

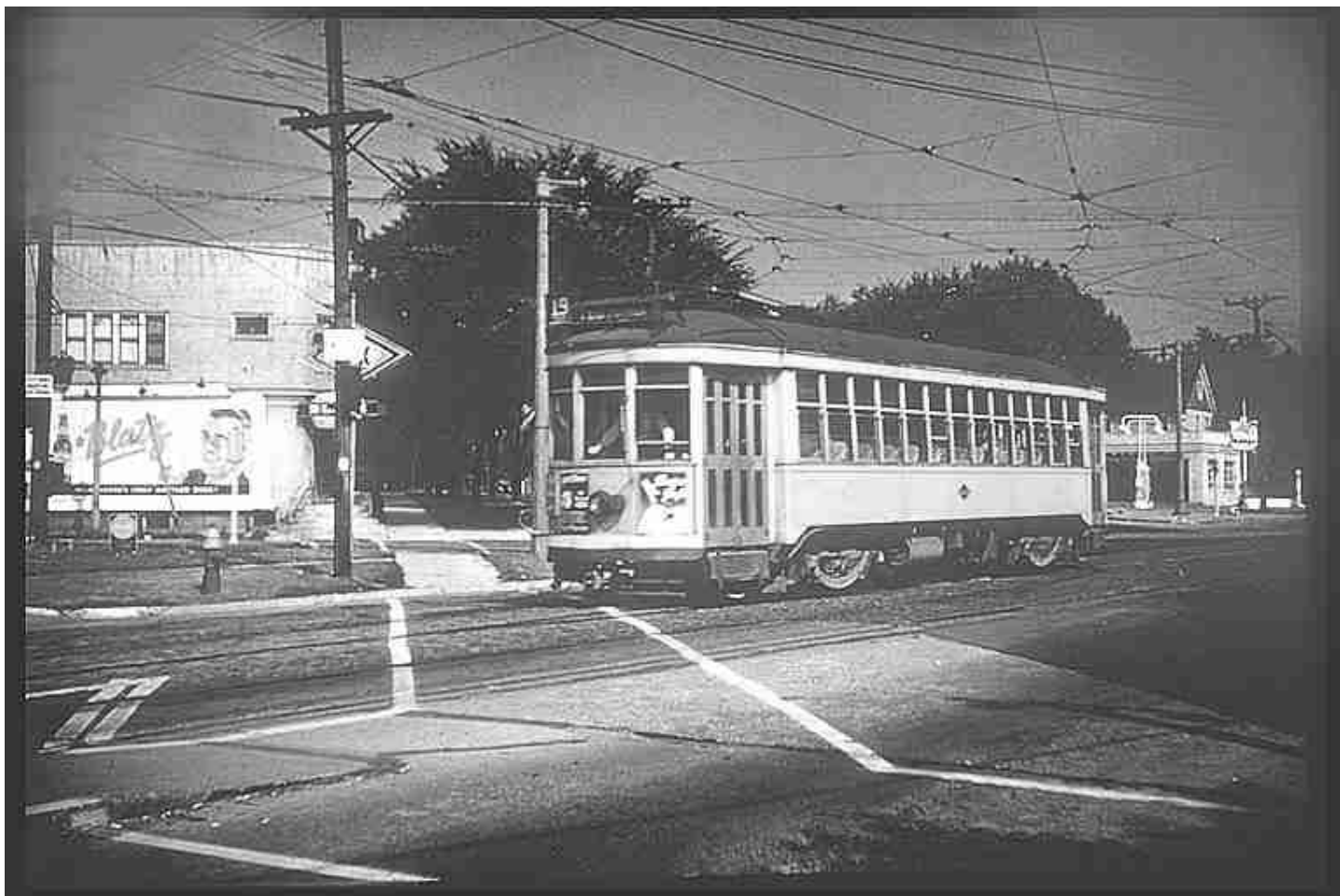


Volume 36 Number 1

January 2005

## NORTHSTAR NEWS

**How I Got to be a Railfan By Russ Isbrandt**



What has TMER&T ( The Milwaukee Electric Railway and Transport Company) 674 got to do with this issue of Northstar News? Read on and find out.

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### Meeting Notice

The next meeting of the Northstar Chapter will be at 7PM January 15th at the St. Paul Fire Department Training Center, 1695 Energy Park Drive, St. Paul (Snelling and Energy Park Drive just east of Midway Stadium). The program will be former hobby shop owner and long time Twin Cities railfan Greg Smith showing Twin Cities area railroads ( mostly passenger trains) of the 60's and 70's.



# NORTHSTAR NEWS

## Northstar Chapter Officers

### Board of Directors

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### Staff

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<b>Newsletter Editor</b>	<b>Russ Isbrandt</b>	<b>Email: risbrandt@comcast.net</b>	<b>Phone: 651-426-1156</b>

## Membership Information

Dues are \$32 (this includes \$20 National dues and \$12 Northstar Chapter dues). Family memberships are \$3 additional. If you want to join, an application is available at <http://www.northstar-nrhs.org/>. Print out the application and send it with a check made out to Northstar Chapter, NRHS to Treasurer, Northstar Chapter NRHS, 1092 Humboldt Ave, West Saint Paul, MN 55118.

## Editorial

Having taken over as editor of the Northstar News, I've also taken on the responsibility of finding content for your newsletter. While there are plenty of sources of railroad news on the Internet, I would like to make your newsletter a little more unique.

I believe having a series called How I Became a Railfan, featuring stories of how our members got into the railfan business, would provide that uniqueness. This issue features the first of the series. Many of our "senior" mem-

bers might have some very interesting stories of the days of the Minnesota Railfans Association fantrips. I suspect more than one of you out there got your first taste of railfanning aboard a MRA fantrip. Tell us about that experience. Maybe you lived a couple of blocks from a railroad mainline and ran down to the tracks to watch a streamliner pass by or double-headed or even tripleheaded steam powered transfer runs or mainline freights struggle up a grade. By all means please share your story with us. Maybe your first Amtrak ride got you interested; this series wouldn't be restricted to the 40's or

50's, so please contribute.  
I'm retired now, so I have time to retype and edit the stories.  
So feel free to send me stuff either by snail mail or e-mail.  
Snail mail address is 4036 Birch Knoll Drive, White Bear  
Lake, MN 55110 or risbrandt@comcast.net.

## Meeting Minutes From December

There was no formal meeting in December. Instead we held the annual holiday banquet at Mancini's Char House on Seventh Street in St. Paul. Approximately 33 members, spouses and friends enjoyed either steak or walleye dinners and shared a delicious box of See's candy compliments of Voigt's Bus Service as their "thank you" for our convention business. Bob Moen, passenger train buff and private car owner, served up a great slide show of Twin Cities fallen flag railroads.

## Meeting Minutes From July 2004

The meeting was called to order by chapter president Bill Herzog at 7:05 p.m. July 17, in the St. Paul Fire Department Training Center with 17 members and guests present. The minutes of the June 19th meeting were not ready for publication when the July issue of Northstar News was put together. The minutes of the April 17th meeting had been published in the May issue of the Northstar News. No one had any additions or corrections to those minutes, so a motion was made, seconded, and carried to approve them as published.

Treasurer Joe Fishbein gave his report. As of June 1, 2004, we had \$6,549 in the checking account. Income during June was less than \$1 in checking account interest, for total income of \$0. Expenses during June were \$129 in newsletter expenses for total expenses of \$129. Cash in checking account, as of June 30, 2004, was \$6,420, of which \$3,180 was in the general fund and \$3,240 was in the GTW 8327 restoration fund. Joe Fishbein said that he had membership cards for certain members and that those members should see him after the business meeting is adjourned to pick up their card. No motion to approve the treasurer's report was needed.

Herzog asked if there were any visitors at tonight's meeting. Bob Chestnut, an old friend of Bill Herzog's, and Carol Fish, wife of member Dick Fish, were present. Herzog said that the chapter did a great job of running this year's national convention. Things came out well.

National Director Marty Swan reported on the NRHS Board of Directors meeting held in Minneapolis during the convention. Next year's convention will be in Portland. No group volunteered to host the 2006 convention, so this time only, the NRHS Convention Committee will run the event, which will be held in Ohio. Emblem sales during the convention came to \$1,300. The NRHS Grants Committee awarded the Lake Superior Railroad Museum a grant for \$2,000 to put together a video tour of the historic passenger car Northland. The Minnesota Transportation Museum got a \$2,000 grant toward the cost of making reproduction seats for their

restoration of Winona streetcar #10. It was estimated that less than half those attending the NRHS national convention in Minneapolis stayed at the convention hotel. We almost had to pay a penalty for not meeting our commitment for a certain number of room-nights. This matter was discussed. Marty said that he wrote the hotel and got a response from the hotel's general manager.

Trip director John Goodman reported that trips are done for the year. We ran three trips during the national convention. Steve Sandberg, who operates excursions with restored Milwaukee Road steamer #261, was very happy. Canadian Pacific steam engine #2816 had some mechanical problems. #261 went up to Canada. It is now done operating for the year. John suggested that the 2005 Northstar Chapter board consider a one day trip to Duluth by rail.

The Minnesota Transportation Museum will dedicate restored Twin City streetcar #1239, a "gatecar," later this summer. The restored steam boat, Minnehaha, is now in the water and operating on a limited schedule. This is under an agreement between the MTM and a new organization, the Museum of Lake Minnetonka. There will be a special event July 31st at Wayzata. James J. Hill Days will be the second weekend in September. The MTM did a great job for us during the convention.

Convention chairman Dan Meyer thanked the members of the convention committee and those who worked during the convention. The budget for the convention is not final yet, but it is clear that they will be able to pay the Northstar Chapter back the \$7,000 we lent the convention committee as "seed money," plus pay interest on that amount. There are still some cancellations and refunds to be taken care of, but there will still be a significant positive balance after that is done. Marty Swan had promised that it would not snow during the convention and we kept that promise. We need to put together a story on the convention together for the NRHS Bulletin (or will the Bulletin editor do the story?) Pre-registration for the 2005 convention in Portland, OR is \$10 (but that only gets you a mailing - the actual registration is \$25.) The convention went well. Again, he gave thanks to all those who helped.

Bill Herzog said that he had some left-over "goodie bags" from the convention and that anyone who didn't get one could have one. He had gotten a call from George Isaacs of the MTM, who said that he wanted to put an MTM membership application in each bag. We should have a Northstar Chapter membership application form. We got about six new chapter members during or just after the convention. NRHS national membership application forms are being re-done and should be ready this fall. Treasurer Joe Fishbein had given Bill Herzog a list of those people who had not renewed their membership. Herzog said that he had called them and that some had renewed their membership. Herzog also said that this month the Northstar Chapter is 35 years old. John Goodman is the only one of the original members present tonight. Herzog also talked about the project to restore the 8327. No one from NRHS headquarters has said anything about its incomplete status. He talked to NRHS president Greg Molloy. Herzog said that he hopes to get Steve

to work on the engine later this year.

Old Business - There was none.

New Business - Editor Glen Holmberg said that he needed more material for the Northstar News. Few people are sending in items. Glen thanked secretary Dave Norman for sending in the minutes of the meetings. Marty Swan read from the by-laws about the requirements for the Nominating Committee. The committee must be appointed before September 1st of each year. Since we will have a picnic instead of a regular membership meeting in August, the committee was chosen at this month's meeting. The members are John Goodman, Cy Svobdony, and Bill Herzog. The August issue of Northstar News will have a map of the location of the chapter's annual picnic, which will be held Saturday, August 21st at Maiden Rock, WI.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made, seconded, and carried at 7:58 p.m. After a break, the program was presented. Russ Isbrandt had a video of the double-header of Canadian Pacific #2816 and Milwaukee Road #261, plus the post-convention trip of #2816. (Some camera work was by Mrs. Isbrandt.) Dawn Holmberg showed slides she had taken during the convention. (Not all the photos she had taken have been processed and scanned yet.) Bill Dredge showed a video that he had made.

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Norman,  
Secretary Northstar Chapter NRHS

## From the President

Greetings: Welcome to a new feature of the Northstar News. It will be my intent to write a President's Page for every issue of the News. I don't know what I will be saying. Sometimes it will be important stuff about the Chapter and where we are going from here. Sometimes it will be just fun stuff I want to write about.

This first issue though, I thought I would write and tell you a bit about myself; i.e. your President for the next year and your former National Director since about 1990.

I was born Harold Martin Swan on Feb. 23, 1941 in Lincoln Nebraska. I was so eager to get out into the world I didn't wait to go to the hospital but came at my Grandparents' house.

Growing up, I discovered a love for trains. It helped that my Grandfather was night clerk at the CB&Q stockyards in Lincoln. He would take me out to the Yards, right next to the Hump and I would watch trains. I became quite a pest at the various Q, RI, MoPac and UP ticket outlets continually visiting them and collecting timetables which I still have today.

I went to the U of Nebraska. The rumor has gone around BNSF that I played for the Cornhusker football team. Yeah sure! But I did get my letter as the basketball manager for the 1963 team. We went 4-19, winning our first 3 games.

Rest of the season wasn't all that great.

After graduation I interviewed the MoPac, UP, NP, and GN. I got the job with the GN and on Oct 1, 1963 I walked in the front doors of the Railroad Building—as the Office Boy. However, shortly I was promoted to Assistant to the General Freight Agent and transferred out to Seattle on Feb. 1, 1964.

One thing working for the railroad did for me was to give me a pass, and boy did I use that pass. Many of you have seen much of my 8mm movies I took while I was out there. I also joined the Tacoma Chapter, NRHS and became their National Director. Transferred back to St. Paul on July 1, 1967, I worked succession of jobs, Representative to the Illinois Freight Association, Manager of the Rate Desk, Assistant Pricing Manager, Scrap Iron and Steel. But all paths led back to Commerce and I eventually became Manager of Commerce (we dealt with rate claims before the ICC and I became an ICC Practitioner, which allowed me to practice before the ICC same as any attorney).

Then the roof caved in. We had just merged with the Frisco, the Staggers Act was in force and the ICC disbanded. What does the BN need an ICC expert when there is no ICC. Eventually I got surplused. But because of merger protection they couldn't tell me to leave. So we went through the rubber room and an age discrimination lawsuit which was settled out of court. I went back to the union and on Jan 15, 2002 at noon, I walked out of the BNSF, through the same door I had entered on Oct. 1, 1963—38 years 3 months 15 days and 4 hours later.

In the meantime I had found Northstar Chapter and in about 1990 I was elected National Director. I have held that position until now. I am also Director of Emblem Sales with the NRHS (anybody want any merchandise, see me—no postage and handling charges if I can hand it to you).

There are 3 things you need to know about me. One: I have very bad knees, in fact they are bone on bone. This limits my mobility. This summer I will start to have knee replacement surgery. Two: My hearing is not what it used to be. I have one hearing aid which I only wear when coming to meetings and I sometimes forget to do that.. Regardless, it sometimes is hard for me to hear what you are saying with or without the aid.. Be patient if you hear a lot of "Whatchsay" or if I turn to Norman and ask him what was said. Three: I can't remember names. Everybody says that they can't remember names, but I'm an extreme case. This has hurt me in my business career. I have tried all the tricks including word association. I ask again your patience if I don't remember your name. It is not an insult it is just a lifelong problem I have had.

I believe that the Board of Directors represents a talent that has been untouched in the past. I plan to call several meetings of the Board and I also plan to invite Committee Chairman and the Editor to sit in. The first of these meetings will be in Feb. Most likely on Sunday and the Amtrak Station—assuming we can get permission from John Goodman to use the room.

There has also been a couple of staff changes.

Glen Holmberg has served as Editor and as Program Chairman for the past several years. He has asked to be relieved of the one and agrees that he has run the course on the other. He has done an excellent job on both and the Chapter owes Glen a great debt.

The new Editor of the Northstar News will be Russ Isbrandt. Some of his ideas can be found with this issue. I hope that you appreciate it. The new Program Chairman will be John Goodman. With his untouched contacts we can expect many an exciting meeting night in the future.

Yours truly

Marty

## How I Got To Be a Railfan By Russ Isbrandt

I'm a war baby, World War II that is. Kids born today will be "war babies" too, but aside from those whose parents and close relatives are serving in the armed forces, their experiences are more like inconveniences than hardships. They'll not have ration tokens for play money and more than likely they'll be able to get in the family car and go virtually instantly. Most will not even know public transit until they grow up. The sacrifices civilians are called on to make today are minimal. Oh yeah, the price of gas is "outrageous", but they don't have ration coupons restricting their consumption. Going to the mall is not just routine, it may even be considered tedious. On the other hand, when the country stopped making cars to focus on Jeeps, tanks, war planes, guns and bombs, going someplace was a big deal. Travel for me began on a big yellow or orange and cream streetcar. The cover photo of The Milwaukee Electric and Transport Company #674 two man car built in the company shops in 1913 and shown blocks away from my home was the type of transportation I was introduced to. These cars took me downtown from our north side Milwaukee home. My dad would purchase a weekly pass to get to work. Sometimes I would walk



Photo by Russ Isbrandt Green Bay bound #149 March 5, 1965

two blocks to the car stop to greet him after work. Sundays, kids under 12 rode free with a weekly pass holder.

After the war in 1946 and '47, cars were extremely hard to come by. We got our 1948 Chevy Stylemaster coupe only though the pull my maternal grandfather had as lead cashier for the Schlitz Brewing Company. Occasionally my Uncle Les would take the family out for a ride in the country in his 1939 Buick. Otherwise, my Sunday afternoon entertainment consisted of a streetcar ride down to the Milwaukee Road Station to see the westbound *Afternoon Hiawatha* or *Olympian Hiawatha* or the Chicago and Northwestern's lake front station to see the southbound *Peninsula 400*. The Northwestern's station had the best vantage point since the tracks laid down at the bottom of a high steeply sloped embankment. The Lincoln Memorial Drive crossed the throat of the station a long block or so away to the north. One could almost always count on seeing the steam station switcher building a Milwaukee-Chicago train or spotting mail and express cars for a later train to Green Bay and Upper Michigan.

My maternal grandparents also contributed to the "effort", taking me out to Estabrook Park in north suburban Milwaukee to watch the westbound 400 roar by at 60-70mph. I've been quoted as saying "I take that one!"

The streetcar ride was always fun. Instead of a steady drone of a diesel engine on today's buses, there was a symphony of sounds. Each startup involved the hiss of the airbrake release, the ding ding of the motorman's foot gong signaling the start, ratcheting sound of the controller being notched out, and motor hum. The stops involved the hiss and squeal of the airbrakes and thuba thuba thub of the air compressor. Crossing another car line was always fun as we bangity banged through the switches and diamonds. No rubber cored PCC car wheels here to muffle the sound. At night the lights would blink as we passed through the trolley wire frogs. Once in awhile they'd go out and we waited in the dark as the motorman got out and rewired the trolley pole. Watching the cars cross trolley bus and streetcar lines was also fun as I watched for the motorman or trolley bus driver to put out big sparks as he powered through the intersection. Riding along I'd watch the reflection of the car in the storefront windows go up and down with the change of window contour.

Travel downtown was more of an occasion then as people dressed up with nice coats and hats. That applied even to thirties and forties railfan trips. Have you ever noticed how well dressed the fans were as they posed in front of the streetcar, interurban or steam engine?

My dad had the good foresight to take me for a ride on the Milwaukee Electric interurban to Kenosha shortly before the line was abandoned 13 September 1947.

(Continued on page 6)



Photo by Bill Volkmer Courtesy [www.davesrailpix.com/mke/mke.htm](http://www.davesrailpix.com/mke/mke.htm)  
Public Service Building 1945 Note the Greyhound far left.

The train left from the Public Service Building at 3<sup>rd</sup> and Michigan in downtown Milwaukee. Going out to the train we had to run the gauntlet of snarling stinky Greyhound silver-side buses which used the track area closest to the waiting room. Fifty seven years later, I'll admit they scared me. I held my ears.

Two incidents still come to mind on thinking back. I distinctly remember the car getting dark as we went into the trainshed at Racine. The second was my effort to walk down to the end of the car to get a drink of water. The track was quite rough and as I walked back down the aisle with my pointy cup full of water, we hit a rough spot and I proceeded to dump the contents down my neck.

My first mainline train ride came in 1954 on a visit to Detroit to visit my aunt, uncle and cousins. We were supposed to go out on the Milwaukee's *Pioneer Limited*. Wouldn't you know

it, #4 was running late. As a result we walked up to the North Shore Line depot and boarded the 6am departure for Chicago. This train made local stops along the Shore Line route. Little did I know that a year later the Shore Line would be abandoned.

We got over to Central Station early enough to catch the New York Central's (Michigan Central's) *Mercury*. Unfortunately this reserved seat train was sold out and we had to take the non-reserved seat *New York Special*. I was greatly disappointed. I wanted to ride the diesel streamliner not a clunky secondary train which probably would be pulled by a crummy steam engine. Well it turns out the train was equipped with lightweight coaches except for the diner or parlor-diner at the end. I recall seeing the *Mercury's* unique observation car with it's tall rear windows depart on the adjacent track. The route out of Chicago used the Michigan Central tracks south of the lakefront lines by a couple of miles to Porter, IN. The reason I remember this is that the restrooms were kept locked until we got through the south suburbs.

Milwaukee's last streetcar line was abandoned in 1958. I didn't take any pictures since I was concerned people would think I was nuts. A year later in 1959 I caught a small clipping in the *Milwaukee Journal* saying the Wisconsin Chapter of the NRHS was sponsoring a special train on the North Shore Line. My folks let me go on the 11 October 1959 trip to Skokie. Lo and behold everyone was taking pictures! Maybe I wasn't nuts after all. They even had photo stops! It was on this trip I met a Milwaukee Road ticket agent by the name of Jim Scribbins who invited me to join the Wisconsin Chapter. I subsequently did and the rest is history.

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Address Correction Requested