



NORTHSTAR NEWS

Season's Greetings !

The Grand Canyon Railway Polar Express By Russ Isbrandt



Grand Canyon Railway display locomotive at Williams, AZ decked out for the railway's Polar Express runs starting November 10th. Photo by Martha Isbrandt

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Meeting Notice
 December 4th is our holiday dinner meeting. This will be held at Mancini's Char House, 531 W. Seventh St. in St. Paul, beginning with social hour at 4pm. Greg Smith will show some of the late Dick Prosser's 8mm movies of the Twin Cities in the '60s. These have recently been digitized.



Northstar Chapter Officers

Board of Directors

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Note: Consult the website for any announcements regarding Chapter activities including cancellation of meeting for any reason including weather.

Membership Information

Dues are \$34 (this includes \$22 National dues and \$12 Northstar Chapter dues). Family memberships are \$4 additional. The student rate is \$17 (\$11 to the National). 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.

The President's Page

Christmas is coming and the Goose is getting fat. Please put a penny in an old man's hat. If you haven't got a penny, a half penny will do, if you haven't got a half penny, then God Bless You.

My Grandmother taught me that little poem so many years

ago and I have never ever forgotten it. I think of her each Christmas and she did cook a Christmas goose.

I'm sure we all have wonderful, special Christmas memories. I can recall a Christmas many years ago. I must have been about 10; I woke up on Christmas morning and went out to see what Santa had brought. With one exception, nothing but clothes, underwear, socks, shirts - yuk what horrible presents.

The one exception was a Straight Arrow board game. You can tell what an impression that this Christmas made on me if after all these years I can remember the one present that wasn't clothes. How many of you remember Straight Arrow and his golden arrows?

I was lucky however; Santa always came to my parents' home AND my grandparents' home. After church we went over to the grandparents'---and what do my wondering eyes behold but going round and round the Christmas tree was an American Flyer die-cast Hudson steam locomotive puffing smoke and making the choo-choo sounds for which that American Flyer was famous. From total disaster this turned into the best Christmas ever. Over the years I built quite an American Flyer empire and I still have them all, packed away in the attic. My pride and joy turned out to be American Flyer's Alco PA's in Northern Pacific passenger colors. OK, OK, NP never had Alco PA's. Who cares, the color scheme fit those Alco's like a glove and if they had ever bought any they would have been a very handsome locomotive.

For those of our members that celebrate Christmas, I wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. For those that do not celebrate Christmas, I wish you a very Happy Holiday Season.

Marty

Christmas and the Rail Connection

By Russ Isbrandt

This is the time of year many get nostalgic. Hopefully your memories are pleasant ones. For me, it brings to mind trips downtown on the streetcar to see Santa at one of the major department stores (Gimbels in Milwaukee in this instance.) The store had a major toy department and a fabulous electric train display. On the way home the streetcar would be packed and the windows all steamed up. Later in the shopping season, another major store, Schuster's, sponsored a "Christmas Parade" consisting of a decorated Milwaukee Electric motorized side dump car pulling a couple of flatcars all decked out in a blaze of lights, a PA system blaring Christmas tunes, Christmas trees, and of course Santa and his sleigh. The parade ran throughout the city on the streetcar line network, passing the Shuster's Department Store's various locations. It was always fun watching the shower of sparks as Milwaukee Electric employees guided the trolley poles through various wire frogs as they crossed intersecting trackless trolley and streetcar lines.

Years later I'd take advantage of the holiday school break to ride the North Shore Line to Chicago to train watch. It was a blast riding the front seat of the *Electroliner* speeding down a corridor of catenary towers on the Skokie Valley route as mo-



Milwaukee's 1954 equivalent of a Minneapolis Holidazzle Parade. Milwaukee Sentinel photo from Joseph M. Canfield's TM Bulletin 112 of the Central Electric Railfan's Association 1972.

torists on parallel US 41 crawled along on the glaze iced highway.

As it is now, this was a peak travel season and many passenger trains were filled out with extra coaches and Pullmans. Those normally carrying much head end business sometimes ran as separate passenger and mail and express sections. Trains like the *Denver Zephyr* ran in separate Pullman and coach sections. Some roads decorated for the holidays. Window decorations could be seen in the observation car of the Burlington *Zephyr* for example.

Still later I would forsake my car to come home from school to Milwaukee from Lexington, KY on the train. Sometimes it was the Southern's *Ponce de Leon / Carolina Special* and the New York Central's *James Whitcomb Riley*. Other times it was the C&O's *George Washington* and Pennsy's *South Wind*. There was always a cozy feeling watching the passing scenery through rain streaked windows. At night the Christmas lights of small towns like Star City and Crown Point, IN flashed by as singer Perry Como crooning "Oh There's No Place Like Home for the Holidays" ran through my mind.

Some of those kind of memories can still be created today! I suspect the kids of the Grand Canyon's *Polar Express* may harbor similar memories. Parents in Philadelphia can still take the kids downtown by streetcar or SEPTA train to Wanamaker's Department Store. No doubt parents in Chicago still take their kids downtown to see the Christmas lights. Metra runs Santa Safety trains at a special \$3.00 fare on weekends. Locally, you can now take the kids on the light rail downtown to see the Holidazzle Parade.

Here's wishing you all a great holiday season full of fond memories and pleasant new experiences.



Hurry! Your bedroom on the *California Zephyr* awaits you this cold late afternoon in December. The Burlington, Rio Grande and Western Pacific are about to create still another wonderful holiday memory. Galesburg Dec. 17, 1961. Photo by Russ Isbrandt

The Polar Express On the Grand Canyon Railway By Russ Isbrandt

The second week of November my wife Martha and I traveled to Phoenix for a wedding. We made a little detour to Williams and the Grand Canyon Railway to take a day trip to the Canyon. But that's another story.

On arrival we noticed the station area and display locomotive decked with strings of Christmas lights. It was only on our return trip from the Canyon that we were informed that tonight the *Polar Express* began making its runs and that our train would have to be unloaded as quickly as possible and pulled back out to the yards.

Our train was due back to Williams at 5:45pm, after sunset. What greeted us was a veritable wonderland of lights. The station, courtyard between the Grand Canyon Hotel and sta-

tion and area leading to the street was crammed with millions of lights.

That was only the beginning. On disembarking from the train we found ourselves engulfed in hundreds of pajama clad kids just about jumping out of their skins with excitement and their parents, some of whom also were in pajamas.

At about 6pm, the Canyon train backed out of the station and into the yards across the street. Very shortly the *Polar Express* pulled by an ex-Canadian National Montreal built FPA-4 with a wreath composed of red lights surrounding its headlight pulled in. As the 13 car train composed of 12 ex-SP Harriman commuter coaches and an ex-Via stream generator car crossed the street, the station PA system boomed "Now arriving, the *Polar Express*". At the end of the train was an ex-Amtrak FP-40 painted silver with a yellow/gold band and Grand Canyon lettering.

I mentioned to a railway employee standing nearby with a radio, monitoring the action, that they could have used a few more steam leaks between the cars besides the one showing mid train for "atmosphere". He replied that only half the cars were steam heated, the others had HEP though they had steam pass through. They grouped the cars together by heating type so the pass throughs were really needed. In our conversation he mentioned that this season they would run 60,000 seats. Apparently the Grand Canyon Railway is a very successful operation in that they now employ 400 persons.

As 6:30pm approached the platform emptied, the kids carrying their *Polar Express* books and parents having been loaded by two elf volunteers at each vestibule.

Promptly at 6:30pm with two blasts of the Amtrak five tone chime horn, the train started pulling out, the steam generator and FA at the end passing at a brisk rate.

The kids were on their way to the North Pole; North Pole, AZ that is, about 16 miles out. During the journey there would be hot chocolate, cookies and a reading of the *Polar Express* book. At the North Pole, Santa boards and makes his way through the train passing out a small gift to each child.



Grand Canyon Railway's *Polar Express* train set prior to decoration. Nov. 10th. Photo by Russ Isbrandt

In the Not So Smart Department Story Summarized from the Chicago Tribune Nov. 23, 2005

A Chicago Metra North Central line express train bound for Antioch, IL over Ex-Wisconsin Central tracks hit five cars stranded in traffic on a diagonal crossing of four lane Grand Avenue in the Chicago suburb of Elmwood Park. The train was traveling about 68 mph when the gates descended trapping cars in the crossing. One of the cars was dragged down the tracks about a block and caught fire. Sixteen were injured including 3 critically. The five cars ricocheted off of 11 other cars. No one on the train was hurt. The engineer, a 30 year veteran put the train into emergency as soon as he saw the situation. Drivers routinely block this crossing, a short distance from a stop light, despite many warning signs not to do so. Duh!!! (Editor's comment.)



Milwaukee Road *Morning Hiawatha* at Milwaukee Dec. 28, 1966. Note the parlor-tap car between the Skytop Lounge and diner. Photo by Russ Isbrandt



Long C&NW *Flambeau 400* departing Milwaukee Dec. 26, 1966. Photo by Russ Isbrandt

Minutes of the November 19th Membership Meeting

The meeting was called to order in the St. Paul Fire Department Training Center at 7:05 p.m. by chapter president Marty Swan with 25 members and guests present. The question was asked if there were any guests at tonight's meeting. There was one, Ed Burns, who is planning to become a member of the chapter. A motion was made to approve the minutes of the October 15, 2005

meeting, as printed in the November 2005 issue of Northstar News. The motion was seconded and carried. Announcements - Marty said that he will be getting new hearing aids soon. Marty also said that he ran for Central Region VP of the NRHS, but Al Weber of the St. Louis chapter won the election, reportedly by a wide margin. Cheer Report - Andy Koetz reported that his father, Bob Koetz, is in the hospital, battling pneumonia. Treasurer Joe Fishbein gave his report. As of October 1, 2005, we had cash in checking account of \$5,306. Income during October was \$1 in checking account interest, for total income of \$1. Expenses during October were \$90 in newsletter expenses and \$50 as a memorial to deceased chapter member John Melius (donated to Boy Scout Troop 243), for total expenses during October of \$140. Cash in checking account, as of October 31, 2005, was \$5,167, of which \$3,427 was in the General Fund and \$1,740 was in the GTW 8327 Restoration Fund. Funds in CDs and investments, as of September 30, 2005, was \$32,000. Total Chapter Membership is 90, of whom 2 have already renewed for 2006.

Trip Chairman John Goodman reported that several officers of the chapter had suggested that he look into chartering the "Cedar Rapids" for a trip to Chicago. They would allow us to get our own hotel in Chicago, but even so, the expense would be several hundred dollars per person. (Also - it is unknown whether the recent shake-up at Amtrak would affect the Empire Builder.) If only a small group goes, could we rent a van? There might be insurance problems with that plan. Twenty people at \$500 to \$800 per person - there probably wouldn't be enough interest at those prices. There was more discussion. The feeling was that the only thing possible would be to charter a bus. We could visit the crossing of two mainlines at Rochelle, IL and the Illinois Railway Museum. It would be a two night trip. The Iowa Chapter of the NRHS is reluctant to run too many trips on the Iowa Terminal RR, but they could accommodate 12 to 15 people from us on their trip next October. This would be a one day trip. John said that he would pursue the proposed trips to the Illinois Railway Museum and to Iowa.

National Director Doug Johnson reported on the NRHS Board of Directors meeting in San Jose, California.

Northstar News editor Russ Isbrandt said that he wants to get the December issue out early, so people get it before the Holiday Party in early December. He has set next Wednesday, November 23rd, as the deadline for that issue. Mike Mackner, who is in charge of Housing, was not present to give a report. Mark Braun, of the By-Laws Committee, is not ready to give a report. Program Chairman John Goodman said that the Dick Prosser estate included a number of rolls of Super 8mm movie film of RR scenes. They have already transferred some of them to DVD. They include many interesting run-bys from the 1961 era. We may use them for the program for the Holiday Party. Russ Isbrandt will do the program for the January meeting.

It was suggested that the program for February be a Members' Night. Bill Dredge said that he had a commercial video of this year's NRHS national convention that he could show at a future meeting.

Cy Svobodny reported for the Election Committee. All current officers are willing to serve another term in their present office. Marty asked if there was anyone interested in nominating someone or in running for any of the offices. He called three times for each office. Dennis Loudon is the present trustee - no one else spoke up. Dave Norman is the present secretary - no one else spoke up. Joe Fishbein is the present treasurer - no one else spoke up. Part way

through the process, someone made a motion to close the nominations and elect all the candidates, but the motion was ruled out of order. Doug Johnson is the present national director - no one else spoke up.

Mark Braun is the present vice president - no one else spoke up. Marty Swan is the present president - no one else spoke up. Russ Isbrandt made a motion to elect all nominated candidates by acclamation. The motion was seconded by John Goodman and carried.

Bill Herzog gave a report on the GTW 8327 restoration project. No work was done on it this year, but he will work on it after he returns to Minnesota next May. A question was asked about the proposed chapter membership roster. No one had objected to being listed. Some wondered if we would have a problem with privacy if we publish one. John Goodman made a motion that the secretary and treasurer compile a roster of the chapter's members and that it be sent to paid members of the chapter only. The motion was seconded, discussed, and carried. Dennis Loudon reported on plans for the Holiday Party. He has only 20 reservation so far. He asked for a show of hands of those who plan to come, but haven't sent in their reservations yet. He reminded everyone that we need to have at least 30 reservations by the deadline, as required by our agreement with the restaurant. He noted that if anyone else wants to attend, they can download the reservation form from the chapter website.

Jim George re-opened the discussion of the proposal that he had made at last month's meeting that the chapter make a donation to the Soo Line Historical Society's project to build an archives building. Jim said that a representative of the group couldn't be present to speak about the project this month, but could be at our January meeting. During the discussion, the suggestion was made that we limit our donations to the amount we receive in interest on our savings and checking each year. Marty said that the chapter Board of

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Address Correction Requested

directors should come up with a policy on charitable grants. He wants to call a Board of Directors meeting, but that might not happen until February. There was more discussion, but no decision.

Other Old Business - A question was brought up about the DVDs made of the seminars presented at the national convention that we hosted.

New Business - A question was asked if people can still put items they want to give away at the front table at the meeting. A question was asked if anyone has items they want to donate as Holiday Party doorprizes. New member Ed Burns, retired after 38 years as a BNSF employee, spoke about numerous errors in a book about the Great Northern's Empire Builder.

He made a motion that the chapter write a letter to Motor Books, asking that they get another opinion before they publish any more books with inaccurate information. Several members spoke up to second the motion. After a discussion, the motion carried.

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made, seconded, and carried at 8:26 p.m. After a break, the program was presented by Dan Meyer and Dawn Holmberg, documenting their trip by train to the NRHS National Convention at Portland, Oregon.

Respectfully submitted,

Dave Norman

Secretary, Northstar Chapter NRHS