

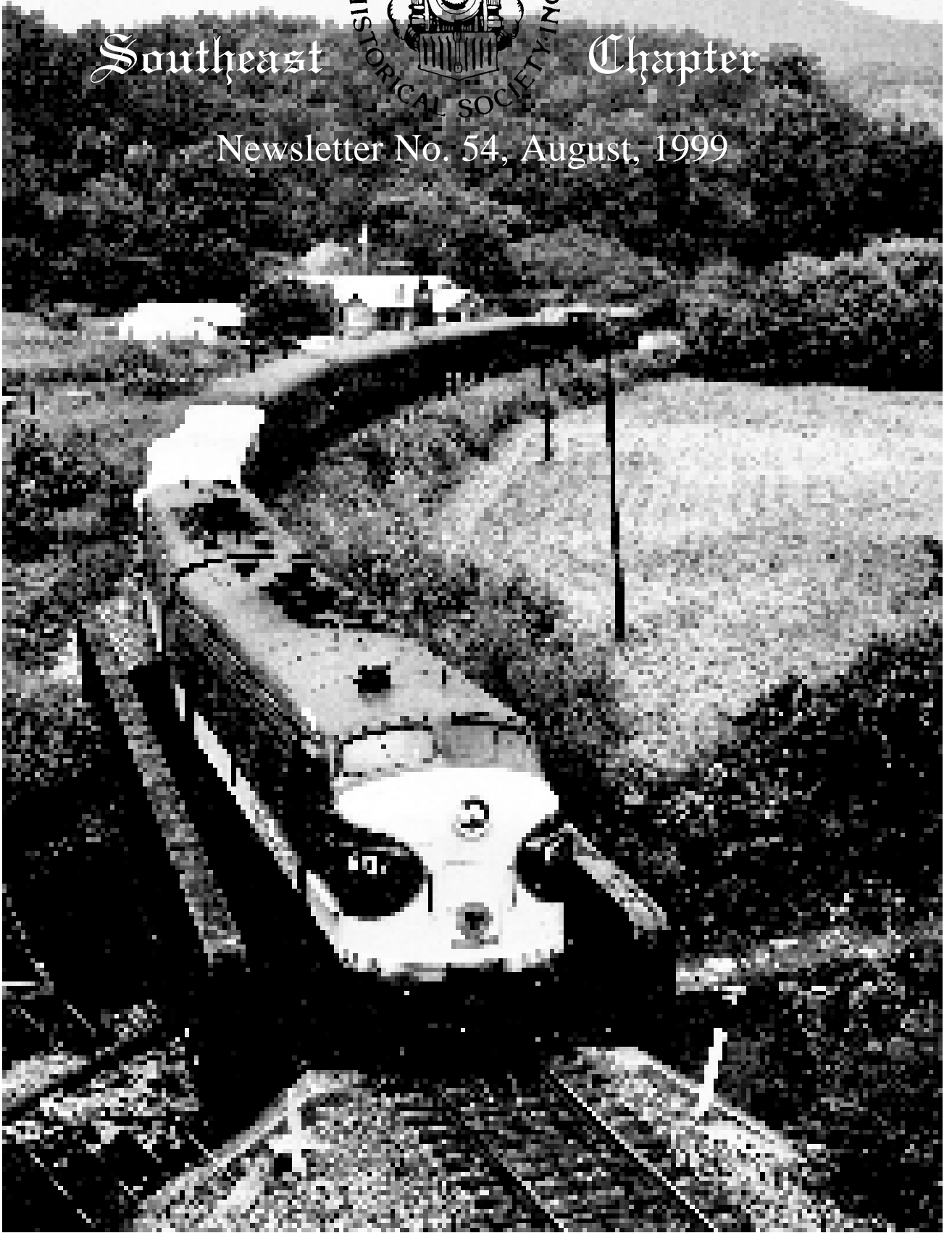
SOUTHEAST LIMITED

The Railway
Historical
Southeast



& Locomotive
Society, Inc.
Chapter

Newsletter No. 54, August, 1999



SPECIAL TRAIN TO THE LAND OF THE SKY

by Lyle Key

A decade old promotional campaign for tourism proclaimed: "Asheville, it will lift your spirits!" I thought that was a clever slogan for a tourist Mecca nestled amid the mountains of western North Carolina, and I must admit that the Land of the Sky always has held an almost mystical attraction for me. In addition to Asheville's natural beauty and cool mountain air, one can't help but be impressed with the palatial splendor of the Biltmore House, the genteel comfort of the venerable Grove Park Inn, and the literary shrine that was Thomas Wolfe's boyhood home.

Wolfe was quite taken by the awesome spectacle of mountain railroading in and around his hometown, and haunting passages about steam era railroading are interspersed throughout his novels. It certainly is easy to see how Wolfe or anyone else would be impressed by descending through the loops between Asheville and Old Fort on the Washington-bound *Asheville Special* or by listening to a road engine and a helper pounding up Saluda Mountain with a heavyweight *Skyland Special* en route from Florida to Asheville.

Hundreds of communities in the United States lost rail passenger service with the advent of Amtrak on May 1, 1971, but Asheville got a

temporary reprieve with Southern Railway's decision to decline a contract with Amtrak and continue operating its own passenger trains. For a time, a local version of the *Asheville Special* endured between Asheville and Salisbury, and during the latter years of the '70's, it was supplanted by a seasonal excursion train that ran from Asheville to Old Fort and return. By the end of that decade, Southern had signed an operating agreement with Amtrak, and Asheville like so many other towns had been relegated to "freight only" status.

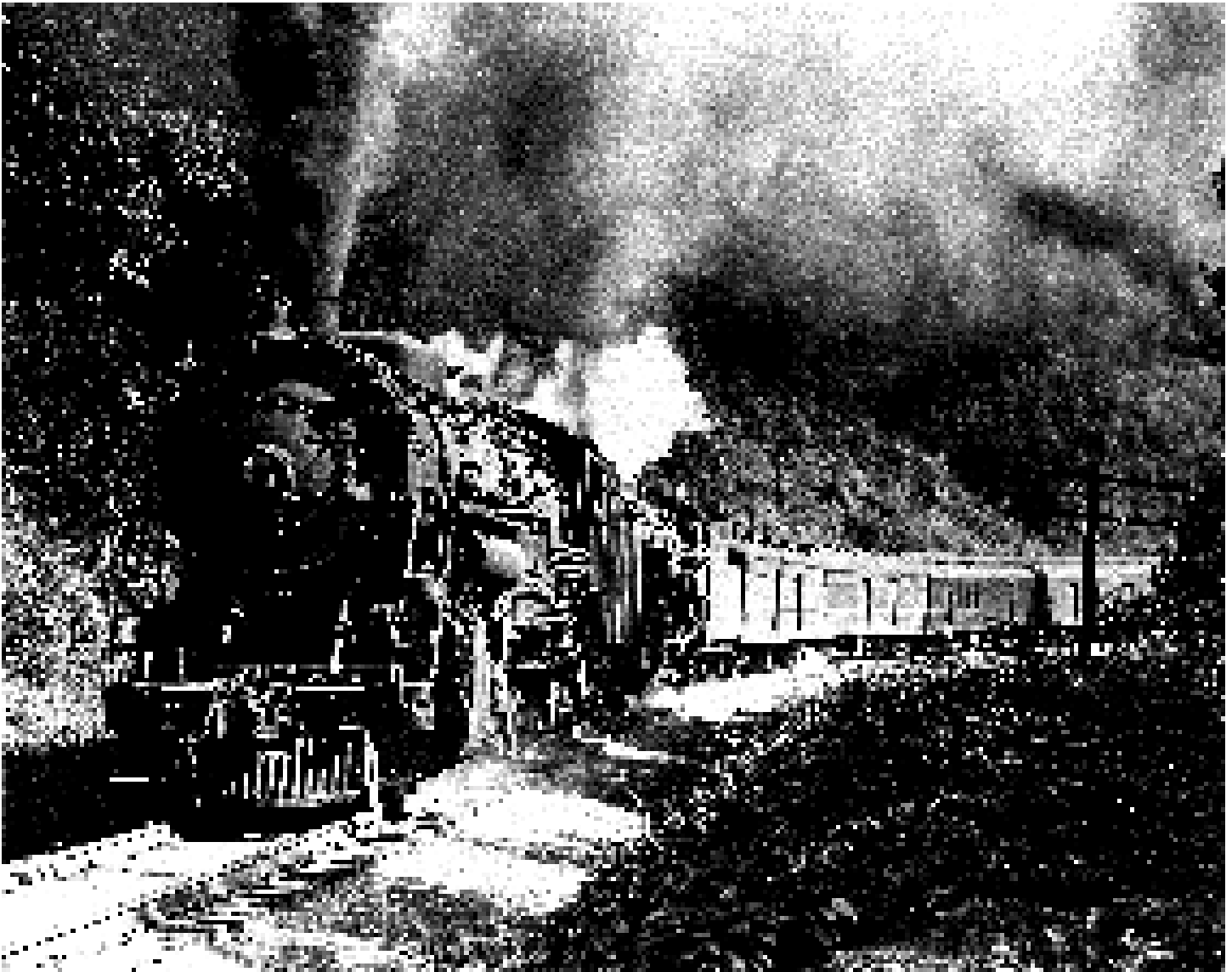
On Sunday, April 25, 1999, a passenger train again will run from Knoxville to Asheville, and my wife and I are among the almost one-thousand excursionists holding tickets on the chartered Amtrak special. The long Amtrak train has been billed as the *Carolina Special*, but it bears little resemblance to the *Carolina Special* operated by Southern Railway in the '60's. When I was a student at the University of Tennessee, the old *Carolina Special* typically ran behind two and sometimes three FP-7's, and like many passenger trains of that era, it featured a garden variety of head end cars. Passengers were accommodated in heavyweight coaches or a streamlined 10-6

FRONT COVER: Before Southern Railway finally relented and signed an operating agreement with Amtrak, it continued its long tradition of providing rail passenger service to Asheville. During the first few years of Amtrak, Southern's Asheville service consisted of a daytime "turn" from Asheville to Salisbury and return. The train didn't have convenient connections with Southern's Washington - Atlanta trains in Salisbury, and consequently, it was lightly patronized. With the blessing of the North Carolina Public Service Commission, Southern replaced the Asheville - Salisbury train with what was in essence a regularly scheduled tourist train that made a daylight turn from Asheville to Old Fort and return. Southern resurrected the *Skyland Special* name for the Old Fort train, and it's shown arriving in Old Fort in the late '70's. Note the dome car on the end of the train. Photo by Lyle Key

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Paul V. Newton	Secretary
James H. Wilk	Treasurer
Clifford J. Vander Yacht	Editor

The *Southeast Limited* is published bi-monthly by the Southeast Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society
P. O. Box 664
Jacksonville, FL 32201



ABOVE: In this magnificent photo from 1948, Frank Ardrey captured all the drama of steam-era railroading in the mountains of Western North Carolina. Southern's *Skyland Special* is shown climbing Saluda Mountain en route from Jacksonville to Asheville. The heavyweight passenger train is being hauled up the step grade by three big steam locomotives: Southern 2-10-2 #5045 is on the point, 4-8-2 #1462 (the road engine) is coupled to #5045's tender, and 2-10-2 #5047 is pushing from the rear. Photo by Frank E. Ardrey, Jr.

sleeper. The latter car operated between Cincinnati and Columbia, South Carolina, before being cut back to the Cincinnati - Knoxville run. A heavyweight diner-lounge was added to the train between Knoxville and Asheville until it was eliminated in 1966 or '67.

If we turn back the clock another decade to the mid-'50's, the *Carolina Special* split into North Carolina and South Carolina sections in Asheville with the former operating as far east as Greensboro and the latter running all the way to Charleston. In April, 1955, for instance, the *Carolina Special* handled sleeper lines between Chicago, Asheville, and Charleston (8 Sec 5 DBR); Chicago

and Asheville (10 Rmtte 6 DBR); Cincinnati, Asheville, and Greensboro (10 Sec 1 DR 1 Cpt); and Louisville, Asheville, and Columbia (8 Sec 5 DBR). A diner operated between Knoxville, Asheville, and Columbia, and a dinette-coach was assigned to the North Carolina section between Asheville and Winston-Salem. Over the ensuing decade, the *Carolina Special* lost its North Carolina section and evolved into a still respectable, but much shorter, train between Cincinnati and Columbia, S.C.

The pre-dawn darkness still holds sway on Sunday, April 25th when we arrive at the loading area alongside the Tennessee River in downtown

Knoxville. The train is waiting on a former Southern Railway/Norfolk Southern branch that now belongs to the Knoxville & Holston River Railroad, part of the Gulf & Ohio short line family. And what a train it is with two Amtrak Genesis locomotives and 19 passenger cars which include a mix of Superliner and heritage equipment:

Amtrak	22 and 88	Genesis locomotives
Amtrak Superliners	33047	Sightseer Lounge
	34077	Coach
	34096	Coach
	34018	Coach
	34062	Coach
	38063	Diner
	34092	Coach
	34026	Coach
	38014	Diner
	34064	Coach
	39034	Transition Sleeper
Watauga Valley	539	Coach
Watauga Valley	500	Coach
Watauga Valley	<i>Moultrie</i>	Diner (ex-ACL)
laeger & Southern	<i>New River Valley</i>	Diner-Lounge*
PPCX	<i>Chouteau Club</i>	Diner-Lounge
ex-SAL	<i>Hollywood Beach</i>	5 DBR/Sun-Lounge
Lancaster & Chester	<i>J. Pinckney Henderson</i>	Sleeper-Lounge**
Gulf & Ohio	<i>Tennessee</i>	Business Car

*Rebuilt Southern Ry. 14-4 sleeper *Tennessee Valley*

**Rebuilt MKT coach

We get settled in Bedroom E on former SAL Sun-Lounge *Hollywood Beach*, and at 7:07 am, we begin easing down the river in a westerly direction. Our departure is a mere seven minutes late which isn't bad for a train that had to load almost 1,000 passengers without the benefit of station facilities or platforms. An orange sun is rising over the hills south of the river; an appropriate color in this community that's so closely linked to the orange clad athletic teams of the University of Tennessee. The train soon passes the boat docks used by the famous "Vol Navy" in the fall and the orange "Vols" sign mounted atop the south stands of Neyland Stadium. Even the awning over business car *Tennessee's* rear platform sports alternating stripes of UT's distinctive orange and white.

The Amtrak special also rolls beneath two railroad bridges that cross the river. The first serves NS's Maryville Branch, and that one once was shared by the long abandoned Smoky Mountain

Railroad pursuant to a trackage rights arrangement. Further downriver, we pass under the busy bridge on CSX's Knoxville - Atlanta main line. CSX painted this bridge UT orange in the mid-'80's, and the unusual color is still visible though noticeably faded.

At Third Creek, the track leaves the river and turns north on an alignment between the creek on the left and the CSX main line on the right. On this spring morning, there's lots of honeysuckle in evidence along this segment of the Knoxville & Holston River. At 7:25, we roll onto NS's Chattanooga - Knoxville main line and cross CSX at grade. A southbound CSX intermodal train is waiting patiently north of the crossing.

While a student at UT, I made many trips over this line aboard Southern's *Pelican*, *Birmingham Special*, and *Tennessean*. Many things have changed since then, and one is the proliferation of graffiti on bridge abutments and freight cars. At 7:34, we pass the old Southern Railway passenger station. This handsome structure once seemed

doomed by a fire, but it now is nicely restored and productively employed as headquarters for an interior decorating firm.

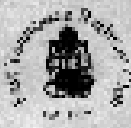
Beyond the station, I'll be covering new mileage. I've always regretted that I never got around to riding the old *Carolina Special*, but thanks to the East Tennessee Railway Club, I'm getting a second chance to ride a train between Knoxville and Asheville.

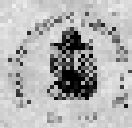
At 7:38, a volunteer in a handsome conductor's uniform comes by to lift our Knoxville to Asheville ticket stubs. The Railway Club has issued nice replicas of the old coupon tickets, and they're pre-punched to denote accommodations and meal selections.

Back in 1966, I rode on the *Hollywood Beach*

or one of its sister cars while en route from Washington to Jacksonville aboard Seaboard's *Silver Meteor*. Today, the unusual Sun-Lounge is owned by Dr. Art Cushman of Nashville where it frequently shows up on the consist of *The Broadway Dinner Train*. On the previous day's trip to Asheville, a couple get married in *Hollywood Beach's* lounge!

The train reaches the south end of NS's expansive John Sevier Yard at 7:45, and on the left side of the train, one can see the Beverly cutoff. The cut-off serves as a Knoxville bypass route for NS trains en route to and from Oakdale, Cincinnati, and Louisville. At 7:55, we pass the north end of the yard where a northbound merchandise train is ready to follow the Amtrak special. About

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		NON TRANSFERABLE EXCURSION TICKET	
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GOOD FOR ONE ROUND TRIP PASSAGE DESIGNATED THROUGH CAR			
This ticket is not subject to the conditions of the Railway Club. It is valid only for the named carrier, and is not lawfully purchased unless authorized by the issuing and participating carriers.			
In holding this ticket, the purchaser agrees to accept the conditions of the Railway Club, and to accept the responsibility for the safekeeping of the ticket and baggage.			
THIS TICKET WILL BE HONORED IN ASSIGNED CARS ONLY			
<i>Art Cushman</i> Club Capt., Pres. Train Knoxville, Tenn.			
No. 150148		BOARDING AT Knoxville, Tenn. * Asheville, N.C. Car. * * * * * * CONDUCTOR'S INITIALS	
PREMIUM CLASS FORM ETRC 60-10		DATE 1999	

a minute later, we meet a southbound merchandise train headed for John Sevier.

At 8:06, we cross the Holston River. The Holston joins the French Broad River above Knoxville to form the Tennessee. It's a beautiful morning, and we're traveling through gently rolling countryside covered with the lush, light green foliage of early spring.

At 8:45, the train diverges from the line to Bristol and heads east on the line to Asheville. We cross Douglas Lake on the French Broad River at 8:58 and exchange waves with scores of boaters. Off to the left of the train on the east side of the river, a long-abandoned coaling tower marks the old alignment of the railroad.

Our 1999 version of the *Carolina Special* bisects downtown Newport at 9:11, and we can see the Pigeon River on our left. Just east of Newport is Newport Junction where a branch line once followed the Pigeon River southeast to Crestmont, North Carolina. Our line continues in a more easterly direction, and about three miles beyond Newport, we begin paralleling the French Broad on its scenic course through the mountains.

At 9:50, we cross into North Carolina at Paint Rock, and the long train slows to a more leisurely pace in deference to the increasingly tight curves in this more mountainous terrain. The special rolls through the old resort town of Hot Springs at 10:04, and just beyond Hot Springs, we're treated to a beautiful panoramic view of the river and the surrounding mountains. In these higher elevations, we note that the dogwoods still are in bloom. At 10:30, the passenger train runs around an eastbound merchandise train which is waiting on the siding at Nacoma.

By now, we're eagerly awaiting our call to breakfast, and at 10:40, the car host sends us forward to lounge *New River Valley* (Jaeger & Southern 2209). We actually aren't all that famished thanks to the coffee, juice, and snacks available in the *Hollywood Beach's* lounge. My pre-selected breakfast of French toast is sold out, but the Eggs Benedict are a good substitute. The tables in the lounge car aren't covered with tablecloths, and as the train eases through an elevated curve, we learn that tablecloths serve a practical as well as an aesthetic function. In the midst of the curve, glasses of orange juice and water suddenly slide across the table and crash into the side of the car. Thank-

fully, nothing breaks, and the spilled O.J. and water promptly get refilled. While we're eating, the train's roving hillbilly band serenades us with *Rocky Top*.

When we arrive in Asheville at 11:45, buses are waiting for the passengers who opted for the side trip to the Biltmore Estate. Under a shed above the railroad, ex-Southern 2-8-0 #722 rests in quiet retirement from its "second career" in excursion service. My wife and I have toured the Biltmore Estate several times, and we opt for a leisurely stroll to the Biltmore Dairy Bar. At the Dairy Bar, we run into another old veteran of Southern steam excursions, the venerable Jim Bistline. I last saw Jim during UP's "Farewell to Tennessee Pass" excursion in the summer of 1997, and we enjoy visiting with him over old fashioned milkshakes and ice cream sodas.

The four hour layover goes by more quickly than I expected. While my wife checks out the antique stores in Biltmore Village, I watch the crew turn our excursion train on the wye formed by the lines to Salisbury and Saluda. I actually make a couple of purchases in one of the antique stores: an old book on famous news photos for \$2.50 and a beautiful old leather suitcase for \$22. Several people give me quizzical looks as I walk back to the train with the suitcase in hand. We're back on the *Hollywood Beach* at 3:45, just as an eastbound coal train passes with a two unit pusher on the rear end.

At 4:05, the Amtrak train departs on its return trip to Knoxville. At the Asheville yard, much of the old roundhouse still stands, but there's barely a trace of the old passenger station. At 4:20, we pass Murphy Junction. This was the north end of Southern's Murphy Branch which now is best known for the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad's tourist train operations. At Murphy Junction, we meet an eastbound coal train and then another one that's right behind it.

At 5:38, we're back in the scenic area where the track follows the river through the mountains. The French Broad is rocky and swift here, and several intrepid adventurers in rafts and kayaks are taking advantage of the foaming white water. As we get into the steepest part of the river gorge, the railroad is laid on a ledge along the steep mountains on the river's north side. The old SAL Sun-Lounge may be in unfamiliar territory, but its win-

dows above the roof line provide superb views of the surrounding mountains.

After crossing the river, we make our return passage through Hot Springs. The trip brochure tells us that this was a thriving resort town early in the century when mineral springs were a major tourist attraction. Nowadays, the hotels are long gone, and white water rafting appears to be the main draw for tourists. As we pass through the little community, there is a sudden burst of laughter as the train gets mooned. We also experienced this phenomenon on the Tennessee Pass excursion, and I hope that this crude gesture isn't replacing the traditional wave to the engineer.

West of Del Rio, Tennessee, we pass a pasture full of horses; one of which is an especially beautiful white horse with a golden mane and tail. Along a high cliff on the south side of the railroad, we see a sturdy slide fence constructed of vertically driven rails spaced a crosstie length apart. Old crossties have been stacked between the rails with the ends of the ties dropped into the slots formed by the rails' "T" shape. Just west of Newport, we see a deer that's running at top speed to distance itself from the train.

Sunset is imminent when we're called for dinner, and tonight, we're seated in ex-ACL diner *Moultrie*. After the demonstration of centrifugal force we observed at breakfast, we're pleased to see that tables in the *Moultrie* are properly adorned with traditional white tablecloths. My London broil is excellent, and the meal is topped off with a generous slice of exceedingly rich cheesecake.

At 8:34, we cruise past the old Knoxville passenger station and get a good look at the lights of downtown. Immaculate Conception Cathedral stands high above the tracks on Summit Hill Drive, and we can see the Sunsphere on the old World's Fair site. We pause before making the move from the NS to the K&HR, and as we proceed across the CSX main, I see that a northbound CSX freight is waiting for the excursion train to clear. The special eases to a stop along Knoxville's riverfront at 9:08 pm.

The excursion train may have had a much classier consist than the old *Carolina Special*, but the long discontinued Southern train clearly had the edge when it came to speed. The Amtrak special left Asheville at 4:05 pm and arrived in Knoxville at 9:08 pm. In 1955, the *Carolina Special*

left Asheville at 5:30 pm and arrived in Knoxville at 9:05 pm. About half an hour of that difference is attributable to the extra time required for the Amtrak train to run beyond the old passenger station to the riverfront site in Knoxville, but that still makes the excursion train's schedule an hour slower on a 129 mile run! This is incredible since the excursion train ran nonstop, and the old *Carolina Special* had five scheduled stops en route from Asheville to Knoxville. Many passengers on the excursion train commented that Amtrak should run a regular train on this route, but how many people accustomed to the easy two hour drive on I-40 would tolerate a five hour train ride?

After letting my opportunities to ride the old *Carolina Special* and subsequent Southern excursions slip away, I thought I had missed my last chance for a train ride between Knoxville and Asheville. All of us harbor regrets about trains not taken, and it's nice when life gives us a second chance to savor experiences that once seemed gone beyond recall. Notwithstanding these occasional excursions, however, it's sad to think of towns like Knoxville and Asheville which once were served by several passenger trains and now are served by none. That thought brings to mind an appropriate concluding passage from Thomas Wolfe's *Of Time and the River*:

And then the train was gone, and there was nothing but the earth, the moon, the river, and strong silence, and the haunting and immortal visage of America by night.

The End

Details!

You have read in the minutes that corrections to **The Story of Florida Railroads** in *Bulletin #86* are to be sent to **Larry Brennan**, so here is his address:

Mr. Larry Brennan
2252 Park Street
Jacksonville FL 32204.

Your editor had often wondered about the railroad abbreviation "L&N." I had assumed that because it went through tobacco country, it meant Leggett & Neyers. **Dick Hillman** cleared this all up when he told us that in Marietta, Georgia, it stood for the Lanta & Noxville. ^

Minutes of the Southeast Chapter, Railway & Locomotive Historical Society

The January meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society was held on Thursday, January 14th at the Hilltop Restaurant in Orange Park in conduction with the organization's annual banquet. The brief meeting was held around 8:00 p.m.

Old Business

- A) President Jim Smith reported that 122 copies of Florida's Railroad History have been sold.
- B) An announcement about the Scranton Rail Camp will be included in the February edition of the *Southeast Limited*.
- C) Twenty-one ballots have been returned for the voting of officers. All candidates named on the ballots won their respective race unchallenged.
- D) Don Hensley has written about the R&LHS and about the Florida Railroad History book on his web page. Don is also interested in helping make a web page for the organization.

New Business

- A) Paul Newton was voted to replace Frank Dewey on the organization's Board of Directors.

Committee Reports

There were no committee reports due to the shortened meeting.

Announcements

- A) Jacksonville's annual train show at the Prime Osborne Convention Center takes place on Saturday, February 13th. The show does not continue Sunday.
- B) Appreciation awards were handed out to members by Jim Smith for their dedication and service to the Southeast Chapter of the R&LHS. Arby, Cliff, Jim, Frank, and Bill received awards.

Upcoming Meetings

- A) The February 11th meeting will feature a presentation on Henry Plant by Ed Mueller & Larry Brennan. Mark Bennett is to supply snacks.
- B) The March 11th meeting will feature a presentation by Gary Sease as we all bid "Farewell to Conrail".

Respectively submitted,



Minutes of the Southeast Chapter, Railway & Locomotive Historical Society

The February meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society was held on Thursday, February 11, at the CSX General Office Building in Jacksonville. The meeting was chaired by William Howes.

Old Business

- A) Two-hundred copies of the **Bulletin #86** Reprint have been sold thus far.
- B) An announcement is to be made in the February edition of the **Southeast Limited** about sponsoring a youth at the Scranton Rail Camp. Art Towson is still handling the matter.
- C) Larry Brennan and Jim Smith are to work with Don Hensley is designing the club's web page.
- D) Larry Brennan has found several corrections to the reprint. Those corrections are to be published in the Southeast Limited.

New Business

- A) An annual dues notice has been sent to all members.

Committee Reports

- A) The next edition of the **Southeast Limited** will arrive in April.
- B) Trip Committee — Reid Adams to talk with Mark Bennett about some day trips including the NASA Railroad.
- C) Southeast Photo Book Committee — Mark Bennett, Art Towson, and Barry Baines are working on this. Some members met at the Jacksonville University archives to review pictures. The group is looking at other sources such as the Jacksonville Historical Committee and a supplement to the Stengle collection.

Announcements

- A) The annual train show at the Prime Osborn Convention Center is Saturday, February 13th.

Next Meeting

- A) The March meeting will consist of a model railroad show and slide sale. Art Towson will bring goodies.

Respectively submitted,



Minutes of the Southeast Chapter, Railway & Locomotive Historical Society

The May 13, 1999, meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society was held in conjunction with the North Florida Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society at 7:30 p.m. at the CSXT Southpoint Building 1. The meeting was abbreviated as Dick Hillman gave a presentation on the Georgia Northeastern Railroad this evening.

Old Business

- A) The tuition for sponsoring Derek Sands at Steamtown has been sent in.
B) The rail trip to Mt. Dora takes place Saturday, May 15 th . Those attending are to meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Orange Park Station. The cost of the rail trip is \$7.00.

New Business

- A) An ad has been placed in *Vintage Rails* in an attempt to sell additional *Bulletin #86* books.

Committee Reports

There were no committee reports.

Announcements

There were no announcements.

Upcoming Meetings

- A) The June 10 meeting will be held at the CSXT General Office Building downtown at 6:00 p.m. Gary Sease will speak on the "Farewell to Conrail." Paul Newton will bring snacks. Derek Sands is to speak at the August meeting on his accounts of the Scranton Rail Camp.

Respectfully submitted,



Upcoming Meetings:

August - RAILFAIR 99 - Reid Adams, Bill Howes, and Jim Smith will share their experiences and slides of the joint R&LHS/NRHS convention. California calls YOU, so come join us for a great evening of California railroading - past and present.

September - Derek Sands will tell us about attending *STEAMTOWN RAILCAMP 99*. This will be an enjoyable evening hearing about RailCamp 99. As you know, the Southeast Chapter which sponsored Derek and we think you'll want to hear about his experiences at Scranton.

More Details!

The June issue was a bit lax in captions. The front page photo was that of Derek Sands. The photo of five members of the R&LHS Mafia on page three was taken by Jim Smith's son while Jim's wife stood by. This now accounts for the whole seven of us on the trip. And the back page photo of the Mt. Dora Scenic Railroad and/or the Mt. Dora, Tavaras & Eustis Railroad doodlebug was taken by Jim Smith. All R&LHS members are welcome on these trips. ^

July 17th 4:00 PM

Plan now to stop by the Jacksonville Amtrak station and see Derek Sands off on his trip to *STEAMTOWN RAILCAMP 99* in Scranton, PA. We'd like to have as many members as possible give him a grand send off on the Silver Meteor, so mark your calendar to be at the station by 4:00 PM. See you there ...

Amtrak Attitude Adjustment *July 31st*

Local Southeast Chapter members have decided to enjoy an Amtrak attitude adjustment by riding from Jacksonville to Orlando on Saturday, July 31st. You are welcome to join us at the local Amtrak station to ride the *Silver Star, #91*, leaving at 8:10 AM and go to either Orlando (arrives 11:26 AM), or Winter Park (arrives 10:51 AM). We'll spend the afternoon wandering around and return on the *Sunset Limited, #1*, leaving Orlando at 6:50 PM (departs Winter Park at 7:08 PM). We plan on eating dinner in the diner on the *Sunset Limited*. Arrival back at Jacksonville will be 10:06 PM. YOU are responsible for your tickets! If you make a reservation now, a one day excursion round trip fare is \$44.00, but that price is subject to change the longer you wait. So if you and your family want to take a nice train ride and experience dinner in a superliner, call Amtrak and join us on the 31st!

Jacksonville, Florida 32201
P. O. Box 664
Southeast Chapter
Railway & Locomotive Historical Society