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FOX RIVER LINES

m a g a z i n e



Issue 04-3, Fall 2004

POLAR EXPRESS

Express Train to Revenue Enhancement



The "POLAR EXPRESS" lights up the night with 2400 Italian lights at Blackhawk Station in the Jon J. Duerr Forest Preserve.

On December 4 and 11 twenty-four Fox River Trolley Museum members made the holiday season happy and bright for many children and their parents. Included are *Bob Blaus, Bob Breese-Rodenkirk, Chuck Galitz, Jim Gonyo, Luke Helm, Paul Kaufman, Dan Kelly, Ed Konecki, Fred Lonnes, Don MacBean, Bill Minerly, Stan Nettis, Mark Petersen, Andy Roth with family members Eric and Elise, Ralph Taylor, Marty Tuohy, Rachel Tuohy, Ken Ward, Bob Wayman and Don Zavacky.*

Friends from the community included: Marcie Lautanen-Raliegh, Elmhurst Historical Museum; Ed Klemm, Wheaton North High School; Dave Doerner, Consulting Mechanical Engineer; and York High School students.



Bob Blaus, Conductor extraordinaire, Santa's Helper and organizer overseeing one of the December 4 "POLAR EXPRESS'S."

On December 4

Drew Bendelow (guitar), Caitlin Mower, Kelley Westerberg, Jenna Dunkle, Jason Koval and his younger brother, Lara Niersbach, Abbi Patel, Cori Haack, Katie Kieft, Amy Maduram, Madeline Brodt

On December 12

Drew Bendelow, Jason Koval and his younger brother, Keith Olson, Drew Nanninni, Katie McCann, Meg Dolan, Rollin George, Shanna Cardea



Marty Tuohy, Bob Wayman, Dave Doerner and Rachel Tuohy have turned IC 9648 into "Santa's Kitchen" preparing gallons of hot chocolate for thirsty travelers on the "POLAR EXPRESS."



Bob Wayman and Mark Petersen "Cheffed" the hot chocolate operation for the December 11th "POLAR EXPRESS" near track two at Castlemuir.

Some other vital statistics that give a better picture of the magnitude of the undertaking.

SUPPLIES

500 Jingle Bells	40 pounds of cookies	PA system and speakers
100 luminaries	17 on board crew	lean to tent
700 cups of hot chocolate	Gallons of hot water	200 feet of extension cable
200 feet of garland	10 pounds cocoa mix	2400 Icicle Christmas lights
72 bows	Propane gas and 3 stoves	Over 100 reservation requests
25 decorative candy canes	Gas powered Electric Generator	About \$4,000 in revenue



"Santa Claus" aka Ed Konecki with the help of Elise Roth makes his way through CTA 43 passing out "jingle bells" presents to the delight of youngsters at the North Pole.



Ed Klemm, speech teacher at Wheaton North High School, sensitively reads the enduring Chris Van Allsburg story "POLAR EXPRESS" to train's passengers.



Fifty "good boys and girls" get their just rewards from a jolly and enthusiastic "Santa Claus."

York High School e-news of Dec. 9, 2004:

"ECO Club members, sponsor Mr. Blaus and English teacher, Mr. Bendelow are bringing Chris VanAllsburg's book "POLAR EXPRESS" to life for nearly 800 parents and children visiting the Fox River Trolley Museum in South Elgin this month. ECO students are helping out while patrons board an antique electric railroad car at the Blackhawk Station in The Jon Duerr Forest Preserve for a scenic four mile ride along side the Fox River. The road from the highway to the platform was lit with over 100 luminaries made from milk jugs collected by Wendy Soltau and her students at LaBrigade. Santa awaits all at the north end of the track.

During the return from the "North Pole", Drew Bendelow and his magic guitar lead the group in holiday songs."

South Elgin's, River Trail Restaurant offered a 10% discount on all menu items to holders of FRTM "POLAR EXPRESS" tickets.

The Museum hosted The Batavia Park District as they operated their sixth annual "POLAR EXPRESS" this year with three trains and over 300 guests and helpers. A gas motor generator crisis occurred hours before the first train's departure was quickly, promptly and enthusiastically resolved by member *Fred Lonnes*. - Thanks Fred!



Member Paul Kaufman and his accordion entertain early "POLAR EXPRESS" arrivals at Blackhawk Station shelter.



On the way back from the North Pole, Drew Bendelow, an English teacher at York High School, delights children and adults alike in a family sing along.



Kids line up at the Blackhawk Station platform for the "POLAR EXPRESS."



The gallons and gallons of hot chocolate are dispensed by one of Santa's helpers, Jenna Dunkel, a York High School student, before the "POLAR EXPRESS" leaves Jon Duerr (Blackhawk) Forest Preserve for the North Pole.

"POLAR EXPRESS" trains have been popular for years in our area. METRA reported that 18 communities and park districts offered "POLAR EXPRESS" train gallery car sections and charters again this year. Many were sold out months in advance. Some were in their eighth or ninth year of operation. The Museum's trains however were different than those on METRA . . . we ran our own on our own historic interurban Fox River Line.

Kudos and our hats are off to Bob Blaus for all of the many hours of hard work, organizing, implementing and overseeing this great and successful

new effort to enhance the Museum's revenue and provide "*education through demonstration.*"

Don MacBean

Ghost Train



By a crackling camp fire, Marcy Luatanen-Raleigh spell binds the kids from the Ghost Train with spine tingling stories to the accompaniment of appropriate strains from Drew Bendelow's guitar.



The Fox River and the dark autumn woods provide a great background for 50 kids and their parents to be "scarred out of their wits" with ghost stories.



Starbucks Or . . . ?

As a museum on a mission we want to preserve and interpret Chicago's and more specifically the Fox River Valley's electric transport era. We work full out maintaining trolleys, trains, and tracks; because we believe that electric railways were a way of life for generations of people from all walks of life. We preserved the trolleys. We have the tracks for the trolleys. We give trolley rides. But, what are we doing to interpret what we mean by way of life and walks of life?

Our Museum should not only be about riding antique trains. It must also be about people having a truly unique experience. A special experience that is, in actuality, education in a fun and meaningful manner. The Museum can provide this kind of unique experience, but we must start thinking of ourselves, first as teachers who teach folk lore, American culture, teamwork, architecture, craftsmanship, electricity, business economics, industrial organization, and engineering practices. If we deliver on this kind of educational experience, people will never stop coming to South Elgin.

Here is a modern example. When a person walks into a Starbucks, they are not buying a cup of coffee. That Starbucks customer is buying a unique and exciting experience. Otherwise, why pay \$2.00 for a \$0.50 cup of coffee. The Starbucks customer is buying a special \$1.50 experience. Now let us return to the Museum. When we sell a \$3.50 ride ticket, how much of that ticket represents the ride and how much represents a truly unique and exciting experience that will bring a person back repeatedly. My hunch is that most of that \$3.50 does not represent a beating-down-the-door experience . . . only a ride . . . a relic.

To be relevant in the 21st century, we need be more like Starbucks. Instead of selling the experience of coffee, we will sell the experience of education not just through demonstration, but also through personal participation . . . So, how now brown cow?

Ed Konecki



Mission

To preserve and interpret Chicago's electric transport era that began in the 1890s and peaked before 1950. The electric transport era is significant because electric railways, including interurban, rapid transit, and streetcars, helped the Chicago region grow to be one of North America's great metropolitan areas. The Museum strives to show that electric railways were more than convenient, they were and are a way of life for generations of people from all walks of life.

The Museum fulfills this mission by preserving, interpreting, and operating historic railway vehicles on its demonstration electric railway, over the Aurora, Elgin and Fox River Electric route at South Elgin, Illinois. Furthermore, the museum preserves, displays and interprets smaller artifacts, photos, oral histories, and documents which help relate the importance of electric transport in and around the Chicago Metropolitan Area, putting them in context with their surroundings and era.

Five Minute Quiz

Here are the answers to the 10 questions about the Museum and where we operate that were shown in the last issue of "*Fox River Lines*." See how you did!

TRUE or FALSE

1. Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railway number 20 is the oldest car in the Museum's collection.

FALSE. See TROLLEY TIMES - Number SOO 130, SOO Line Caboose built in 1887 and acquired in 1974 by the Museum.

2. The two large oak trees by the Castlemuir station are over 400 years old.

TRUE. George Ware, Chief Taxonomist of the Morton Arboretum, visited the Museum in 2000 and established the approximate age of both trees as over 450 years.

3. There is a memorial to two soldiers located in the Jon J. Duerr (Blackhawk) Forest Preserve.

TRUE. See Pictures.



A far view of the monument along the main trail in the Jon J. Duerr (Blackhawk) Forest Preserve steering the hiker to the grave site.



A closeup of the "Soldiers Memorial" which has an arrow pointing towards the grave site. It reads "In memory of two soldiers who camped near here in July 1832 on their way to join General Winfield Scott."

4. Coleman Grove and the Coleman station of the Illinois Central (Canadian National) were named after the inventor of the Coleman Stove and Lantern. **FALSE.** Named after one of the original farmers in the area.

5. The Museum is located on LaFox Street in South Elgin - once known as "Fox River Trail."

TRUE. See page 228 - Ralph Tredup, *South Elgin - 150 Years of Heritage*, © 1989, South Elgin Heritage Commission, South Elgin, Illinois 60177

6. Two soldiers are buried in a grave site in the Jon J. Duerr (Blackhawk) Forest Preserve.

TRUE. See Pictures.



The grave site and grave marker of the two soldiers buried in Jon J. Duerr (Blackhawk) Forest Preserve. It is located on a branch of the main trail about 30 feet from the memorial stone.

7. The gravel pit originally owned by the Illinois Central R.R. and its predecessors through which we operate was served also by the Aurora, Elgin and Fox River Electric Company and its predecessors.

TRUE. See Fox River Lines issue 99-2.

8. The Museum opened rail service to the public on July 4, 1966.

TRUE. See TROLLEY TIMES -Visitor's Guide

9. The current "Castlemuir" station building was used to sell gifts and tickets on July 4, 1966.

FALSE. The first station building at Castlemuir was built in 1967 with a later addition. See RELIC 1966 Annual Report.

10. There is a waterfall located in the Jon J. Duerr (Blackhawk) Forest Preserve.

TRUE. See Kane County Forest Preserve Education Guide - 2004 and picture below.

Don MacBean



The waterfall is located in the south section of the Jon J. Duerr (Blackhawk) Forest Preserve. It is on a small stream that goes under IL Route 31 near the junction with McLean Boulevard and then goes over the falls and flows a little later into the Fox River.

Doug Christiansen

1939 - 2005

Friend, entrepreneur, photographer, railfan, railway executive, historian, organ and theater restorer, lover and protector of animals the epithets are endless and Doug was all of these and more. We met as persons having a common interest - the saving of the Chicago, Aurora and Elgin Railroad in the middle 1950's. Discontinuing service to Wells Street in September 1953 and struggling to maintain service from DesPlaines Ave., Forest Park to the western suburbs after that produced the mix of events that brought Doug and me together. He, Wendell Dillinger and I met in August of 1953 to see what we could do to preserve several CA&E cars. These activities began a long friendship that included founding of Railway Investment Club which later became the Railway Equipment Leasing and Investment Co. (RELIC) and culminating in the Fox River Trolley Museum.

Doug was most always enthusiastic, positive, forward looking and dedicated - fun to be around and it seemed most time - tireless. In addition to CA&E preservation, Doug and many RELIC members took numerous trips to the North Shore Line, C&EI, Milwaukee Road, Monon and South Shore Line locations to photograph trains and look at business cars. Along with Fred Crissey, Ian Muir, Dave Hoffman and myself, Doug spent many

hours commuting on the C&NW to Chicago (on the rear platform of the 7:18am train from Glen Ellyn) where we all discussed and planned the saving of the CA&E and the cars. Doug was instrumental in moving RELIC through its developmental years establishing continuity and growth helping to make what Fox River Trolley Museum is today.

Doug you are and will be missed.

Don MacBean



Every Artifact Tells a Story . . . Will We Continue to Tell Ours?

Each item on display in a museum or historical society has a story to tell - two stories in fact. First there is the tale of why the artifact is significant or how it fits in a historical context. Then there is a back story, the saga of how that thing made its journey to the institution. It makes headlines when someone donates a multimillion-dollar Monet, but most donations aren't news. Most of what hangs on the walls or sits in display cases are gifts representing more emotional than financial investment. They are there because someone has made the decision to share a meaningful thing with the rest of us.

Charles Leroux - *Chicago Tribune*, April 21, 2004.

When we picture in our mind's eye the Fox River Trolley Museum we see cars - CA&E 20, CNS&M 756, CTA 4451 and so on. Maybe some of us see car parts, tickets or collections of old books timetables, post cards or other memorabilia. But are these the only "artifacts" that the Museum is preserving and restoring? What is our "biggest" artifact? W&SR #73? Surely it is by weight. Or the two 450+ year old oak trees? What is the artifact that everyone sees whether the Museum is operating or not? It is our biggest artifact in any size term, weight, length, width, height or age. It

is the Aurora, Elgin and Fox River Electric Company track, ties, trolley poles and wire and right of way and all of its parts.

Other than things like tie replacement, bonding rails, weed spraying, adjusting trolley wire, replacing joint bars and so forth we pay little attention to preserving it short and/or long term and yet it is probably one of our most endangered assets.

Consider this, our closest railroad and trolley museum is and has been investing hundreds of thousands of dollars acquiring property adjacent to their railroad right away to protect it against urban sprawl. Or consider the fate of the Santa Fe Speedway or farmland in eastern Kane County. Well, do we have to worry? After all the property on one side of our right of way is owned by the Kane County Forest Preserve Commission or is the Fox River and on the other side a fully developed but mostly hidden upscale housing. Recent developments there should give us pause to think about preserving our biggest asset. The Village of South Elgin is progressing with its TIF district with the building of a four story condominium complex on a whole block at State and Gilbert Streets. How do we preserve our "biggest" asset? How do we continue to be good neighbors and *preserve* our "biggest" asset? The American Association of Museum's annual meeting in Indianapolis in May has as its theme "*A Defining Moment - Museums at the Crossroads.*" Are we dealing with ours?

Don MacBean

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