

Another trip to St. Louis – Oct. 3-6, 2024

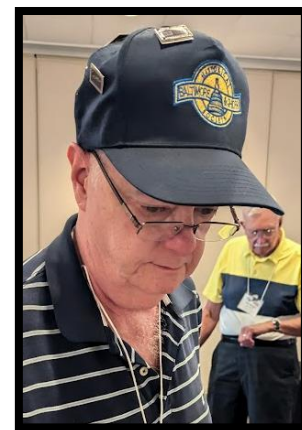
STL is probably the place that I have visited the most in the US. Since my first visit in January 1972, I have made countless trips there, mostly to do research in the Mercantile Library at UMSL or to attend RR/model railroad events. This was my 2nd trip there this year.



This purpose of this trip was to attend a joint annual meeting of the **Baltimore & Ohio** [B&O] and the **Gulf, Mobile & Ohio** [GM&O] Historical Societies. Just about every major fallen flag RR has a historical society. Initially, these orgs were founded by former employees and railfans; however today most members of RR historical societies are model railroaders. The historical societies produce magazines and other publications that preserve the history of the line, plus issue limited run HO and sometimes N scale rolling stock. The historical societies also hold periodic meetings. In recent years, attendance at the GM&O's annual meeting has waned. Hence, this year's joint meeting. While the B&O and GM&O were separate RRs, there was a link between them and that was the Alton RR. The Alton was the leading provider of passenger service between Chicago and STL. Notably in 1859, it carried the first sleeping car designed by George Pullman. The Alton was controlled by the B&O from 1931-1942 till it went bankrupt. The GM&O acquired it in 1947 and adopted *The Alton Route* as its corporate slogan. I am not a member of the B&O HS but was certainly aware of the significance of that RR that started in 1828 as the first common carrier in the US. I wrote an academic paper on the B&O's financial statements but was not able to have it published. I would like to revisit the paper some day and have it on my mental to do list.

I have been a member of the GM&O HS for many years. I came to it thru my interest in the Illinois Central that merged with the GM&O on 8/10/72 forming the Illinois Central Gulf RR. For many years, there was an IC Historical Society to which I belonged. However, the leadership of the ICHS was of the opinion that the world ended on 8/10/72 and refused to include anything about the ICG or the later revitalized ICRR in its publications. Eventually, it lost members [including me] and several years ago, the ICHS folded and transferred its assets to the Monticello RR Museum in central Illinois.

A key part of attending events like this is the folks you meet. I am good friends with Andy Sisk from the GM&O HS and know some of its members by name or reputation. I was surprised to see Henry Freeman of the B&O HS there as he lives near Asheville, NC. I know him thru the NMRA. He lost power but had a generator and was otherwise unaffected by Hurricane Helene. This man [Walter Magel] came to the GM&O table and remembered meeting me at the NMRA Annual convention in Birmingham AL back in 1988. In catching up, we realized we had both been to other NMRA events since then.



Thursday - October 3, 2024

We had enjoyed free parking at the SEPTA lots since COVID, but this ended on 9/23/24. To pay for parking now, you need an app on our phone and I did not have this set-up yet. So, I had Carol drop me off at the Jenkintown station so I could get the 1155AM airport train. [As you will later read this turned out to be a mistake.] This got me to PHL just before 1PM or in plenty of time for my 243PM flight. I went to the food court and had a GENO steak sandwich for lunch. In addition to the high airport price, a 3% surcharge is applied to all purchases to cover employee benefits!

It was an EZ walk to gate B3 for my AA flight. Up to this point, I had not been upgraded. The plane was a A319 that only has 8 first class seats. However, I was upgraded at the gate. We took off early at 233PM with just 69 folks on board. I have not seen a plane this empty in a while. I was also surprised to see the A319 as usually I get a smaller E175 jet on my flights to STL. I had a aisle seat but could still tell we flew past STL and landed from the west at 359PM, a few minutes early. I got my checked bag and called the Holiday Inn in Earth City MO [7 miles west of the airport] only to find their shuttle was not operating that day. I was told to take an UBER or taxi to the hotel. I use LFTY instead of UBER and with a special discount, the ride came to \$14.81 that the hotel credited to my bill. I went the convention registration desk to get my badge and a nice book and then to the GM&O table that was being set-up by friend Andy Sisk. I ended up helping Andy cover the table during the convention and managed to sell some B&O RRiana that I bought with me.

Soon there was a dinner break and I went out with Andy & another GM&O HS member to a FIVE GUYS. Back at the hotel, there were two presentations that evening one on the B&O in East St Louis and one on the Alton.

Friday – October 4, 2024

Because I had two reservations, I had to check out and then check in, but at least stayed in the same room. There was a complete schedule of presentations from 8AM to almost 930PM. These covered B&O and GM&O topics plus the Alton. There were several mentions of this famous early boxcab, diesel engine [B&O 50]. It was built in the early 1930s by EMC [the predecessor of EMD] and used on the B&O, Alton and the GM&O.



However, for me the most interesting presentation was on the Wiggans Ferry Company that for many years held a total monopoly on ferry and rail service across the Mississippi River at St. Louis. The presenter was a Catholic Priest who scratch builds 1/64 scale river boats. During COVID, he built a model of a Wiggans ferry and wanted to learn more about the company so he researched its history back to early 19th century, which became the basis for his presentation. He used the Mercantile Library and meet Nick Fry, its curator, who was one of the organizers of this meet. We went out to lunch at a near bye Chipotle but had dinner in the hotel. There was only one server for a large crowd and one person at our table didn't get his dinner until just as we left. Fortunately for him, it was gratis.

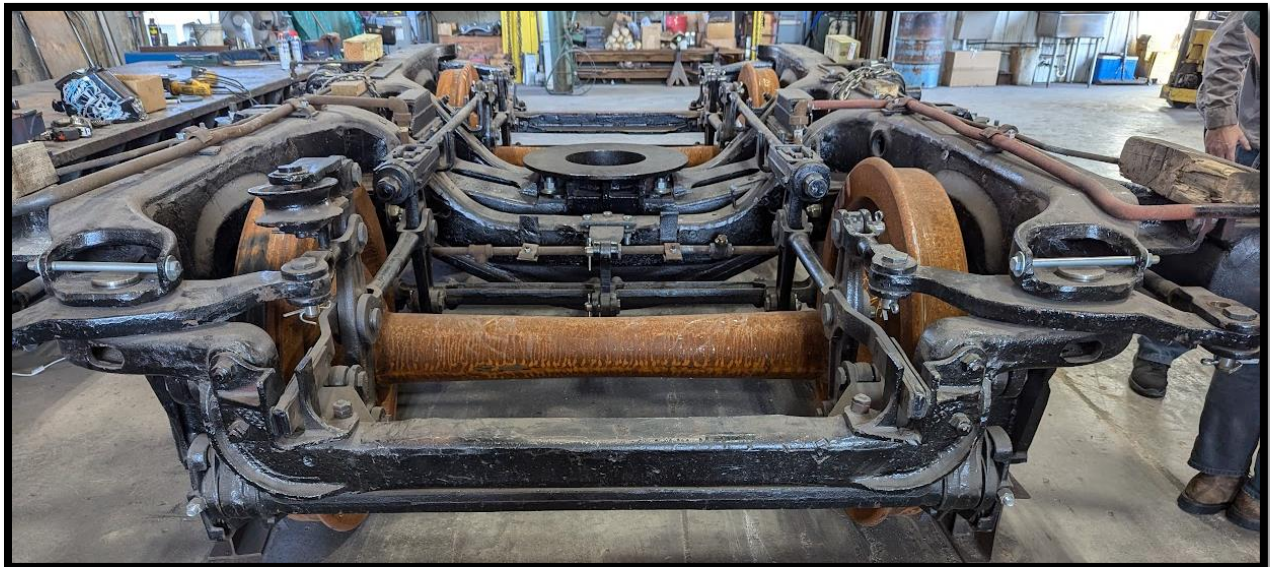
Saturday October 5, 2024

Attendees left the hotel in two motor coaches to visit two locations. Andy Sisk was the host on my bus and pointed out the various RR facilities enroute to **Gateway Rail Services [GRS]** in Madison IL. This view is to the south as we crossed the Mississippi River. GRS' specialty is the remanufacturing of Amtrak certified passenger cars as well as being a repair facility for passenger cars. It is located on what was once a C&NW [formerly Litchfield & Madison] yard and on the property are scores of heritage passenger cars



in various states of disrepair. This is just a small group of them.

We split into two groups and my group went first to the truck shop. Trucks are the metal device that hold the wheels on the axles for a passenger car. Each car has two trucks that depending on the type of car, have either two or three axles in each truck. In this building, trucks are disassembled; the frame is checked for cracks, etc. and then is rebuilt with updated wheels, axles,



brake gear, etc. to Amtrak's standards. We were told the rebuilding cost is about \$200K for a pair of two axle trucks and \$250K for a pair of three axle trucks.

We switched with the other group and went into the main shop building where the tour was given by Roger Verbeeren, Jr., the head of the company.



The heavy weight car he is standing on was originally built in 1928 and was in for some minor repairs. The car to the left is being totally rebuilt for OmniTRAX, an operator of shortline RRs at a cost of approx \$3.5 million. Outside was a former dome car built by Budd in North Philadelphia that has been stripped of its steel sheathing as GRS prepares a quote for rebuilding it for a rich woman in Texas.

After the tour, we were taken for a ride in their yard.



Pulling the short two-car train was a former C&NW GP 9 that was built in 1957. We ran thru the yard and then were able to get off for a photo run by. GRS fed us snacks and gave each attendee a nice hat. It was very nice of them to host us for our visit.

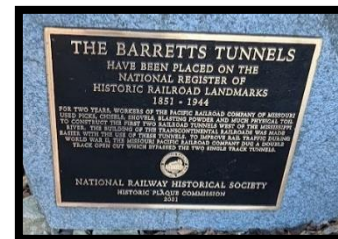
Back on the busses, we headed to the **The National Museum of Transportation** in St. Louis



County. As we approached the Mississippi River, the Gateway Arch, completed in 1965, came into view. As we crossed the river looking to the north, I saw the Eads Bridge that was completed in 1874. Back in 2004, I had breakfast on the Eads as part of the 100th anniversary of the St. Louis World's Fair and the 200th anniversary of the Lewis & Clark Expedition. The cable-stayed bridge in the distance is the Stan Musial Veterans Memorial Bridge that opened in 2014.



I have been to the TNMOT [It now uses this abbreviation on all of its interpretation signage.] several times, most recently when it hosted a train show in its parking lot during COVID. For our group, the focus was on the Museum's collection of historic RR equipment. However, TNMOT also has an extensive collection of antique cars in a building donated by the founder of Enterprise Rent a Car [closed that day because of a wedding], a C-47 w/ D-Day stripes, a Mississippi River tow boat and most recently, the first F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet that was built at the Boeing [former Mc Donnell Douglas] factory at the STL airport. We had a boxed lunch from Subway [not my favorite] by the original entrance building to the Museum that now has displays and a gift shop. I used my time there to charge my phone and bought five donated books for \$21 that I can easily resell on eBay. Outside, the Museum has two covered sheds with locomotives, passenger cars and trolleys and several uncovered tracks with freight cars and more locomotives, plus an active trolley loop that runs thru the property. At the rear of the grounds is this historic RR tunnel that dates back to 1851. It is no longer in use but stores several pieces of the collection. While St Louis is relatively flat, there are a series of hills west of there as the land raises from the Mississippi River Valley.



I walked around looking for two particular pieces of rolling stock. This is B&O 50 now, badly in



need of a paint job. This was mentioned at the convention with some disagreement as to what RR paint scheme should be done. The GM&O fans said it should be that RR given that the locomotive is in the same physical condition as it was retired in 1958 after being used in freight service and the GM&O's commuter train between Joliet and Chicago's Union Station. When used on the B&O, a shovel nose was added to the front of the locomotive [see picture on p.2].

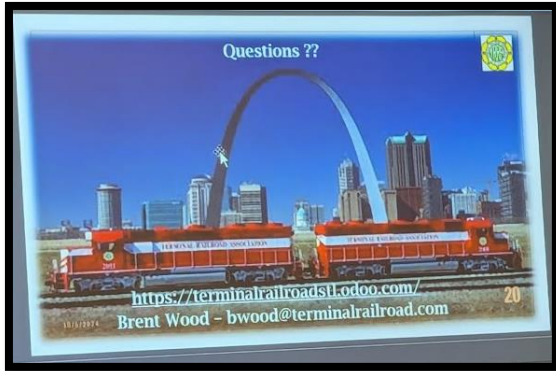


The other locomotive I was very interested in seeing was in very poor shape, but fortunately it is under one of the train sheds. This is B&O #1 that was built in 1925 by ALCo, GE and Ingersoll Rand. It was one of the first successful diesel/electric locomotives ever built. For years, the B&O used it to move freight cars at its W 26th Street freight station in lower Manhattan. The freight cars were moved there by car floats from Staten Island and NJ. A sister locomotive, CNJ #1000, has been cosmetically restored at the B&O Museum in Baltimore, MD.

The Museum closed at 4PM and we were back on the busses for a half hour ride back to the hotel. The GM&O table made some last minute sales before it was time for the banquet. It was a typical buffet. I ended up sitting at table in the back with the folks that I did not know. The man to my left was a B&O fan from Ohio. We had a nice talk and I mentioned my travels. He said he had not flown since 1980. I asked if he had ever been to Europe? Nope! When it was time to get in the line for the food, I noticed the woman behind him. I asked if that was his wife. He said no; she's a friend and then added "with

benefits”. She said she was a “factory hag” and had worked where Cub Cadet tractors/lawn movers were made for 35 years.

After the banquet, we went to another room to hear Brent Wood, the president of the Terminal RR Assoc. [TRRA] speak. TRRA is the largest terminal RR in the US with trackage on both sides of the Mississippi River and ownership of two RR bridges across the river. Historically, it owned and operated St. Louis’ Union Station that was the busiest one in the US. [St. Louis was a



major gateway between eastern and western RRs and only had one station while Chicago, NYC and Philadelphia each had more than one train station.] Brent joined the TRRA several years ago as its CFO; he was a CPA but his experience was with coal companies. When he interviewed for the job, he asked about not being from the RR industry and the then TRRA president said he was tired of dealing with RR people. He was made the president a few years later and lead the

company thru the recent rebuilding of the Merchants Bridge. I could tell from how he spoke that he was NOT a RR guy. Still, he took the time to do some research so he could include the B&O and the GM&O in his very interesting presentation.

Normally, this would have been the end of my trip and I would have flown home early the next AM from STL. However, I knew that the **33rd Annual Greater St. Louis Metro Area Train Show** was in Kirkwood, Missouri on October 5–6, 2024. I attended this show in October 2022 while attending a tri meeting of the MOPAC, CB&Q and TRRA historical societies. Friend Andy lives in Kirkwood and drove me to a Best Western there after the banquet.

Sunday October 6, 2024

I had an early breakfast at the hotel. Andy kindly picked me up at 745AM and drove me to St. Peter’s Church so I could attend its 8AM Mass. I had gone to mass there once before. The church is a very unusual shape with the curved walls that are full of stained glass. Andy returned



after 9AM and drove me to where the train show was being held. I waited till it opened at 10AM while Andy went to the service at his church before returning to the show venue.

The show is sponsored by an N scale modular club. This was on one of the club's layout; it is exactly N scale [1/160] and was 3D printed in sections and then assembled. There were several



modular layouts and perhaps 100 tables. There were more N scale dealers than what I normally see but not surprising given the show's sponsor. I went up and down the aisle and had some nice discussions with folks selling the stuff. I

went thru several boxes of parts and decals. I bought an ICRR bulkhead flat car that I have never seen before. At one table, someone was selling a large collection of PRR books. I bought eight of them to read and then resell on eBay for \$15.

When Andy returned, I pointed out some things that he might be interested in. He seemed to know many of the dealers and club members. The only bad thing about the show was while it had food for the dealers and club members, there was no food or drinks for sale to the public. So, when we left for the airport, I said that I needed to get some food first. Andy drove me to a Lion's Choice, a local chain that specializes in roast beef sandwiches. I had a Chicago-style, Italian beef but w/o the sporty peppers. STL was a short ride up I-270 and I-70. I said goodbye just after 3PM and headed into the terminal for my 444PM flight. I checked my bag and headed to the gate with a boarding pass for seat 9A. My flight was a way down the C concourse.



Looking out the window, I was surprised to see a Lufthansa jet parked at Terminal 2 that handles Southwest. Turns out the LH flies to STL 3x a week from Frankfurt. I checked the stand by list just before we boarded and I was still #1. However, as the agent processed my boarding pass, the screen flashed red and the agent said I was not paying attention. I was upgraded to seat 2C.

The flight back was uneventful; it left at 439PM more than $\frac{3}{4}$ full and arrived a few minutes ahead of schedule at 755PM. Once off the plane, I made potty stop and decided to grab a slice of pizza that turned out to be a very good thing. I was over towards baggage claim just as the 810PM Sept train left. Without a checked bag, I could have made that if I rushed. But I had to wait for my bag and wait and wait. I missed the 840PM train and then the 910PM. I was waiting by baggage carousel #19 but no bags were coming out. The belt would start and stop but no bags came out. Finally, about 915PM, an employee went down the belt and brought out several bags. He said no more and the rest would be on belt #13. I walked to there but noticed my bag sitting on belt #14. Who knows how long it had been there? It was 921PM! I walked out to the train station and got on the 940PM train a few minutes later. Unfortunately, this train was not going to Jenkintown. In talking with another convention attendee on the flight, I learned that the upper part of the Warminster line was still closed for weekend maintenance. My original plan was to take the train to Crestmont and walk over to Rt 611 and take the #55 bus back to my street.

Instead, I exited the train at Jefferson and waited for a 1040PM train to Doylestown that stopped at Jenkintown at 1105PM. There I arranged a LYFT ride but the driver had to come from Willow Grove [above where I live], that took almost 20 minutes. He did not have clue how to get my house. His GPS map was taking him in the wrong direction. Luckily, the driver, from Uzbekistan, was willing to follow my directions. It was just before midnight when I was in the house! I was all wound up, so I went on line and reviewed my finances and went thru emails for over a hour before going to bed.

The next day I sent a complaint email to AA about the baggage issue and later received a reply thanking me for letting them know about the situation and that they'll try and do better.

Recapping the miles, points, etc.

This was a short weekend trip so the earnings were not that great. The RT flights got me 3,707 loyalty points/award miles that put me at 172,844 LPs for this year, or within striking distance of the 200K needed to renew my Executive Platinum as on 3/1/25. I previously earned 392 LPs and 1,1176 award miles [3x] when I bought the ticket. The RT flights came to 1,628 miles, putting me at 1,067,914 lifetime miles or still very far below the 2 million needed for a substantial award. The two nights at the HI got me 8,826 points including a 3K bonus from IHG's current promotion. My regular HI rate for Thursday night was \$20 less [plus tax] than the convention rate. For Friday night, the convention rate was less so I booked with that. I booked the Saturday night stay at the BW in Kirkwood thru Booking.com to utilize an available award from prior reservations with them. So, the stay was pointless.

I wrote up this trip on 10/9 while it was very fresh in my mind. I am now behind from five other trips from AUG/SEPT and given the time it takes to write them up, I don't think I will be able to do them all. Carol & I are traveling to Raleigh NC on AMTRAK to attend this year's NMRA MER convention. We'll also visit the NC state capital.