



Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, Inc.

Southeast Chapter

Newsletter No. 136 – April 2013

www.rlhssec.org

Southeast Limited

TRIP REPORT ON THE PULLMAN SLEEPING CAR COMPANY'S "SHAKE DOWN" CRUISE FROM CHICAGO TO NEW ORLEANS AND BACK IN SEPTEMBER OF 2012

Written by a Southeast Chapter member Lyle Key.



Ed and Peggy Ellis, welcomed us at Chicago Union Station. We occupied five cars on the rear of the *City of New Orleans*. Photo by Phil Gosney.

The Pullman Sleeping Car Company "Pullman" is the latest venture of Iowa Pacific, an international short line railroad group created by Ed Ellis. Ed grew up in Paducah, Kentucky, and started his railroad career with Illinois Central. He, understandably, has a soft spot for the chocolate and orange colors used on IC's passenger trains, and four of the five Pullman cars on the rear of Amtrak's *City of New Orleans* would be painted in IC's famous color scheme. The only exception was a silver ex-NYC sleeper-lounge that was leased to Pullman for the New Orleans trip. Ed majored in Transportation at the University of Tennessee, and he was

hosting the annual reunion for former UT Transportation Majors on Pullman's shake-down cruise to New Orleans and back.

We walked out to the train around 7:30 on Saturday evening, September 22nd, and boarded the five Pullman cars coupled to the regular Superliners on Amtrak's *City of New Orleans*. The rear end of our train was graced by observation-lounge-sleeper *Pontchartrain Club*, and but for the lack of a lighted sign with the train's name, it could have been mistaken for the last car on the old *Panama Limited* or *City of New Orleans*. IC rebuilt the observation car from a heavyweight coach in 1947 for service on the *Daylight* between Chicago and St. Louis. At that time, the car was named the *Mark Beaubien*. Today, the observation car has one master suite, two double bedrooms, a kitchen, and a lounge in the observation end.

The next car ahead of the *Pontchartrain Club* was our sleeper, ex-L&N Pullman *Plantation Pine* which had been renamed *Colorado Pine* by a subsequent owner. Pullman-Standard built this sleeper for L&N in 1953, and it still retains its unusual original configuration of six roomettes, four double bedrooms (I was excited that we would be sleeping in Bedroom A), and six open sections. Some of Pullman's guests requested space in the open sections just to have the experience of sleeping in a lower or an upper berth! The former L&N car looked quite different on the outside with its new chocolate and orange livery, but the interior still looked very familiar and inviting.



Our host's, "Colorado Pine" is the former L&N sleeper named "Plantation Pine." I (Lyle Key) slept in this car both directions. Photo by Phil Gosney.

Ahead of *Colorado Pine*, one found the *Scenic View*, one of the full length domes that Budd built for Santa Fe in 1954. Pullman gave *Scenic View* an extensive interior refit, and the tables under the dome on the upper level were used for dining and lounging. Dinner was served as we departed Union Station, and dining under the dome brought back fond memories of a dinner my wife, Carolyn, and I ate in the dome dining

car on UP's eastbound *City of Los Angeles* in the fall of 1969 as the train went over Cajon Pass at sunset.

The next car was sleeper-lounge *Swift Stream*, a six double bedroom-buffet-lounge car that was built for NYC in 1949. *Swift Stream* was leased from Mid-America Railcar for the New Orleans trip, so it was the only one of the five Pullman cars that was silver rather than chocolate and orange.

Between *Swift Stream* and the Amtrak Superliners, one found *Chebanse*, a 10 roomette, 6 double bedroom sleeper built for FEC in 1949. The name "Chebanse" came from a small town in Illinois that we would pass through on our trip. IC once owned a 10-6 sleeper named "Chebanse" that was used on its streamliners.

Carolyn and I quickly got settled in our bedroom on *Colorado Pine*, and shortly before the train left Chicago, the porter told us that dinner was being served in the *Scenic View*. We would back out of Union Station for a while and then pull forward onto the St. Charles Air Line. Phil Gosney, an Amtrak locomotive engineer from California, was seated at the table behind us, and Phil was tracking the Illinois Railroad Museum's (IRM) inbound *Nebraska Zephyr* excursion on his iPhone through the IRM website. Phil announced that the *Zephyr* was getting close and running 80 mph as we stopped to pull onto the Air Line, and then Carolyn spotted its headlight coming up fast on our train's right-hand side. The *Nebraska Zephyr* zipped past us very quickly, and all of us admired the lighted red tail sign with the train's name on the rear of its observation car.

Phil regaled us with many great tales during the trip, and one of them was about a previous mainline excursion featuring the *Nebraska Zephyr* (Photo next page). The speedometer in the E-5 was on an acceptable 81 mph, but the Road Foreman of Engines in the locomotive cab felt like the train was going much faster. It was like the old song about the *Hot Rod Lincoln* which says, "The telephone poles looked like a picket fence." The Road Foreman pulled out his pocket watch and discovered that the *Zephyr* actually was running 94 mph. As it turned out, the speedometer needle was stuck so that it couldn't go higher than "81." Needless to say, the Road Foreman quickly ordered the engineer to bring the train down to 79 mph!

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The Southeast Limited is published bimonthly by the Southeast Chapter of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society, P. O. Box 600544, Jacksonville, FL 32260-0544

The Southeast Limited Newsletter is edited by James A. Smith with layout by Clifford J. Vander Yacht.



First, a bonus: Sept 22 will be remembered as a special day for me. The Illinois Railway Museum's Burlington E-5 locomotive pulls the "Nebraska Zephyr" to Galesburg and Quincy. Later that evening we departed for New Orleans with the Pullman Company's "shakedown" trip. A great day for streamliner trains in Chicago! The "Nebraska Zephyr" heads west and gets up to track speed at Chicago Halsted Street. Photo by Phil Gosney.

Pullman hasn't attempted to replicate IC's famous *King's Dinner* that was served on the *Panama Limited*, but the food and the service on the dining car far exceeded my expectations. On the first night out, I had an excellent medium rare filet, salad with IC dressing (*i.e.*, *Thousand Island*), shrimp cocktail, and chocolate cake. After a thoroughly enjoyable dinner, we repaired, to bedroom A in *Colorado Pines* for a good night's sleep.

When I pulled up the window shade on Sunday morning, the train was stopped at Central Station in Memphis, and we were running about an hour late. It was too late for the tour of the new railroad and trolley museum in Central Station, but happily, several of us got to go through it on the return trip. Carolyn had opted to sleep in, so I went forward to *Scenic View* for a good breakfast featuring corned beef hash.

One thing I don't miss about the "good old days" of train travel is foregoing showers while en route. We "made do" back then with something akin to sponge baths with the wash cloths and small towels that The Pullman Company placed in our accommodations, but all of us were pleased that *Colorado Pine* had been modified by adding a real shower in part of the men's lounge. One could reserve a shower time with the porter or simply "walk in and use it" during periods of low demand.

As just about everyone knows, Amtrak's only remaining train between Chicago and New Orleans has been rerouted over the old Yazoo & Mississippi Valley (Y&MV) line between Memphis and Jackson, Mississippi. In other words, the *City of New Orleans* no longer uses the old mainline through Vaughan, Mississippi where Casey Jones had his fatal accident on April 30, 1900. I had heard that the Y&MV route was one of the roughest lines on today's Amtrak system, and now I believe it. *Pontchartrain Club* made a couple of violent lurches while we were highballing over the Y&MV, and my wife was up under the dome in *Scenic View* when several glasses and a pitcher filled with ice water hit the deck and were broken. During this part of the trip, we're reminded that this isn't Wayne Johnson's Illinois Central and that we aren't riding on the *Panama Limited*.

Canadian National was doing a lot of track work down around Lake Pontchartrain to repair the extensive damage caused by Hurricane Isaac. We met our northbound counterpart around Pass Manchac, and the southbound traversed quite a few slow orders as we approached New Orleans. Thanks to some generous padding in the schedule, we were only

half an hour late when we arrived in New Orleans despite the slow running along Lake Pontchartrain and the fact that we were an hour late at Hammond, Louisiana.

Breakfast was served on *Scenic View* during our layover on Monday morning, but some of us opted for the



This photo by Rob Hammons, shows the entire train consisting of the *City of New Orleans* and the *Pullman Car's* equipment as the train goes by the Delta region southbound near Yahoo City, MS.

famous breakfast served by Brennan's on *Royal Street*. It was nice to return to NOUPT and find the *Pontchartrain Club* up against the bumping post along with three other cars in the old IC colors. By the time I finished brushing my teeth, it was 1:45 pm, and our two locomotives were pulling our 12 cars out of NOUPT en route to Chicago.

IC retiree Jack Ferry from Chicago came equipped with a track profile and was kind enough to answer our questions and point out several places of interest. Phil Gosney pointed out the grade crossing in Magnolia, Mississippi, where IC's *City of New Orleans* hit a gasoline tank truck at high speed and killed the engine crew, the truck driver, and a crew that was loading a nearby boxcar. We met a southbound KCS double-stack train as we pulled into the station at Jackson, Mississippi, and darkness set in north of the Mississippi state capital.

We arrived in Memphis about 10 minutes early on the northbound trip, and several of us detrained for a quick tour of the railroad and trolley museum in Central Station. Several local railfans attired in orange golf shirts were on hand to show us the museum, and it was obvious that a lot of work had gone into cleaning out the area and setting up the displays. After we left Memphis, I spent a few minutes back in the observation car where Iowa Pacific President Ed Ellis was playing his guitar and singing various songs to entertain the passengers.



Ed Ellis is presented an autographed copy of "Birmingham Rails" by authors Marvin Clemons and Lyle Key. Photo by Phil Gosney.

I woke up briefly during the night and pulled up the window shade to watch a big thunderstorm with lots of lightning and rain. When I awakened again before sunrise, I decided to get up and take a quick shower before the morning rush. After I got dressed, I headed back to the observation end of the *Pontchartrain Club* for a last visit with several of my fellow UT Transportation Majors before the sunrise. My wife and I had another great breakfast in the *Scenic View* – I opted for the French toast and sausage

patties - and then we headed back to the *Colorado Pine* to finish packing before our arrival at Union Station. We pulled in 30 minutes early at 8:30 am. It was a wonderful trip, and all of us will be pulling for the Pullman Sleeping Car Company to be a big success.

Epilogue – Pullman kicked off regular service with twice-weekly round trips between Chicago and New Orleans on November 2, 2012. The event was marked with great fanfare, and Iowa Pacific President, Ed Ellis, was on hand with an oversize top hat and a matching morning coat. Everything went well until the morning of November 17th when an axle broke on an 11 Bedroom sleeper, *Baton Rouge*, at Tuscola, Illinois. Fortunately, the northbound City of New Orleans had slowed to 40 mph to traverse the CSX-UP diamond in Tuscola, and the Pullman conductor immediately pulled the emergency brake after hearing a grinding noise and seeing sparks flying from underneath the *Baton Rouge*. The *Baton Rouge* was the next to last car on the train, and the truck with the broken axle was the only thing that derailed. Thankfully, there were no injuries. Passengers on the *Baton Rouge* and observation car *Pontchartrain Club* were reassigned to spaces on the other Pullman cars, and the *City of New Orleans* continued its northbound trip to Chicago – without the last two cars – after a 65 minute delay.

Pullman operated some trips in December with leased equipment – e.g., ex-*Twentieth Century Limited* observation car *Hickory Creek*, ex-California Zephyr 11 bedroom sleeper *Silver Quail*, 6 Bedroom-diner *City of Angels*, and baggage – dormitory *Sunset Harbor*. Pullman’s regular equipment is being inspected by a third party pursuant to an agreement among Pullman, Canadian National, and Amtrak, and regular twice- weekly round trips between Chicago and New Orleans should resume this spring. For current information, one can check out Pullman’s website at www.travelpullman.com.



Lyle and Carolyn Key had a splendid journey aboard the streamliner Pullman Cars. Photo by Phil Gosney.

Announcements

April 6 - Folkston Funnel Rail Watch.

April 11 - Regular meeting of the Southeast Chapter at the CSX building.

April 13 - Florida Rail Fair, Volusia County Fairground, Deland, FL.

May 11 - NE Florida Model Railroaders open house at Green Cove Springs, FL.

June 6-9 - **Annual R&LHS Convention** at Madison, Wisconsin.

Bill Grogan's Goat...

Bill Grogan's goat was feeling fine,
Ate three red shirts from off the line,
Bill took a stick, give him three whacks
And tied him to the railroad tracks.
The whistle blew, the train drew nigh
Bill Grogan's goat seemed doomed to die
He gave three groans of awful pain,
Coughed up those shirts and flagged the train!

(Editor's note - We've heard of dogs being brought home from Afghanistan, but here's one from World War II - JAS)

Limited Stops to Pick up Returning GI and His Dog.

Baltimore & Ohio Magazine, September, 1946

The National Limited, one of the Baltimore and Ohio's crack trains, stopped in Harper's Ferry last Sunday to pick up a returning GI and his dog. This was the happy ending of a story of a man and a dog that began a few months ago in Maulberg, Germany.

Pvt. Scott Cortez, from Louisville, Ky., and Cognac, the mongrel dog, have been "buddies" since Cortez found the puppy in Germany and adopted it. Cortez was discharged Friday at Fort George G. Mead after four years' service, eighteen months of which were spent overseas.

When the transportation officer at Fort Meade handed Cortez his ticket for home, he said the railroads wouldn't haul Cognac.

The soldier and his dog then started to hitchhike home. Many of the motorists were like the railroads, Cortez said, they didn't want to transport a dog either.

Cortez and Cognac were trudging westward on Route 40, when state police at Barracks B, near here noticed them. They brought the soldier and his dog to the barracks for questioning.

Then they fed both the soldier and the pup, and Lieutenant Charles W. Magha made arrangements with the railroad to stop the National Limited to take the pair aboard at Harper's Ferry. Cortez got first-class reservations; Cognac rode in the baggage car ahead.

Southeast Chapter Members:

We are always looking for articles for the Southeast Limited. Lyle Key did a great job on telling us about his Pullman Sleeping Car Company trip. Perhaps YOU could tell your fellow R&LHS members some interesting story about railroading. We'd be happy to publish more work from Southeast Chapter members. Go ahead, drop us a line or two, or four to six pages with photos!