

## **Board Meeting – Northern Pacific Railway Historical Association – September 21, 2021 – Missoula, Montana**

Meeting called to order by President Bill Zidel at 7:34 PM. Board Members present: Don Golde, Dave Hillard, Bob Makins, Dean O'Neill, Doug Shearer, Jim Woodward, Bill Zidel, and Ken Zieska. Harold Shannon did not attend the 2021 Convention.

Guests included Chris Atkins, Alan Burns, Hilding Larson, Bill Taylor, and Jan Taylor.

### **Comments on the 2021 Convention:**

Bill Taylor commented that the Convention has gone relatively smoothly so far, although Duane Durr had questioned the lack of specific activities for spouses. Bill response to Duane was that downtown Missoula contains numerous museums, art galleries, and shopping experiences within easy walking distance of the Convention hotel. Most convention attendees seem to be complying with the Convention hotel's requirement to wear masks while indoors at the hotel, as well as other recommendations and restrictions in response to Covid-19. Agendas are available to all attendees, and the steering committee is working well.

A hospitality room has been set aside external to the large room where presentations will occur. This should enable Convention attendees to socialize without interrupting presentations. Coffee and water will be provided in the hospitality room.

Since refurbishment of the hotel restaurant remains incomplete, it is not available to serve any meals; so the Convention Committee has arranged for catered breakfast offerings in the hotel atrium for Wednesday – Friday mornings at no extra cost to those registered for the Convention. The Committee will also host an outdoor BBQ luncheon on Friday for those registered, and the Saturday evening Banquet will be served in the main meeting room at the hotel. Ross Lane, VP of Communications for MRL, is the Banquet Speaker. Prior to joining MRL, Mr. Lane worked for BNSF in Montana, so he has a fair depth of knowledge regarding Montana railroad topics.

FRA restrictions and bus driver availability have limited the number of attendees who can take the MRL Tour on Friday morning, so Bill and Jan have arranged for Convention attendees to also visit the exhibits at Fort Missoula, which include the Milwaukee Depot from Drummond, MT, a Missoula electric streetcar, a logging equipment display, and the 70 ton Anaconda Copper Mining railroad Willamette logging locomotive #7 that was used in the 1955 motion picture *Timberjack*, which featured Sterling Hayden, Vera Ralston, Chill Wills, and Hoagy Charmichael, and others. Bill Taylor will mention during the convention that attendees who were able to purchase tickets for the Friday MRL Tour are allowed to resell those tickets to attendees who were not able to purchase tickets, if they wish to do so. A total of 120 color-coded tickets were sold – 40 for each of three tour buses. If all goes well, we will have exactly 40 ticket holders aboard each of the three buses on Friday morning.

MRL and the bus company will *require* masks to be worn by all persons participating in the tours on Friday, September 24.

Saturday features a Swap Meet, which will be open to the public. About 45 tables have been spoken for so far; the room can hold up to 50 tables. We should have an enticing range of items for the raffle after the Saturday evening Banquet.

Covid-19 has complicated many aspects of planning and executing the Convention, but the Committee, with the support of the NPRHA Board, has prevailed so far in bringing the Convention to fruition, and so far the Convention appears likely to at least break even financially.

Ken Zieska requested that the Taylors share their plan and budget for the 2021 Convention with him to assist with planning for the 2022 Brainerd Convention. Due to Covid-19 and other factors, hotel costs and many other aspects of convention planning are evolving quite rapidly.

For the September 24 Membership Meeting, Dean O'Neill will present the Modeling Committee report and Bill Zidel or John Fuji will present the Grants Committee report.

**NPRHA Company Store:** We had identified a couple to help staff the Company Store during the Convention and perhaps on an on-going basis; however, they later decided to take vacation during the dates of the rescheduled 2021 Convention. Bill Zidel will discuss with them their participation in future Conventions. For the 2021 Convention, Chris Atkins will be the primary storekeeper, with assistance from Steve Miller. We do not need to keep the Store open during presentations; Chris does not need to miss Convention presentations to keep the Store open. The store space will remain available so the Store can remain open during Modeling presentations on September 25.

### **Convention Committee:**

Dean O'Neill commented that planning to date has been based on holding the 2023 NPRHA Convention in Everett, Washington. Past Conventions in Washington State have occurred in Tacoma, Centralia, Pasco, Yakima, and Spokane. Seattle has been deemed too expensive; Everett offers a less expensive location with NP content such as the Sumas line and Lake Whatcom. However, some members have commented that 2023 is the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NP's initial activities at Tacoma. Tacoma will be substantially more expensive than Everett. General consensus among the Board was to continue to pursue Everett for 2023, and perhaps study facilitation of a Sounder trip or other pre or post-Convention visit to Tacoma for those who might be interested. Wherever the Convention occurs, we must have activities for spouses as part of the Convention. The Convention Committee needs to examine past convention schedules and descriptions and develop a list suggested spouse content for future conventions.

For 2025, we may attempt to have a joint convention with both the Great Northern Railway Historical Society and the Burlington Route Historical Society, likely in the Twin Cities area.

**GoTo Meeting** worked well for our on-line Board gathering in the spring of 2021 and should be used when appropriate to facilitate Board communication between Conventions in the future.

### **Financial Planning:**

NPRHA will soon receive a \$50,000 donation from the estate of a deceased former NPRHA member. Dave Hillard and Bill Zidel are working with appropriate legal and financial resources to ensure this donation is processed smoothly. There do not appear to be any stipulations associated with the donation.

NPRHA may also have been the target of a recent phishing scam, which Dave Hillard has reported to Wells Fargo, and it will be dealt with appropriately. All NPRHA accounts are safe and secure.

### **Vista-Dome Package:**

Dean O'Neill reported that to date, NPRHA has sold 126 Vista-Dome Packages, with gross revenue of \$36,540. \$140 of each VDP purchases four years of NPRHA Membership. Hardware costs are \$10, leaving \$140 as revenue to NPRHA. This can be used for Modeling, Membership Recruitment, etc., as outlined by Dean in his VDP proposal. Dean plans to retire later this year, which will give him more time to pursue those VDP-funded projects. He will submit a more detailed VDP proposal to the Board later this year. Dean hopes to redouble sales of the VDP over the coming year, in part by using up to 10% of VDP revenue to advertise the VDP. Dean also plans to develop VDP 2024, a second-generation VDP for sales beginning in 2024. It will likely feature content from Rick Leach, and perhaps content from Larry Schrenk.

### **Archive Committee:**

Issues remain between East and West groups regarding systems used to store information electronically and the use of those systems. Bill Zidel will work with Ken Zieska and others to attempt to resolve those issues.

On the other hand, the new Director at the Minnesota Transportation Museum has established an atmosphere that is significantly friendlier to NPRHA. NPRHA will now have space for changeable exhibits that we will renew periodically. MTM appears to be moving more toward being an historical museum and away from being an attraction for children. MTM's current emphasis is more on the objects (rolling stock and other equipment) associated with railroading and less on the documents associated with railroading.

Both MTM and the Duluth Museum are currently willing to share information such as builder's photos and joint facilities books with NPRHA.

**Calendar Committee:** The 2024 NPRHA Calendar will probably present 24 Ron Nixon photos (12 color, 12 B&W) featuring both diesel and steam operations on the NP.

**Liability Insurance:** NPRHA now has Liability Insurance - this helped facilitate arrangements for the Missoula Convention.

**Mainstreeter:**

Dean O'Neill presented an analysis comparing page count and content for the most recent six issues of the NPRHA **Mainstreeter** and the GNRHS **Goat** – see the attached file *Mainstreeter – Opportunity v1.pdf* for details. The **Goat** generally has more content in total, as well as in several specific information categories than the **Mainstreeter**. However, we must consider both quality and quantity when comparing the publications, and some subscribers to both publications consider the **Mainstreeter** to be superior as to the quality of the articles. Dean also compared the **Mainstreeter** to the publications of the Milwaukee, C&NW, Missouri Pacific, Penn Central, and Erie as to page count and price per issue. Hobby shop sales of the **Mainstreeter** have dwindled in recent years.

Dean does not question the efforts or output of our current **Mainstreeter** Editor, Kurt Armbruster; however, he does suggest that Kurt could use some assistance with Production of the **Mainstreeter**. Perhaps we could benefit by working with a high-quality publisher, such as White River. White River has their own collection of NP photos that we might leverage for **Mainstreeter** content. Partnering with White River would also probably make Dale Sanders available to assist with Production of the magazine. In addition, we should explore improvements that our current publisher might make to improve the quality of the **Mainstreeter**.

Dean mentioned that he plans to ask each of the members of the Modeling Committee to write a Modeling article for the **Mainstreeter** at least once/year. These could include how-to articles, as well as listings and descriptions of newly available models.

Ken Zieska commented that our focus may be a bit narrow in that the **Mainstreeter** seems to cover strictly Northern Pacific content, seldom venturing into topics related to NP's interchange with other railroads or the broader context within which NP operated. Perhaps we could devote more coverage to interchange with other railroads.

Kent Sullivan commented that in comparing the **Mainstreeter** to publications from other railroad historical associations, we also need to gain some insight into how the members of those organizations view the value and success of the publications produced by those organizations. We also have to ensure that the **Mainstreeter** maintains or improves the quality and accuracy of the content.

Don Golde commented that we need to find ways, including **Mainstreeter** content, to entice new and younger members into the NPRHA in order for the NPRHA to survive and perhaps flourish.

Bill Zidel commented that some **Mainstreeter** content might be better handled as a separate document that arrives to members in the same envelope as the **Mainstreeter**. Bill also commented that some content is best handled as captioned photos rather than a verbose article with few or no illustrations. Finally, we need to use a high quality paper stock for the **Mainstreeter**.

We also need to remain mindful that the writing of high-quality articles, just like the production of high quality photos and illustrations, is a difficult endeavor, even for relatively talented authors. And we must also deal with the fact that the population of former NPRHA employees who can write or assist with writing historical articles based on their own first-hand knowledge and experience is rapidly dwindling.

Dave Hillard mentioned that we need to maintain Kurt Armbruster's current timely production schedule for **Mainstreeter** issues, and avoid slipping into past situations when **Mainstreeter** issues were sometimes published several months after the expected date.

Dean O'Neill said that he plans to further discuss these issues related to the **Mainstreeter** with Kurt Armbruster, as well as some other folks who prominently figured in the **Mainstreeter's** past, such as Gary Tarbox.

Another potential topic for discussion is to ensure that members of the **Mainstreeter's** Editorial Review Board remain fully involved in the publication process for the **Mainstreeter**.

Bill Zidel requested that Board members discuss **Mainstreeter**-related issues with members during the remainder of the 2021 Convention so we can resume discussion of the issue at the September 25 Board meeting.

**Adjournment:** Makins moved to adjourn the meeting, Golde second. Adjournment approved unanimously at 9:57 PM.

Jim Woodward – Secretary, NPRHA