconsin Chapter—National Railway Historical Society is to gather, preserve and disseminate information, both historic and current, pertaining to railroading in Wisconsin and the Upper Midwest.

Since 1950

Preserving Wisconsin Railroad History for 70 Years

Visit the Chapter Webpage www.nrhswis.org



Wisconsin Great Northern's SD40-2 and a short train did a little work at Springbrook and are now heading east toward Hayward Junction on October 16, 2016. Photo by Mike Yuhas

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Wisconsin Chapter Meeting Schedule



October 2, 2020 - Wisconsin Great Northern - Join Greg Vreeland virtually as he talks about the WGN's 24 year history and some of the railroad's latest acquisitions and current operations. This will be a virtual meeting via Zoom.

October 20, 2020 - Join us for the first Wisconsin Chapter online virtual slide show. See details elsewhere in this issue.

November 6 2020 - To Be Announced

Monthly meetings are usually held in the lower level of the North Shore Congregational Church in Fox Point, but for now, we are meeting virtually, via the Zoom platform, during the coronavirus outbreak. The virtual meeting room will open by 7:00 pm, and the meeting will be called to order at 7:30 pm. Zoom meeting connection details are shared with chapter members and other interested persons via email the day of the meeting, or before. To ensure you are made aware of this info, we must have a working email address on file - send yours to president@nrhswis.org. Appropriate notice will be given (in Sparks & Cinders, on the chapter's website, and through the chapter's email announcement list) when we resume in-person meetings. For the latest, check the chapter's webpage at www.nrhswis.org

Sparks & Cinders is published by and for the members of the Wisconsin Chapter, Inc., National Railway Historical Society monthly except for July and August. The Chapter meets at the North Shore Congregational Church, 7330 N Santa Monica Blvd, Fox Point, Wisconsin, on the first Friday of each month, except June, July and August, at 7:30 p.m. The Wisconsin Chapter is a not-for-profit corporation, affiliated with the National Railway Historical Society and the Wisconsin Historical Society, organized to preserve the history of railroading in Wisconsin and the surrounding area. Additional information is available on the chapter's website, www.nrhswis.org.

Membership in the Chapter is open to anyone having an interest in any aspect of railroading who is also a member of the NRHS. Paying \$20 annually to the Chapter will entitle you receive Sparks & Cinders. Paying the National dues of \$50 to the NRHS will entitle you to membership and subscriptions to the NRHS Bulletin and NRHS News. Full NRHS membership is required to participate in chapter business discussions and to vote in annual chapter elections. All address changes should be sent to Mike Yuhas president@nrhswis.org (or via USPS at PO Box 070758 Milwaukee, WI 53207).

Wisconsin Chapter officers are: Mike Yuhas, President (president@nrhswis.org); Keith Schmidt, Vice-President; Tom Marcussen, Secretary; Tara Grudzielanek, Treasurer. Directors: Dan Grudzielanek, Ralph McClure, Andrew Roach, Cathy Wegner and Neal Wegner.

Contributions to Sparks & Cinders should be sent to Editor Keith Schmidt at editor@nrhswis.org (or USPS at PO Box 070758 Milwaukee, WI 53207) by the 15th of the month to be considered for the following month's publication.

All original material published in Sparks & Cinders may be reprinted in other railfan publications provided credit is given to "Sparks & Cinders, Wisconsin Chapter, NRHS." If an author is indicated for the item or article, credit must also be given to the author. The views, opinions, and comments published in Sparks & Cinders are those of the authors and do not reflect the policies of the Wisconsin Chapter or the National Railway Historical Society. Copyright ©2020, Wisconsin Chapter, Inc., NRHS.

Virtual Meeting Summary September 11, 2020

The meeting was held using the Zoom Platform. Mike Yuhas opened the meeting at 7:30pm. Mike welcomed the 43 members and guests in attendance. The meeting began with a moment of silence to remember the lives lost 19 years ago when the World Trade Centers, Pentagon were attacked and Flight 93 crashed in Pennsylvania after being hijacked.

Mike then welcomed a new member Rich Peters. Following that Mike showed off the new envelopes that Sparks and Cinders will be mailed in. This is to protect them. Then Mike mentioned the new Informal Slide Nights hosted by the Chapter. These will be bi-monthly on Tuesday nights. The first one will be Tuesday October 20, 2020. Check out page 3 for more information. These will be a virtual event on the Zoom platform.

Mike then introduced Chapter Member Harry Evans who gave a brief presentation of the replacement of the Brown Street railroad bridge in Mapleton, WI. This bridge is on the Adams Sub on the Union Pacific, formerly CNW. Harry showed several shots of the old bridge and then construction of the new one.

Following that the 10 presenters for Members Favorite Slide Night began. Presenting in this order were Dan Grudzielanek, Greg Mross, Keith Schmidt, Rob Pfeiffer, Robert Hoffmann, Jerry Krug, Dave Nelson, Steve Thomas, Harry Evans and Mike Yuhas. All of the presentations were well done. Only a few technical issues but all in things went well.

Respectfully Submitted Keith Schmidt VP

From the Prexy

I think we can all agree that the Chapter's online meetings are an imperfect but reasonable substitute for our in-person meetings. I miss the informal chit-chat before and after the meetings, and the feeling of shared purpose by sitting in a room with a group of like-minded people who are passionate about railroading and railroad history. But, coronavirus circumstances being what they are, it may be months before our group again descends the stairs to the lower level of the North Shore Congregational Church, so for now we will make do with our Zoom virtual meetings.

Our in-person meetings over the last year averaged 35 members and guests; under Zoom, we're seeing 45 or more. I am gratified that so many members have checked in to our online meetings. The online format gives far-flung members an easy way to participate when a Friday night drive to Fox Point would be impractical, due to location or other factors.

Let's take a look at September 2019 vs. 2020 meeting attendance. By long tradition, our first meeting after the summer hiatus is our annual Members Favorite Slide Night. In September 2019, there were 27 members and guests present. The participants count during our virtual September 2020 meeting held steady at 45 for most of the evening. I look at this as a big success!

Still, there are folks who haven't checked in for one reason or another. This technology can be daunting, and I know there are a few members who may not be comfortable with online meetings. If you need assistance in setting up Zoom on your computer, tablet or smartphone, just send me an email (president@nrhswis.org) or phone 414-698-6625 and I will try to help.

October will be busy for the Wisconsin Chapter. First, on the second, we'll welcome Greg Vreeland as our presenter (see details elsewhere in this issue). I've known Greg for several years, and I'm sure that you'll be impressed with his presentation outlining the history and future of the Wisconsin Great Northern.

Then on Tuesday, October 20, check in online for our inaugural edition of the Wisconsin Chapter informal slide show. At press time, the lineup was still being finalized, but the vision of this every-other-month event is to present five short slide shows, each about fifteen minutes long. Check the Wisconsin Chapter website (www.nrhswis.org) for late-breaking info.

Reminder: As a security measure, Zoom meeting connection information is sent to all members via email within 24 hours of meeting start time. If you haven't received a meeting announcement, it may be that we don't have a valid email address on file for you. Please keep us up to date - send any changes to president@nrhswis.org.

Finally, let's give a warm welcome to new member Rich Peters, of Sheboygan.



Model Train Show and Swap Meet Kettle Moraine Ballast Scorchers

When - Sunday October 11 2020 9am to 3pm

Where - Washington County Fairgrounds
Hwy 45 and Hwy PV

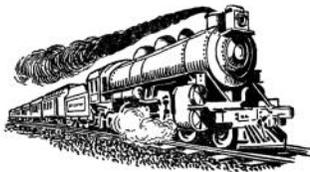
Cost - \$3.00 Donation Kids 12 and Under FREE
Military with ID FREE

See operating model train layouts in N and HO Scale plus other scales.

Buy model trains to expand the collection or get started in the hobby.

Face Masks will be required for attendance.

For more information <http://www.kmbsrrclub.org/index.html>



The Extra Board - Upcoming Events

With all the cancellations the Extra Board is on furlough. In early 2021 will take another look to see what is happening. Until Then - Be Safe

Starting in October: Informal Slide Shows

The Chapter will host informal online slide shows, on the Zoom platform, on a bi-monthly basis beginning in October. Here's how it will work:

- ◆ Third Tuesday of even-numbered months, shows start at 7:30 PM online.
- ◆ Members and non-members may present (membership is always encouraged!)
- ◆ Five presenters will show short programs no more than 15 minutes each
- ◆ Presenters share their own computer screen
- ◆ Sorry, due to limited bandwidth, no video, please
- ◆ Avoid dissolves, barn doors, and other bandwidth-intensive transitions
- ◆ Live narration or soundtrack audio
- ◆ Sign up to present: president@nrhswis.org

October 20 presenters, as of press time:

- Don Marson - winter in New England and elsewhere
- Andy Wehrle - railroading around Wisconsin
- Bill Christopher - Green Bay & Western then and now
- Steven Chen - trains in Atlanta
- Erik Lindgren - Colorado

The shows will be held via the Zoom cloud meetings platform. Members and guests may "attend." Connection instructions will be sent within 24 hours of the event to the Wisconsin Chapter email announcement list (to sign up for the announcement list, just send a request to president@nrhswis.org).

October membership meeting (via Zoom) - Friday, October 2, 2020

The Wisconsin Chapter's October meeting features a presentation by Greg Vreeland, President of Wisconsin Great Northern. WGN, based in the northwestern Wisconsin town of Trego, is a lot more than a typical short line railroad. Their business model relies on tourist train operations, last-mile freight service to Hayward, and car storage.

Wisconsin Great Northern thinks differently. As a tourist hauler, the railroad initiated five-night-a-week dinner train service - and offered optional bed & breakfast accommodations on the train. When faced with the season-ending coronavirus, the railroad used the break to undertake a major trackwork project.

In July, the railroad announced that it had acquired the Chicago Burlington & Quincy Mark Twain Zephyr trainset. This train had languished, exposed to the elements, at various locations in Iowa, Missouri and Illinois, since its last run on the CB&Q six decades ago. All pieces of the trainset are now undergoing restoration in Trego. WGN's audacious plan is to return it to revenue service on its scenic line along the Namekagon River in 2021.

Greg will share the history of the family-run railroad and his vision for the future of rail freight and historic rail preservation in Wisconsin's northwoods. Photos by Mike Yuhus and Rich Peters



Do You Know

Story and Photos by Dave Nelson

Railroad rules are, so the saying goes, written in blood: reactions to tragic accidents rather than examples of wise foresight. One such rule, and one of the most important, is the so-called "blue flag" rule, sometimes known as Rule 26. FRA regulations require that every railroad have its own version of the blue flag, or blue signal, rule.

Stated simply, the blue flag rule requires that a worker or group of workers place blue flags (or blue metal signs, or blue lights, often flashing blue lights) near one or both ends of a locomotive, rolling stock, or cut of rolling stock where workers will be working on, between, or beneath the cars. It further requires that those cars or locomotives not be moved in any manner, or coupled onto, while the blue signal is displayed. One can easily imagine the deaths and injuries that resulted before the blue flag rule was created.

The rule has been refined and added on to over the years: originally, only the workman who placed the blue signal could remove it, thus authorizing the car or locomotive to be moved or coupled on to. When a group of workers was involved, all of them would place their name tag badges on the blue signal and the last to retrieve his or her name tag badge could and would remove the blue signal(s). Since work can extend over multiple shifts, a later refinement was that only a member of the same craft union as the person who placed the original blue flat could remove it, if the original worker was not around to remove it. If more than one craft union was involved, multiple blue flags might be placed. The last worker from that craft union would remove not only his or her name tag, but the craft union's tag as well, from the blue flag or blue signal.

No other equipment is permitted to be located where it could obscure the view of a blue flag or flags.

So what activities would warrant the placing of a blue flag (or light or signal)? When a string of freight cars has been made up into a train in a freight yard, blue flags are placed at both ends as brakemen travel (walking or using carts) the length of the train, stepping between cars "lacing up" the air hoses. Or the brakeman might be attaching a "yard air" hose to one end of the cut of cars to charge the air brake system before the locomotive is coupled to it. An initial airbrake test before a train leaves a yard could need blue flag protection. Workers might also swap out worn brake shoes if they are observed. From the overhead bridge at Galesburg Illinois's BNSF freight yard, one can observe the small utility carts used by the work crews -- the backs of the carts are filled with a supply of blue flags and spare brake shoes of various sorts, and sometimes a small welding tank since other modest repairs might be made to grab irons or ladders without having to take a given car to the RIP (repair-in-place) track. At night one can see blue lights twinkling and flashing at many locations in the yard as dozens of utility carts go about their business.

More serious repairs to cars and locomotives take place at specialized shops, where permanently mounted blue signals at or near a derail might be seen, 50 feet or more from one or both ends of the designated work locations. If 50 feet clearance is not available, the switch leading to the worksite is protected with a special lock and only shop foremen have the key. A blue flag would be placed at the switch. The foreman in charge would be assigned to place and remove the blue signal, and line and lock the switch. At some shops a loud horn is sounded before any car or locomotive is to be moved after repair or service.

Although industries which ship or receive by rail are not required to follow railroad rules, most of them follow the blue flag rule and a railroad switch crew encountering a car protected by a blue flag can only move or couple on to the car when the blue flag has been removed by a designated industry employee.

The photos show a few examples of blue flags/signals/lights to be seen on railroad property. Railroadng can be a dangerous occupation and lives are at stake when these blue signals are placed and removed.

Information for this article primarily came from the articles "Blue signal protection" by Andy Sperandeo (December 2010 Model Railroader) and "Blue flags for safety" by Jim Hediger (December 2007 Model Railroader).



From the Archives

October 1955- 65 Years Ago

DSS&A has received their RDC for service between St. Ignace and Ishpeming....MT&W is using a second hand diesel for its operations. Ex-Milwaukee Road steam engines are in standby service....The UP will begin using the Milwaukee Road between Omaha and Chicago for its transcontinental trains on October 30. The trains formerly ran on the C&NW between Omaha and Chicago.

October 1960 - 60 Years Ago

Wisconsin Chapter is operating an excursion via the C&NW to Baraboo on October 16. Ticket price is \$7.75 per person....The Milwaukee Road Magazine for July-August, 1960, had a good article on the 25th Anniversary trip of the Hiawatha which we were privileged to take. Ninety-plus members and guests of WC-NRHS made the trip, viewing the Minirama at the Dells, also." - CWS. (Carl Solheim) (Minirama was an operating model of the rock formations, river, tour boats, and trains in the Wisconsin Dells area.

October 1965 - 55 Years Ago

"In Minneapolis this past Friday I saw a GN freight leaving with the following consist: a GP35 leading, a U25B, and a GP30. Units are apparently mixed as needed." - JFH (Jerry Hilton)...."A Pictorial History of C&NW Steam Power" by Charles T. Knudsen, 208 pages, 8 1/2 x 11, 300+ photos, text and rosters, is available for \$10.00 from the author. (Mr. Knudsen presented a program about C&NW steam at a Chapter meeting shortly after publication of his book)

October 1970 - 50 Years Ago

The Milwaukee Road has scheduled three "Football Specials" running from Milwaukee to Madison via Watertown. The Specials will operate on October 17, 31, and November 7. Since October 1, 1969, the Milwaukee Road has discontinued Train Nos. 2 and 3, and 1 and 4. The North Western has discontinued Trains Nos. 214 and 125-121....On September 4th MILW No. 117 from Chicago to Madison operated with two parlor cars instead of coaches....News item: Santa Fe plans to get out of Chicago's Dearborn Street Station and switch its five passenger trains to the Illinois Central terminal on Michigan Ave. GTW, L&N, and N&W will also have to vacate Dearborn before the city can tear it down.

October 1975 - 45 Years Ago

C&NW GP18 No. 1776, in its Bicentennial paint scheme, has been highly visible at Butler Yard and on local assignments....C&NW suburban service to Lake Geneva, Pell Lake, and Genoa City ceased on August 12. The trains now terminate at Richmond, Illinois....The Milwaukee Road has petitioned to abandon approximately nine miles of line between Republic and Champion, Michigan. This is a portion of the former Copper Country Limited route.

October 1980 - 40 Years Ago

Plans are being finalized for MidRail '80, hosted by Wisconsin Chapter, on November 7, 8, and 9. Scheduled events are the Chapter auction on the 7th; on the 8th a tour of the Butler Yard and trip on the Kettle Moraine Ry. followed by lunch at the Depot Restaurant in Waukesha. A visit to Williams Siding where the Wisconsin Central (not WCL) keeps its engine and a visit to the NMRA meet at State Fair Park are on the schedule for the afternoon. A banquet at the Ramada Inn with speaker Dave Ingles followed by the slide show "A Sentimental Journey" are slated for the evening. Sunday morning the 9th will feature the NRHS Board meeting....The "Revive the Cannonball" Committee will sponsor a two-week trial of the resumption of commuter service from Oconomowoc to Milwaukee beginning October 13.

October 1985 - 35 Years Ago

Plans continue for the annual auction on November 1. A complete list of locomotive renumberings on the Soo/ Milwaukee was published....CNW has signed contracts with Wisconsin Power & Light to move two million tons of low sulphur coal per year from the Powder River basin in Wyoming to the Edgewater plant in Sheboygan and via CNW to St. Paul and Soo/Milwaukee to Portage....Red and yellow will be the colors applied to the SP and Santa Fe locomotive fleet after the proposed merger is completed. (The so-called "Kodachrome" paint scheme. - ed.) The first unit in the new colors, SD45 No. 5394, emerged from the ATSF shops in San Bernardino.

October 1990 - 30 Years Ago

On September 29, the Wisconsin Central named their shop switcher No. 1 the "Francis J. Wiener" in honor of their greatest fan, unofficial official photographer, and long-time employee of the predecessor Soo Line in North Fond du Lac, who passed away recently. The PBS series "Tracks Ahead," produced and aired locally by Channel 10 last season, begins national distribution this season

October 1995 - 25 Years Ago

Fiscal year 1996 funding for Amtrak is in serious jeopardy in Congress. Although the House has voted a total of \$546 million and the Senate has voted \$515 million, none of the funds will be available until a reauthorization bill is passed. It is currently hung up in Congress over two labor-related issues: reducing wage

protection for laid-off employees from six years to six months and contracting out repair work to non-Amtrak shops

October 2000 - 20 Years Ago

Trains Magazine celebrated its 60th Birthday Party at Rochelle Railroad Park on October 7....Extension of Amtrak service to Fond du Lac, scheduled to begin August 21, has been delayed. No freight contracts or operating agreements have been signed as of August 23. An Illinois historical marker commemorating the North Shore Line was dedicated September 17 at the site of the NSL Edison Court station in Waukegan....On September 4 the UP/BNSF double track crossing diamonds at Rochelle, Illinois, were replaced. The project required just 13 hours to complete.

October 2005 - 15 Years Ago

Ground breaking for a new Amtrak depot in Sturtevant was scheduled for Saturday, September 24. The new \$3.2 million depot will replace the 104-year-old former Milwaukee Road depot which appeared in countless photographs over the years. Amtrak said that owing to a Canadian Pacific Railway rail replacement program in Wisconsin, train No. 8, the eastbound Empire Builder, will be detoured over the BNSF Railway between Minneapolis-St. Paul and Chicago on specific days in October. The CP project is replacing 29,200 feet of continuously welded rail in three locations on the Tomah Subdivision, from one mile west of La Crosse to three miles east of Wisconsin Dells. Train No. 7, the westbound Empire Builder, will not be affected by the work and will operate on its regular route and schedule

October 2010 - 10 Years Ago

Union Pacific Railroad said on August 24 that it will spend more than \$9 million to improve the rail line from Milwaukee to near Lebanon in south-central Dodge County. Work on two projects covering more than a 40-mile stretch of railroad track began August 18 and is scheduled to be completed by the end of November, the UP said in a statement. The projects include removing and installing more than 33,000 ties, replacing the surfaces at 57 grade crossings and replacing nearly 24 miles of rail. The track handles six freight trains per day and does not handle passenger traffic, said Mark Davis, a UP spokesman. "This is an important line" for Wisconsin, said Mark Davis

October 2015 - 5 Years Ago

The state of Wisconsin will pay Spanish train builder Talgo Inc. \$9.7 million in a settlement agreement between the parties, the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel reports. Additionally, the company will retain title to the two trainsets for the state built a under contract that was later voided by Gov. Scott Walker. On Saturday and Sunday October 10th and 11th the Milwaukee Road #261 4-8-4 steam locomotive will pull excursions out of Minneapolis, MN. On Saturday the #261 will head north from Minneapolis to Superior, WI. Then on Sunday October 11th #261 will proceed west out of Minneapolis to Willmar, MN on former Great Northern track.



Wisconsin Great Northern's dinner train has boarded passengers and dinner service has begun. Train is about to depart the Trego depot. The railroad runs passenger excursions five nights per week, year-round. August 30, 2018. Photo by Mike Yuhas

The Final Frame



Protecting the Shove. Soo #1003 backs from Beaver Dam, WI to Randolph, WI to spend the night on April 23 2005. Photo by Keith Schmidt