



## ASTA-Sponsored Marker Commemorates Austin's Long-gone Downtown Depots

Standing at the corner of Congress Avenue and Third Street in the heart of Austin's booming downtown, one might be forgiven for not recognizing what was once a bustling railroad terminal. There is not, in fact, any visible trace, nor has there been for half a century.

Now, though, an official state historical marker tells passers-by that the corner once sported two handsome brick passenger depots, facing one another across the intersection. The marker, sponsored by ASTA and the Travis County Historical Commission, was officially unveiled in a brief ceremony Aug. 28.

On the southwest corner,

where the marker is situated, the International & Great Northern built a depot with a distinctive corner turret in 1888, and on the northeast corner, the Houston & Texas Central built its depot, with its ornate French-style belfry, in 1902. The tracks ran down the middle of Third Street, and the intersection was Austin's busy (a dozen trains a day in the mid-20s) passenger hub for many years.

After the I&GN-successor Missouri Pacific moved its station to what is now Austin's Amtrak depot in 1947, the I&GN depot was torn down in 1955, and after the last passenger train left the H&TC-successor South-



ASTA leaders helping to dedicate the new downtown historical marker. L to R, President Robert Schoen, Executive Director Lil Serafine, Chairman Ben Sargent, General Counsel Bill Bingham, Director David Gracy and Vice Chairman Larry McGinnis. (Janaye Melsba photo.)

ern Pacific depot in 1964, it, too, fell to the wrecking ball a year later.

ASTA Chairman Ben Sargent welcomed visitors to the August dedication of the new historical

marker, and Bob Ward, chairman of the Travis County Historical Commission, spoke of the revolution wrought on Texas' then-remote frontier capital

(Turn to "Marker," next page)



Another busy "Day Out With Thomas" (three days, actually) wrapped up, some of the 120 people who worked to put on another successful event pause for a smile with the "really useful engine" at the Burnet depot. The "Day Out" weekend, in addition to months of preparation, setting up and taking down, requires the efforts not only of ASTA's dedicated staff and loyal corps of volunteers, but often dozens of other temporary volunteers and school and civic groups. Thanks, everybody!

## Thomas' 12th Visit Wows 'Em Again

Thomas the Tank Engine, the "really useful" little blue engine famed in children's stories, returned to the Austin & Texas Central's rails Sept. 18-20 for a three-day weekend of fun.

ASTA's 12th presentation of "Day Out With Thomas" was centered around 31 round-trip train rides to and from the Burnet depot. A&TC diesel No. 442 discreetly powered the eight-car train, but at the front end was the full-scale replica of Thomas, whistling, blowing "smoke," rolling his eyes and generally delighting his fans. Over the three days, 14,738 passengers took the 25-minute excursions.

The event was made possible by the efforts of ASTA's dedicated staff and of 120 volunteers, some from ASTA's regular volunteer corps and others pitching in for the occasion.

Off the train, visitors could enjoy a variety of child-friendly arts, crafts and toy-train layouts, as well as musical and magic performances, refreshments and the opportunity to have photos made with Thomas or with his costumed boss, Sir Topham Hatt. The Burnet Community Center adjacent to the depot offered a generous array of Thomas-related activities, toys and souvenir merchandise.

Organizing and putting on the annual Thomas event always required a massive effort on the part of volunteers and staff, but its revenues always provide substantial support for ASTA's ongoing railroad-preservation projects. Thomas' 2016 visit to the Hill Country is scheduled for Sept. 30 - Oct. 2.

# Thanks to our generous friends!

(Donations from July through September, 2015. If we have left anyone off, please accept our apologies and contact us at [director@austinsteamin.org](mailto:director@austinsteamin.org) so we can make sure we recognize you in our next edition.)

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### Marker, continued...

by the arrival of its first railroad in 1871.

Melissa Parr, director of the nearby Brush Square Museums, recounted the history of that arrival and of the two depots. (The Brush Square Museums are the official city custodian of ASTA's steam locomotive, and the museums are adjacent to Austin's first railroad depot, still standing near Fifth and Neches Streets.)

The actual unveiling of the 7½-foot-tall marker was courtesy Doug Fusselman, representing the Union Pacific Railroad, which serves Austin today and over the years absorbed all three of the roads (MP, SP and Missouri-Kansas-Texas) which once used the twin depots.

City Council Member Kathie Tovo, whose district includes the depot site, read a proclamation from the Council and Mayor Steve Adler making Aug. 28

"Historic Train Depots of Austin Day."

The state marker, conceived by ASTA and shepherded through the process by the county historical commission, was approved and manufactured in 2010, but placement of the marker was delayed while the city completed a comprehensive

overhaul of Third Street as part of its "Great Streets" downtown development program.

Throughout, the process was guided by a committee composed of ASTA Vice Chairman Larry McGinnis; Barry Hutcheson, former chairman of the county historical commission; and Sargent.



The historic depots commemorated by the new historical marker, as seen in period photos. The I&GN depot at left, called "Union Station" when it was used by all the city's railroads, was built in 1888, and the H&TC depot, right, followed in 1902. (Photos courtesy Austin History Center.)

Help ASTA's museum efforts....donate to the **Keep History Alive Fund!**  
Call us at 512-477-8468  
or e-mail us at [director@austinsteamin.org](mailto:director@austinsteamin.org)

# “Reading on the Rails” Event Brings Together Trains, Books and Kids

ASTA’s first “Reading on the Rails” event brought 275 guests to the Cedar Park Yard Oct. 4 for an afternoon of hands-on train activities meant to encourage a lifetime of reading.

Children and their families toured the A&TC’s passenger equipment while taking part in literacy-related activities including talks with children’s authors Beth Guillot (*Elizabeth the Dreamer*) and Susie Krolavansky (*12 Cowboys Ropin’ and There Was a Tall Texan Who Swallowed a Flea.*)

ASTA sponsored the event in conjunction with the Cedar Park Public Library and the Leander ISD Educational Excellence Foundation. Admission was a new or gently used children’s book, to be used in LEEF’s reading-initiative pro-

gram, which seeks to put books in the homes of all the district’s children.

Visitors to the yard were also able to tour the site where ASTA’s steam engine, Southern Pacific 786, is being reassembled, and the railroad’s newest display of historic railroad artifacts, located adjacent to the Cedar Park boarding platform aboard a rare Santa Fe baggage car built in 1930 to haul expensive race horses.

The “Operation Lifesaver” crossing-safety program also had an information booth at the event, and food and beverages were provided by local vendors Raising Cane’s (famous for chicken fingers) and Red Horn Coffee House & Brewing Co. (who offered coffee and tea).



On board the lounge-sleeper City of Chicago at “Reading on the Rails,” Kit Coates, youth services manager of the Cedar Park Library, entertains kids and their parents with song and story. (Janaye Melsha photo)

## Chronicle Lauds Austin’s “Best Choo Choo Ch’boogie”

(And Yep, We’re It)

The *Austin Chronicle’s* popular annual “Best of Austin” issue in September dubbed ASTA and its railroad the area’s “Best Choo Choo Ch’boogie.”

Not only that, but the issue’s cover sported a photo of a smiling young girl in an engineer’s cap (the photographer’s daughter) in front of the A&TC’s workhorse diesel No. 442.

“This living history is not just a glimpse into the past,” wrote *Chronicle* editor Kate Messer, “it’s a living, breathing example of history’s through line to the present.”

(And not only did ASTA earn a “Best of Austin” nod and the issue’s cover, but the downtown historical marker the association sponsored at the site of Austin’s former passenger depots earned recognition as “Best New Historical Marker.”)

The *Chronicle’s* “Best of Austin” issue, now in its 26th year, annually showcases the choices of both critics and readers in dozens of categories covering architecture, arts, entertainment, kids, media, recreation, politics,

services and shopping.

The A&TC made the issue once before, in 1993, as “Best Way to Spend a Hill Country Afternoon.”

In its recommendation, the *Chronicle* says:

“America’s romance with rail can sometimes seem an odd and fickle thing, as old modes give way to new. Here in Central Texas, however, the Austin Steam Train Association keeps the trains running on time in a living history

museum of real-life rail cars and engines restored to their former glory; a fully operational leisure rail system to afford glimpses into the past along routes of the present, featuring regular treks like the *Hill Country Flyer* and *Bertram Flyer* and special-event excursions celebrating various themes and holidays. Volunteers here are not mere docents, they are conductors, engineers and tradespeople restoring decades- and century-old rigs, and their love of history is as deep as the roots they honor. Their passion is 100-per-cent can-do and their only wish is to share it with everyone. All aboard!”

Couldn’t have said it better ourselves!



Conductor Steve Barry in the cab, Thomas returns to the Burnet depot platform for another trainload of happy passengers. Since ASTA first sponsored Thomas’ Central Texas visits in 2003, more than 175,000 people have enjoyed the trips.

# Devoted Railfan and Charter ASTA Member Remembered With Museum and 786 Donations

Jennifer Elmendorf-Lehman of San Antonio has been exceptionally generous to ASTA's historical-preservation mission, both with artifacts and with financial support, in memory of her late husband, a lifelong rail aficionado and charter member of ASTA.

Earlier this year, she made a \$10,000 contribution to the ongoing restoration of ASTA's steam locomotive, SP 786, and recently donated a vintage locomotive bell and a period marker lamp to ASTA's railroad museum at its Cedar Park headquarters.

All was made in memory of her husband, James R. Lehman, who died Feb. 28.

Mr. Lehman, who had a career in the music-store business in Corpus Christi and San Antonio, had a lifelong passion for railroading, and he and his friend Gary Knight were charter members of ASTA.

Ms. Elmendorf-Lehman said she and her husband spent many vacation days in pursuit of narrow-gauge railroading, his particular area of interest. She said they traced miles of former narrow-gauge routes and made numerous trips on the Georgetown Loop, Cumbres & Toltec and Durango & Silverton narrow-gauge lines, as well as the Great Smoky Mountain Railroad in North Carolina.

The donated locomotive bell, in a handsome custom mounting, was purchased from a San Antonio antique dealer, and the Adlake "non-sweating" kerosene marker lamp was a present to Mr. Lehman from Mr. Knight.



Jennifer Elmendorf-Lehman, center, visited ASTA's new railroad museum in Cedar Park with her donation of a vintage locomotive bell and a period marker lamp. Present to receive the gifts were ASTA President Robert Schoen, Board Secretary Brian Smith, General Superintendent Paul Phalen, Chairman Ben Sargent and Director Jimmie Burleyson. (Behind the camera were Executive Director Lil Serafine and Volunteer Coordinator Janaye Melsha.)

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



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