

Spring
2021
No. 98

The CALL BOARD

Newsletter of the Austin Steam Train Association



Wild Winter Weather Batters the Railroad, But Can't Knock It Down!

The notorious Big Freeze that paralyzed Texas in mid-February didn't show any mercy to ASTA's operations, facilities and equipment, but quick and heroic efforts by staff and volunteers made the best of a disastrous situation.

As the deadly storm gripped the state, two week-ends of train service (five scheduled trains) were cancelled due to concerns about volunteers, staff and passengers trying to drive in hazardous conditions.

Meanwhile, on Feb. 17, disaster struck in Cedar Park, as a frozen fire-riser pipe burst and flooded ASTA's general offices, ticketing area and museum with several inches of water.

General Superintendent Chris Hoff, Volunteer Coordinator Erin Hoff and several of their neighbors responded promptly and spent eight hours vacuuming and squeegeeing water from the

flooded floors. A team of a dozen or so ASTA volunteers followed soon after, rescuing furniture, files and museum artifacts before too much water could soak in.

A shipping container and two railcars in the ASTA yard took in all the rescued items, administrative functions were temporarily moved to the yard office, and Ticket Agent Cat Morley began serving train-day passengers from a temporary outdoor facility.

The property manager for ASTA's offices sent crews in to fix the broken pipe, and soon after to replace floors and a considerable amount of wallboard throughout the office.

ASTA volunteers returned in force on April 7 to begin moving back into the renovated office, depot and museum.

Said Volunteer Coordinator Erin, "It's hard to tear us down!"

Emery Rail Trust Grants \$10,000 Toward Returning 442 to Service

The John H. Emery Rail Heritage Trust has made a grant of \$10,000 toward ASTA's vital project of returning its historic Alco diesel, ATCX 442, to active service.

The grant will pay for rebuilding of one of 442's electric traction motors as part of the ongoing top-to-bottom refurbishing of the engine.

Returning the 1960 Alco RSD-15 to service will allow ASTA to rely on its own motive power rather than the leased engine, reliable but costly, that has powered the trains since 2017.

The grant to ASTA was one of 22 made by the trust for this year, totaling nearly \$325,000.

Founded by Chicago businessman John H. Emery, the

trust is the only fund in the U.S. that devotes all of its grants to rail preservation.

The trust specifically targets "organizations that offer the general public an opportunity to ride historically significant equipment over historic rail lines," which pretty neatly sums up ASTA's purpose and operation.

The 442 project includes revamping of the locomotive's diesel engine, complete overhaul of the six traction motors and six-wheel trucks, and renovating the electrical system.

A 2,400-horsepower diesel, 442 was built for the Santa Fe and served on several short lines before coming to haul Austin & Texas Central trains in 2000.

Two Exciting Ways to Help ASTA's Mission!

Another **Texas Train Treasures** online auction will launch Monday, May 17, and run through 5 p.m. Friday, May 28.

Watch ASTA's website for enticing items—many train-related, some just for your fun and enjoyment—on which you can bid, with all proceeds going to ASTA restoration projects.

And our latest **Go-FundMe** campaign has entered the final \$10,000 stretch in reaching its goal of \$45,000 to support restoration of a power car that will supply reliable electricity to all the cars on our train.

The car is on its way to Cedar Park and needs your help to get it ready to run!

To find out more, and to lend a hand,
stay tuned online to
www.austinsteamtrain.org/about-asta/donate/

The latest news and information on Central Texas' historic excursion railroad is always at your fingertips: www.austinsteamtrain.org !

Thanks to our generous friends!

(Donations from October, 2020 through February, 2021. If we have left anyone off, please accept our apologies and contact us at director@austin-steamtrain.org so we can make sure we recognize you in our next edition.)

General Donations.

\$5,000 to \$10,000.

Estate of David Bergen
Gracy II

\$2,500 to \$4,999.

Dennis Kearns
Gary Powell

\$1,000 to \$2,499.

Ben Sargent

\$500 to \$999.

Dr. John Reid Howell and
Susan G. Conway
The Brian and Mary Lengel
Fund

\$250 to \$499.

Ben and Jeri Jarrett
Randy Leo and Colleen
Waring

\$100 to \$249.

Patricia Lee
Michelle McMeekin
John and Ann Pearce
Sam Sargent
Eric Spiak
Anonymous

Other donations.

Andrew Diefenthaler
Ray Rylander
Shana Steinhardt

Memberships.

\$100 to \$249.

Paul and Gayle Calmes
Hal and Gudrun
Opperman
Brian and Virginia Urban

\$40 to \$99.

Gary Bonine
Carl Brotherman
Robert L. Bucher
William and Susan Jefferys
Ken Levine
Skip Waters

786 Donations.

\$100 to \$249.

Joe Douglas Hirsh
John F. Hudspeth
James and Barb Ross

\$40 to \$99.

Gary Bonine
Lewis F. H. Smith
Craig and Sandra Smith
(in honor of Brian Smith)

In Memory of Dr. David Gracy.

\$1,000 to \$2,499.

Roger and Jeannie Shull

\$250 to \$499.

Debra Korty

\$100 to \$249.

Henry and Mary Baade
Charles Bonner and Grace
Bonner

In Memory of Walt Grey.

\$40 to \$99.

Anja Macek-Jinks

2021 'Circus of Wonders'

\$1,000 to \$2,499.

Larry and Lindy McGinnis

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



New Directors Bring Deep Talents and Wide Experience to ASTA's Board

The ASTA Board of Directors at its quarterly meeting Feb. 10 beefed up its ranks with four talented new directors.

"These new board members, with their enthusiasm, ingenuity and broad and deep experience with non-profit involvement will bring ASTA's leadership to a whole new level," said Board Chairman Ben Sargent. "We look forward to their involvement in broadening ASTA's mission and appeal."

Joining the board are:

Dale Craymer, president

of the Texas Taxpayers and Research Association. Dale has had wide experience in government and tax policy that included stints with Comptroller Bob Bullock and Govs. Ann Richards and George W. Bush.

Casey H. Kelley, director of state-government affairs for Exelon Corporation, a national energy-generation company. Casey has broad experience working in and around the Texas Legislature, and has been involved in many community organizations.

Lynda Rife, founder and president of Rifeline, a "public involvement and community relations firm serving organizations that rely on public support to achieve their goals." Lynda has had wide involvement with transportation, education and infrastructure issues as an advocate and organizer.

Brian Thompson, vice president of human resources for Senox Corporation, a manufacturer of construction materials. Brian has had a long career in investigative, management and human-

resource roles in several national companies. And best of all, he is a five-year ASTA volunteer now serving as a locomotive engineer!

The four new directors will join other recent additions to the board including Austin attorney Nikelle Meade and former Travis County Attorney David Escamilla.

The recent additions have resulted from much hard work by ASTA's Board Development Committee, particularly its chairman Larry McGinnis, and board member Dennis Kearns.

Fabrication of Bearing Assemblies Next Step in 786's Steaming Again

Progress on returning ASTA's signature steam locomotive, Southern Pacific 786, to active service has been slow but steady, with much of the current work not readily visible, but essential nonetheless.

The immediate goal is to lift the engine's frame, with its newly cast cylinder saddle, on to the driving wheels, and installation of the pilot and trailing trucks.

Where a driver meets the frame, of course, is a complicated assembly that needs to be carefully and accurately made to insure the engine's smooth performance.

The ends of a locomotive's drivers ride in lubricated bearings attached to the frame by a moving assembly of shoes, wedges and oil cellars that allow the wheels to adjust to uneven track, roll freely and stay constantly lubricated.

For 786, Harold Downey of Spicewood, an experienced mechanical engineer, has made the necessary patterns and castings for the engine's driver shoes and wedges. He also designed and hand-fabricated parts for the oil cellars which will lubricate the drivers. (In 786's rebuild, the decision was made to improve driver lubrication by switching from grease to oil.)

Mr. Downey has wide



experience with steam locomotives and has been actively involved in the building of a new, from-scratch two-foot narrow gauge engine for the Wiscasset, Waterville & Farmington in Maine.

In ASTA's yard, volunteer crews have already replaced and strengthened the cribbing holding up 786's boiler and frame, specifically raising the level of the frame so that the new driver components can be installed.

(The re-cribbing project, of course, involved lifting the 38-ton boiler and the 29-ton frame, so a large mobile crane from Crocker Crane Co. was necessarily involved.)

Built in 1916, the 786 operated for 40 years on the Southern Pacific's Texas and Louisiana lines before being retired to an Austin park in 1956. She was restored by ASTA to operating condition in 1990-91 and served pulling ASTA's trains for the first seven years of operations.

Revamped Training Program Turning Eager Volunteers into Railroaders

A point of pride for ASTA for its 30 years has been the corps of volunteers who actually operate the trains, and the opportunity that the association provides for teaching railroading skills to people from all walks of life.

For years, that training has been somewhat ad hoc, consisting mainly of on-the-job experience and the federally required schooling and testing on the railroad rule book.

ASTA President Dr. Robert Schoen and Board Secretary Brian Smith have more recently been devising a much more comprehensive training program to ensure that all student brakemen—the first step to all operating positions—have a thorough and consistent grounding in helping to operate trains efficiently and safely.

“At the end,” said Dr. Schoen, “everybody will have a foundation of what they're supposed to know and what they're supposed to do.”

In addition to the usual classes and tests on the General Code of Operating Rules, the new course of training involves both classroom and

hands-on sessions covering

- Paperwork, including the time table, general orders, general notices and mandatory directives.

- Practical skills such as getting on and off moving equipment, coupling and uncoupling cars, switching and assisting with air-brake tests.

- Procedures in the fully signaled Centralized Traffic Control part of the railroad.

- Radio communication, including active practice on the air.

The aspiring railroaders also sign up for student-brakeman positions on regular trains, where they work under the supervision of regular crew and are evaluated on their performance.

As of press-time, seven active students are involved in the new program, with three others making application.

New hands are always welcome, and anyone who'd like to take part and to begin working toward becoming a volunteer railroader should start with the volunteer application on ASTA's website, www.austinsteamttrain.org/about-asta/volunteer/



Instructors Brian Smith and Robert Schoen, foreground, initiate students Rich Wise and Carsten Gallini into the mysteries of railroad radio procedures. (Marc Opperman photo.)

Come railroading with us!

Join the fun as an ASTA volunteer!

Give us a shout at volunteers@austinsteamttrain.org
or at 512-477-8468 ext. 205.

History Corner

1897 Time Table Showed Busy Days on Our Hill Country Railroad

In 1897, the railroad that now carries ASTA's trains into the Hill Country was still operating under its original name, the Austin & Northwestern. Six years earlier it had been absorbed into the Houston & Texas Central, relaid from narrow to standard gauge and extended beyond Burnet to Llano, but retained its character as a typical country shortline of its day.

As such, daily operations consisted of a passenger ("mail") train and a "mixed" train (probably mostly freight) between Austin and Llano, with connecting trains to and from Marble Falls.

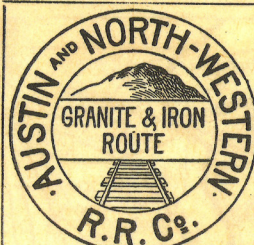
These operations are detailed in this 1897 time table, apparently from an issue of the *Official Guide of the Railways*, the thick monthly book that detailed time tables for railroads large and small throughout the U.S. and Canada. This copy was kindly provided by longtime ASTA benefactor William Osborn, owner of the *Nambe* lounge

car that's a fixture on our trains.

The daily passenger job left Austin at 8:05 a.m., made the 99 miles to Llano in just over four hours, then returned in the afternoon, pulling back into the capital at 6:40 in the evening. (The train covered ASTA's route between Cedar Park and Burnet in about an hour and a half, only a little quicker than today's *Hill Country Flyer*.)

ASTA crews may marvel at the times prescribed in 1897 for running from the Wilkie wye into Burnet—one to four minutes for a movement that requires anywhere from nine to 15 minutes for our trains.

It's clear, though, that the little "Granite & Iron Route," with its dozen 4-4-0 and 4-6-0 steam locomotives, provided for passengers, quarry products, crops and livestock a reliable and reassuring link to the outside world from an area that had been isolated for years by its rough terrain.



THOS. H. HUBBARD, President, New York.
 A. N. LEITNAKER, Vice-Prest. & Treas., Austin, Tex.
 P. J. LAWLESS, Secretary, " "
 E. W. CAVE, Asst. Treas., Houston, Tex.
 GEORGE KIDD, Asst. Auditor, " "
 H. A. JONES, Asst. Gen. Fht. Agent, Houston, Tex.
 C. W. BRIN, Acting Traffic Manager, Houston, Tex.

N. B.—Trains marked † run daily, except Sunday. ♂ Telegraph stations.
Central time.

No. 51 Mixed.		No. 53 Mail.		Mls.	January 24, 1897.		Mls.	No. 54 Mail.		No. 52 Mixed.	
†9 30A.M.	†8 05A.M.	0	live	.....	Austin ¹ ♂ arr.	99.2	6 40 P.M.	4 40 P.M.			
...	...	1.0	.....	Austin Junction	...	98.2					
9 50 "	8 23 "	6.2	.....	Fishers	...	93.0	6 23 "	4 15 "			
10 15 "	8 40 "	12.9	.....	Watters	...	86.3	6 06 "	3 50 "			
10 45 "	8 49 "	16.5	.....	McNeil	... ♂	82.7	5 58 "	3 35 "			
11 05 "	9 01 "	20.0	.....	Rutledge	...	79.2	5 46 "	3 10 "			
11 30 "	9 10 "	26.0	.....	Cedar Park	...	73.2	5 36 "	2 50 "			
11 55A.M.	9 23 "	31.5	.....	Leander	... ♂	67.7	5 23 "	2 30 "			
12 40NO'N	9 45 "	39.0	.....	Liberty Hill	... ♂	60.2	5 05 "	1 45 "			
1 20 P.M.	9 57 "	44.2	.....	Grover	...	55.0	4 52 "	1 20 "			
2 15 "	10 10 "	50.0	.....	Bertram	... ♂	49.2	4 40 "	1 00 P.M.			
2 30 P.M.	10 30 "	57.3	.....	Summitt	...	41.9	4 23 "	12 25NO'N			
	10 37A.M.	59.8	arr	.....	Wilkie	... ♂ live	39.4	4 12 P.M.	12 05NO'N		
	10 40A.M.	60.2	.....	.....	Burnet ² ♂	39.0	4 12 P.M.	12 01NO'N			
3 05 P.M.	10 41A.M.	...	live	.....	Wilkie	... ♂ arr	4 08 P.M.	11 35A.M.			
3 25 "	10 58 "	67.5	.....	Sudduth	...	31.7	3 50 "	11 17 "			
3 43 "	11 07 "	70.0	.....	Fairland ³	... ♂	29.2	3 43 "	11 07 "			
4 25 "	11 27 "	79.5	.....	Kingsland	... ♂	19.7	3 23 "	9 55 "			
4 45 "	11 42 "	88.0	.....	Graphite	... ♂	11.2	3 08 "	9 35 "			
5 10 "	11 59A.M.	93.4	.....	Bessemer	... ♂	5.8	2 53 "	9 15 "			
6 30 P.M.	12 15NO'N	99.2	arr	.....	Llano ⁴ ♂ live	0	†2 40 P.M.	†9 00A.M.			

No. 71 Mixed.		No. 73 Mail.		Mls.	MARBLE FALLS BR.		Mls.	No. 72 Mixed.		No. 74 Mail.	
†8 50 P.M.	†11 10A.M.	0	...	...	LEAVE	[ARRIVE]					
4 05 "	11 25 "	4.0	.....	Fairland	... ♂	6.2	10 35A.M.	3 35 P.M.			
4 10 P.M.	11 30A.M.	6.2	.....	Granite Mountain	... ♂	2.2	10 15 "	3 20 "			
				Marble Falls ⁵	... ♂	0	†10 10A.M.	†3 10 P.M.			
					ARRIVE	[LEAVE]					

CONNECTIONS.—¹ With Houston & Texas Central and International & Great Northern R.Rs. ² With stages for Lampasas. ³ With Marble Falls Branch. ⁴ With stages for Mason, Ft. McKavett, Brady, Junction City, Menardville and Fredericksburg. ⁵ With stage for Blanco and Johnson City.

Your Spring CALL BOARD!

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