



“Reading on the Rails” Event Will Encourage Childhood Literacy

ASTA will partner with the Cedar Park Public Library and a Leander Independent School District foundation for a gala fall afternoon in the A&TC railyard, encouraging area elementary-aged children to develop a lifelong reading habit.

The event, “Reading on the Rails,” will be from 2 to 6 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 4 in the Cedar Park Yard at 401 E. Whitestone Blvd.

Two childrens authors, Beth Guil- lot (author of *Elizabeth the Dreamer*) and Susie Krolav- ansky (*Twelve Cowboys Ropin’* and *There was a Tall Texan That Swallowed a Flea*) will be on hand for readings.

Other activities will in- clude interactive Train Bingo and coloring activities and a train-themed pop-up photo opportunity, and food, bever- age and community-vendor booths will be on hand.

Visitors will also be able to have an exclusive first look at ASTA’s horse-car rolling mu- seum space (see story on Page Three) and to tour the site where Southern Pacific steam locomotive 786 is undergoing restoration.

Admission to the event will be a new or gently used chil- dren’s book, to be donated to the reading-initiative program of the Leander ISD Educa- tional Excellence Foundation. The program seeks to ensure that every home in the district has a selection of age-appro- priate children’s books available to families.

According to ASTA Ex- ecutive Director Lil Serafine, “Reading on the Rails will be an early- childhood literacy event to educate children and their families about railroad heri- tage, engage participants in interactive activities, distrib- ute children’s books to those in need in Leander ISD and support the collective mis- sions” of the sponsoring groups.

ASTA is seeking dona- tions and sponsorships for the event, the proceeds to support the association’s railroad-preservation activi- ties. Sponsorships are avail- able at various levels, and in- terested parties may contact ASTA Executive Director Lil Serafine at director@austin-steamtrain.org or 512-477- 8468 extension 204.



ASTA Bids Farewell to Everyone’s Favorite Crew Member

Maurice Beckham Was the Railroad’s Gentle, Funny and Smiling Face for 22 Years

Maurice Beckham, who charmed, entertained and befriended thousands of A&TC passengers in on- board service for more than two decades, died in Austin June 29 at age 82.

While Maurice’s title on the train crew was “car at- tendant,” he was much more to both the pub- lic and to his fellow crew members, bringing to his frequent tours of duty an un- failing store of optimism and good cheer.

Passengers over the years were treated not only to Maurice’s courteous and genuine attention, but to an array of characters—some complete with costumes—that included the French poet Filet Mignon and Mc- Gruff the Crime Dog, and to lively performances of “Chattanooga Choo-choo,” the “Birthday Rap” and “Chattanooga Shoe-shine Boy.” Maurice also made thousands of balloon ani- mals and ran a lively raffle for a drawing of SP 786.

Retiring from a distin- guished 38-year career in



law enforcement, Maurice had gone into an active schedule of public appear- ances as a humorist and inspirational speaker when he was recruited by one of ASTA’s founders to en- tertain passengers on the then-new excursion trains.

In his career with the Texas Department of Pub- lic Safety, Maurice rose from highway patrolman to the department’s chief of administration, with the rank of major. He was also commissioned a special Texas Ranger.

He also served on nu- merous boards and state commissions, including a term as chairman of the board of the state Employ- ees Retirement System.

Maurice was born in
(Turn to “Maurice,” Page 3)

Thanks to our generous friends!

(Donations from April through June, 2015. If we have left anyone off, please accept our apologies and contact us at director@austinsteamtrain.org so we can make sure we recognize you in our next edition.)

Thanks to our regular member-donors!

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Thanks to our 786 donors!

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Thanks to our donors for the AT&C's new concession car!

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On the Train or in the Classroom, Brian Schenk Was a Born Teacher

Brian Schenk, who spent many years with the A&TC not only as a passenger-service volunteer but as a careful chronicler of the railroad's and ASTA's early history, died July 19 at the age of 76.

Brian joined the volunteer corps in 1996, and was a familiar presence as a car attendant on the trains, educating passengers on the history and lore of the railroad and the area through which it passed, bringing to his railroad service the skills of a lifelong teacher and historian.

A New Jersey native, he was educated at the University of Texas and spent 37 years as a social-studies and government teacher at Reagan High School and Austin

High School, where the Brian W. Schenk Archives collection is named in his honor.

In addition to his train service, Brian put his scholarly skills to work chronicling the history of the association and of the railroad on which it runs. ASTA Board Member David Gracy, himself a professional archivist and historian, noted that Brian "year in and year out devoted to the work the hours and hours required to gather and identify the pictures, pull together and organize all of the varied archival documentation, and write up his recapitulations of events."

"Brian left us," he said, "not only the historian's invaluable gathering of source

material, but also his review of events that ties the whole together."

In addition to his work for ASTA, Brian was active as a volunteer for the Railroad and Heritage Museum in Temple (making his commute there twice a week via Amtrak), and was active with the Boy Scouts and the Gymnastics Association of Texas, which he helped to found.

Brian is survived by his sister, JoAnne Schenk Phillips of Fort Myers, Fla. and a niece.

A memorial service will be scheduled for September in Austin, and memorial donations are requested to be made to the Temple Railroad & Heritage Museum.

You Can Help Bring Steam Back to the A&TC!

👉 **Check** progress on the restoration of SP 786 by clicking the "Steam Engine Restoration" page on our website!

👉 **Contribute** by sending your tax-deductible contribution online or to the ASTA office: 401 E. Whitestone Blvd., Suite C-100, Cedar Park 78613!

👉 **Volunteer** for one of our 786 work days and put your skills to work bringing the engine back to service. Call 512-477-8468 for details!

Maurice (Continued from Page 1)

1932 in Hallsburg, just east of Waco on a branch of the International & Great Northern Railroad. (The I&GN station sign for the town is in ASTA's museum collection thanks to Maurice's generosity.)

He earned a degree in criminal justice with study at Baylor University, Sam Houston State and the University of Texas. Maurice also served in the Korean War with both the Army's 24th Infantry Division and the First Marine Division.

He was a Methodist and a

Master Mason, and a member of numerous law-enforcement groups.

A softball pitcher of note in his younger years, Maurice played semi-pro baseball in the old Central Texas League. He also took part in DPS softball, football and judo teams, and was a Salvation Army volunteer and Boy Scout leader.

Maurice is survived by Peggy, his wife of 64 years; a daughter, Connie Willis; a son, Hilton Beckham; eight grandchildren; a sister and two brothers.

Dramatic Rescue Portended a Life of Service

Maurice Beckham often attributed his sense of obligation in serving others to an incident in his infancy that nearly cut short his young life.

By his account, his family's two-story farmhouse in rural McLennan County caught fire, and as the family and neighbors frantically struggled to save what they could from the burning house, Maurice's two sisters watched from the yard.

The older girl suddenly realized that the newest member of the family was unaccounted for, and rushed inside amid the flames to rescue the baby, lying on a pallet in an upstairs room. She brought

the infant to a place of safety, saving young Maurice from an untimely end.

Years later, he would recount the story and the sense he had always had that his rescue had given him a particular responsibility for the safety, welfare and happiness of those around him.

Maurice once wrote that he found three things important in the story: "One, it is an outstanding example of great things that can be accomplished by the bright minds of the young, able to cause an alert. Two, the willingness of the older person to take action in a dangerous situation. And three, the baby was me!"

A Special Thanks to Our Friends and Supporters,
the City of Cedar Park and Cedar Park Tourism Services!



As a permanent recognition of his two-decades-plus service to the railroad and its passengers, the ASTA board named Santa Fe dormitory-lounge No. 1343 the "Maurice Beckham" at the suggestion of his fellow passenger-service volunteers. The car, built by Pullman-Standard in 1950 and a veteran of the "Super Chief," was Maurice's favorite, and where he charmed and entertained thousands of guests over the years. The naming was shared with Maurice shortly before his final departure June 29.

Renovation of Unique Santa Fe Horse Car, ASTA's Rolling Museum, Nears Completion

A rare piece of railroad equipment that has served as ASTA's rolling museum space on a number of occasions, is nearly at the end of a thorough overhaul that will make it a second museum experience for passengers and visitors at the A&TC's Cedar Park terminal.

Santa Fe "horse express car" No. 1993, owned by ASTA Director Bert Dockall, was built in 1930 as a highly specialized baggage car for transportation of expensive race horses and their gear.

The horse car will occupy a track just opposite the Cedar Park boarding platform, from which visitors will have easy access via a newly built asphalt walkway and wooden stairs. (The stairs have also been designed to be ADA accessible with the railroad's portable wheelchair lift.)

Overhauling the car has been a particular project of ASTA Director Scott Lewis,

who assembled a team of volunteers to help with the work.

In addition to general clean-up and construction of the walkway and stairs, a new lighting system has been installed in the car with cooler, more efficient LED bulbs, and a more permanent source of electrical power for the car is being installed. In addition, the car's exterior paint has been revitalized.

Artifacts on display in the car include a depot-operator's desk complete with telegraph equipment, next to other station accoutrements of the day such as a pot-bellied stove and platform scale, as well as steam-era tools and cans, vintage railroad advertising and other period items.

Santa Fe's Pullman-built horse cars could be configured to carry up to 24 horses, and from the 30s through the 50s transported expensive stock to polo grounds and race tracks.

A&TC Excursion Trains Will Enliven Elgin's Famous Hogeye Festival

Elgin, a railroad town since its founding, will this fall add passenger-train excursions to the Hogeye Festival, its yearly civic celebration.

As part of the one-day gala Oct. 25, the Austin & Texas Central will run a dozen 20-minute round-trip excursions between the festival site in downtown Elgin and Milepost 35, four miles to the east.

Manned by A&TC volunteer crews, the trains will include a locomotive, two coaches and a caboose.

The planned fare for the trips will be \$5 in coach or \$10 in the caboose, sold both on ASTA's website and at the festival itself.

Between runs, photo opportunities will be available with the train equipment. ASTA will also sponsor a display for Operation Lifesaver, the national campaign pro-

moting grade-crossing safety.

The Hogeye Festival has been an annual attraction in Elgin for 28 years, and includes a barbecue cookoff, arts and crafts, live music, a car show, children's activities and a variety of contests. The

festival is spread across the downtown area of the town, which is about 25 miles east of Austin.

While most excursion operations in the A&TC's 23-year history have been from Cedar Park westward into the

Hill Country or eastward into downtown Austin, the railroad operated some regular trains east from Austin as far as Littig siding (just east of Manor) for two years.

A&TC trains, however, have never operated before as far east as Elgin. Capital Metro, owner of the tracks over which the A&TC operates, is investigating the possibility of expanding its commuter operations in the direction of Manor and Elgin.

Elgin was founded in 1871 as a stop on the Houston & Texas Central Railroad as it built westward toward Austin, and the Missouri-Kansas-Texas, building southward toward Houston, crossed the H&TC at Elgin in 1886. The handsome brick Union Depot, built at the two roads' crossing in 1903, is today open as a museum.



Elgin's historic brick Union Depot, now a museum, is at the crossing of what were the Southern Pacific and Katy tracks. The town's annual Hogeye Festival celebrates a local history rich in railroad tradition.

Your Summer Call Board!

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