



MRHS MAINLINE

The Official Newsletter of the
Muskegon Railroad Historical Society
Volume 21, Issue 5: May 2006

Car Ferry Railroadng *By Jerry Tyler*

The following are a few recollections of my personal experiences working as a locomotive fireman on both steam and diesels, loading and unloading the GTW car ferries in Muskegon, Michigan and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The ships were named the Madison, Grand Rapids and City of Milwaukee.

When I was hired as a locomotive fireman on August 8, 1955 at Durand, Michigan, and after completion of my student trips, they assigned me to Muskegon, Michigan for the third trick (10:45 p.m.) yard job, and regular engineer, George M. Chase. Our nightly tour of duty was mainly the car ferry assignment. Quite often when going on duty we would work at least two ships, sometimes three. I can recall going on duty with a boatload of cars waiting in the yard to be switched and three ships coming in.

Generally, #513 from Durand would show up a short time after we went on duty. Most of #513 consist would be destined for Milwaukee. The freight cars that were pulled from the ships were, for the most part, for #514 leaving Muskegon for Durand and beyond. In making up #514, the consist was made up with cars according to destination.

Grand Rapids cars would be the car immediately behind the engine. I'm not quite sure which cars followed next, but there were cars for Durand, Pontiac, Port Huron, Detroit, Shore Line, and Tunnel. These were cars for Canada.

Now, let's get back to the ships. For the first few years the power on my trick was 0-8-0, #8300 class steam locomotives. The work horses for switching services.

Ship loading or unloading was performed at a very slow pace. The First Mate was the supervisor who instructed the conductor (yard foreman) which cars were to be

May Meeting Program

Program to be Determined...

**Tuesday, May 2, 2006
7:00 PM
Don't Miss It!**

taken on or off first. This was done according to car weight. A typical boat load consisted of 26 cars. This was based on 40 foot car lengths. The ships had four tracks within each holding 6 cars: starboard wing, starboard center, and port wing and port center. The last two cars to go on were the 25th and 26th cars and placed in the stem. The stem port wing and stem starboard wing. A bumping block at the end of each track had a standard freight car coupling affixed to it. The first two cars to come off were those on the stem port and starboard wings. After the wing cars were pulled then either the starboard center or port center would be pulled. While this was going on, the ship's ballast tanks were continuously adjusting the ships weight to prevent capsizing. When things went well, loading and unloading time was about forty-five minutes. I remember one time the Madison incurred a wild storm. Its cargo was

Calendar of Events

Tuesday, May 2, 2006 7:00 PM
MRHS General Membership Mtg.
Thursday, May 4, 2006 9:30 AM
Points for Profit Mini Trade Fair
Theme: Gardening
Saturday, May 6, 2006 10:30 AM
Tuesday, May 16, 2006 7:00 PM
MRHS Board Meeting
Sunday, May 21, 2006
Durand Railroad Days
Model Railroad Flea Market
Thursday, June 1, 2006 9:30 AM
Points for Profit Mini Trade Fair
Theme: TBA
Tuesday, June 6, 2006 7:00 PM
MRHS General Membership Mtg.
Tuesday, June 20, 2006 7:00 PM
MRHS Board Meeting
Tuesday, July 11, 2006 7:00 PM
MRHS General Membership Mtg.
NOTE DATE CHANGE!

mostly auto frames from A.D. Smith Co. of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. These frames stood upright in gondola cars. With so much listing and diving into huge waves, the frames worked themselves free. When the Madison finally docked it was just a maze of twisted steel pretzels that were once perfect auto frames. G. T. W. called on a firm, Lowry Welding Co., for help. It took two days to cut up all the twisted metal and debris and load it back onto the gondolas. There was a switch crew present all this time. When a gondola was loaded to a certain point, the switch crew would pull it off and wait for the next. I was on one of the relief crews.

When loading and unloading the ships at Muskegon there were four idler flat cars ahead of the locomotive. This was for the purpose of the locomotive's weight not bearing down on the slip (apron).

Quite often car men utilized a large can of oil and an oversized swab which they would oil the inside of the apron rails so the truck flanges would not climb the rail and jump due to the sharp curve leading into the ship. I have witnessed many car derailments at the docks.

Lake Michigan low water levels in the late 50's caused lots of problems for the ferrys, especially when fully loaded with freight cars. I can recall the water level in the 50's so low that chains were sometimes used to pull the first few cars off with their hand brakes set so the slack would not run in or out. You could literally see the tops of the cars from the locomotive cab. Due to low water when docking, the slip or apron had to be lowered to a point that would match up with the stem of the ship.

To Be Continued...

This article will span at least a couple of months, and we thank Jerry for this wonderful contribution!



Prez Sez
By President Thomas Anderson

Time flies by fast when you're having fun! The warm weather is here and we are already experiencing smaller turnouts as those outside jobs at home begin interfering with the time left for playing with trains. But don't take that wrong, things are still happening at the club and on the layouts!

Thanks to Kent and Andy for presenting the video on the "Wreck of the Grand Trunk car ferry Milwaukee". Very interesting information about the perils of transporting cars across the big lake during the November gales was presented. The video offered great underwater shots of railroad cars, cargo, and car ferry shortcomings that never made it across the lake.

Our layouts are all "running fine." What's wrong? Have we finally figured them out?

On April 8th, a HO committee meeting was held to determine the future of the existing layout. Over a dozen members attended and very good discussion about possible changes was offered. I believe it was successful and started to build the foundation for a new layout. The Board of Directors is looking for details to be presented, including: commitment, cost estimates, schedule, and designs. The attendees are gathering and sharing ideas, and there is another scheduled HO committee meeting on May 6th at 10:30 AM. It was discussed at the board meeting to meet with the Heritage Association about a long term commitment for the MRHS before we invest additional dollars required for a new HO layout. Finishing the back room before building modules for the HO layout is also being considered.

Thank you to the members that continue reporting on the engine work being done at the Muskegon rail yards. The stories and pictures keep all informed of railroading in our area. Mid-Michigan (Michigan Shore) #180 is now running and #179 was still torn

down as of the last membership meeting.

And thanks goes to Jim Beal for picking up those rolls for our last meetings, and to Ken Kadrovich for volunteering for the May meeting. We are always looking for more help in sharing the responsibilities, so that all may enjoy.

The new Bylaws have been signed, sealed, and delivered! Thanks go to all members that added great ideas for our leadership!

By the time you receive this newsletter we hope to have had a group of us working on track work for the Coopersville and Marne Railroad. There will be additional work sessions in the near future.

A few dates to put on your calendar: July 28th will be the MRHS Party in the Park. This event is a great fund raiser for the club, but we need lots of help, and the work is not even that much work!

Place August 1st on your calendar for

our societies' social this summer, again a charter on that famous railroad!

May all your switches be for you,
Prez, Tom

Member News and Donations

To date, 114 individual and family memberships have been received! The numbers are great, but if you have not paid your dues for 2006, you are loosing out! Get your dues paid soon.

Bruce Nyhoff has donated a 4 story N scale building, a Pere Marquette sign and Grand Trunk Western sign. Thanks Bruce.

Tom Parker has donated 4 old style wooden engines, a wood tender, a wood freight car and some scenery items. Thanks for the train Tom.

The library has acquired several new books, including:
 Classic Railroad Advertising
 New York, Ontario & Western in the Diesel Age
 Classic American Railroads Vols 1 to 3

Check out these new additions to the library!

**MRHS Online-
 Moving onto the Web
 By Thomas Van Bruggen**

The MRHS web site of www.mrhs-online.org is getting great exposure for the club. I am still working on many of the pages, as you may have seen. If you have photos, text, or other constructive suggestions for the site, just let me know!

**Articles Requested for the
 MRHS Mainline Newsletter**

It appears here often, but I am continually in need of articles for the newsletter. If you have articles or information to share, please submit them to the secretary/editor for inclusion in the newsletter. Please share your knowledge.

**Points for Profit Program
 List of Participating Businesses
 Look for special point bonus
 programs inserted with your
 newsletter!**

- ACN- American Communications Network
 - Advanced Hearing, Inc.
 - Albertson's Supermarket
 - Auction-it Today
 - Baglien and Associates Realtors**
 - Bolema Home Center and Rentals**
 - Carnival Cruise Lines
 - Chevron Gasoline Stations
 - Cool Stuff
 - Dr. James Donley Laser and Family Dentistry**
 - Frauenthal Center for the Performing Arts
 - Go Gear
 - Home Interiors by Barb Sidock
 - Investment & Retirement Consulting
 - Kaat's Culligan Water Conditioning
 - Lakeshore Chrysler-Jeep-Dodge
 - Little Caesars Pizza**
 - LowCarb Specialties, Inc.
 - Mary Kay- Laura Ecker
 - Melaleuca- The Wellness Company
 - Michigan's Adventure**
 - Mr. Rooter Plumbing
 - Muskegon Brake
 - North Muskegon Eye Care
 - O'Brien Family Chiropractic Center
 - Perkins Restaurant & Bakery
 - Pre-Paid Legal
 - Pre-Paid Legal Services
 - PromoRomo Marketing
 - Runnigfish Web Design
 - Republic Bank**
 - Savon Pharmacy
 - Shoreline Insurance
 - Skinsations by Colly Travis
 - Studio Creations of America
 - Tupperware by Cathy Cook
 - The Tux Shop
 - Van's Car Wash & Quick Lube
- Visit www.pointsforprofit.com for more information

DUES...DUES...DUES

Discounts, Library Access, Layout Access to name a few...

Get your dues in so you don't lose these privileges of membership.

If you have a check mark by your name on the envelope, your dues **have not been** paid for 2006

**Individual Membership:
 \$20/Year
 Family Membership:
 \$30/Year**

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Published Monthly by the
 Muskegon Railroad
 Historical Society

Edited by
 Thomas Van Bruggen, MRHS Secretary
 561 W. Western Ave
 P.O. Box 765
 Muskegon, MI 49443-0765
 (231) 726-3657

2006 MRHS Officers

President: Tom Anderson	H: 744-9782
	W: 773-6411
V. Pres: Steve Bowyer	788-3876
Treasurer: Andy Busard	755-6298
Secretary: Thomas Van Bruggen	670-6129
Director: Jim Beal	722-3599
Director: Jamey Morrison	(616) 780-4914
Director: Jim Funnell	744-1979