

Carolina Conductor



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Monthly Newsletter of the Carolina Railroad Heritage Association, Inc.

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Preserving the Past Active in the Present Planning for the Future

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Spartanburg Amtrak Station

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Wednesday 10-2 & Saturday 10-2

Meeting Site:

Fountain Inn Presbyterian Church

307 North Main Street

Fountain Inn, SC 29644

Third Friday of the Month at 7:00 p.m.

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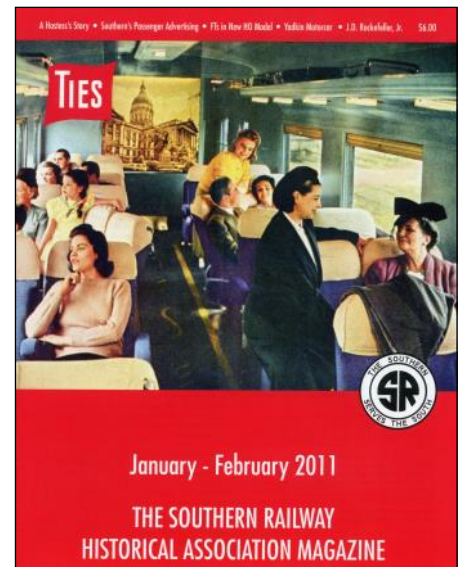
Bruce Gathman -
newsletter@hubcityrrmuseum.org
Articles can be submitted anytime.

SOU Hostesses

*From an article in the Ties magazine
written by our esteemed president—
Bo Brown.*

Being a fan of the Southern Railway I have spent a good portion of my life seeking out both memorabilia and information on the Southern. As I have gone along this journey there has always been one employee on the railroad that has both fascinated me and eluded me. They were the most visible yet the most unknown of 1940s passenger service — the Hostess.

For years I had seen pictures of these young ladies in brochures, on matchbook covers and in the center section of timetables. But still the question remained. What exactly



did they do as they rode the rails for Southern Railway? As time has passed, these young ladies we see only in photographs have now become senior ladies and still the questions remained. Well, that was until recently, for you see after years of wondering who and where these ladies were it just so happened that one lived 4 miles from our home. As it turns out I've had a hostess in my own backyard for years I just didn't know it! This is her story.

For Myra Virginia Donald It all started in 1946 when she was attending Mississippi Southern College (now the University of South-

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Museum Happenings



CSX Heritage unit spotted by Will McWhorter in Spartanburg recently.



One of several boxes of hopper cars for sale in the caboose. All are HO scale and are Colorado railroads and power companies.



Get ready to start watching for these if the buyout happens.

Wanted—Articles for the Carolina Conductor

Submit an article of 200 words or more with some photos and captions and see them in print. Every one of us has some unique railroad experience that would make interesting reading for our membership. Your editor always needs more contributions of railway history and news.



ern Mississippi) in Hattiesburg. It was there on a bulletin board she saw an advertisement for a job with Pan American World Air Lines. They were looking for young ladies to be stewardesses. Myra, at age 22, had seen her dream job, travel, and adventure, what could be better. Unfortunately, when she approached her parents with this wonderful adventure, they did not share her excitement and after a time Myra gave up her dream. But as fate had it the adventure was only beginning. About a month later Myra saw another flyer, this time it wasn't from an airline it was from the Southern Railway. It seemed they too were

looking for young ladies to be on train hostesses. Once again Myra saw a chance to realize her dream and surely her parents wouldn't mind, the Southern went right through their hometown of Hattiesburg. Myra decided to apply and was sent a telegram to come to New Orleans for an interview. So, along with her mother off to New Orleans she went to chase that train.

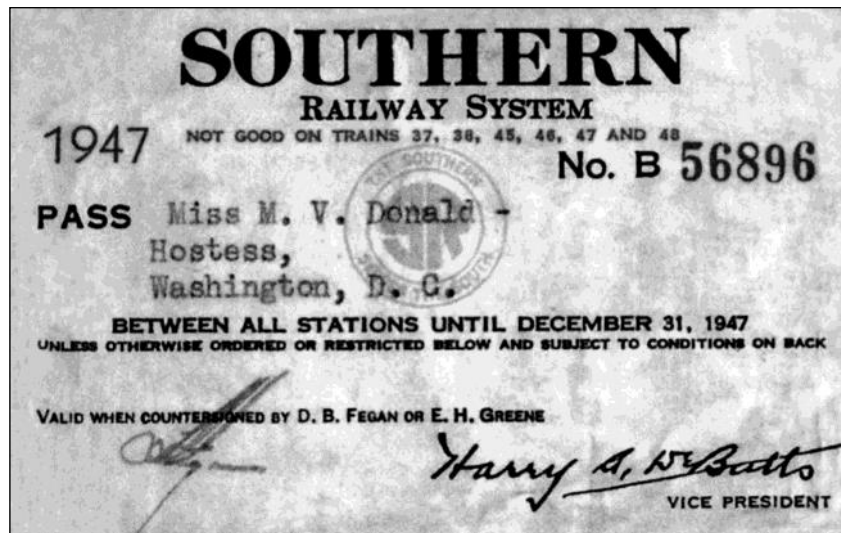
During the interview in New Orleans, Myra found out first thing that the young ladies vying for the hostess position fell under strict guidelines. They had to be between 22 and 33 years of age, they could not be married or have plans to be married, they had to have a pleasant personality, they had to have at least 2 years of college, they couldn't drink or smoke while on duty. In short they could not do anything that would portray a negative image toward the railroad. And last but not least, they could be no shorter than 5-6 and no taller than 5-9. Myra was a perfect fit, with one exception; she was only 5-5 tall. But not to be out done she figured out very quickly that if you stand on your tip toes you could make up that inch, so that's what she did. You know it worked, she was offered a second interview in Washington, DC with the Assistant

to the General Passenger Traffic Manager and director of the hostess service, Wanda L. Myers. Myra made that trip to Washington and there standing on her tiptoes she was offered a job as a hostess with The Southern Railway. Myra received her training at the Washington, DC Headquarters of Southern. It was very intense in etiquette. Here she was taught how to sit, how to stand, how to walk, and how to talk the way the railroad expected you to. The railroad was very strict in what the hostesses said to passengers, when greeting passengers in the morning they would say good morning not the southern ver-

sion of good moooourning. If they were asked a question, they were never to use the words "I think." You either told them the answer, or you told them you would find an answer. On the railroad you didn't make it up as you went. Myra was also taught basic operating rules of the railroad and limited first aid. While on the train a hostess was only allowed to hand out aspirin, and when you did you had to list who you gave it to and what time you gave it to them. Even then the railroad had to be concerned with lawsuits. The main thing the railroad stressed to the hostesses was service to its passengers.

Myra along with the other hostesses had several things that they were responsible for. First they had to purchase their own uniforms at a cost of \$110.00 each. A uniform consisted of a blue-green gabardine skirt and coat, a beret, white blouse, white gloves, girdle, and hose. They also had to purchase a top-coat. The uniforms were custom tailored in Baltimore, MD. Myra said when you received your first uniform you also received your first schedule. The second thing, all the hostesses were responsible for was their share of an apartment. The only problem was it was not only an apartment in Washington; it was a room in New Orleans and a room in Memphis. In Washington they lived at The Burlington Hotel, in New Orleans, The Roosevelt Hotel and in Memphis, The William Len Hotel. The suites in Washington housed five girls. It had two rooms with twin beds and one room with a single bed; this was for the senior hostess in that group. Myra said she remembered her first room at the Burlington, it was over the ballroom; needless to say, she didn't get much sleep and was oh so glad when she was assigned her permanent room. Myra also noted when you left the hotel either in your full uniform or regular street clothes it had better be appropriate because they were to do nothing to embarrass themselves or the railroad. And they never knew when Miss Myers might be watching. Myra says she remembers her first trip on The Southerner; she rode deadhead to

observe what the hostess job duties were. When they got to New Orleans, Myra was taken to dinner in the French Quarter by the hostess and the passenger representative. The main reason she remembers, the restaurant was raided. Fortunately, they left right before the raid. She says she almost got fired before she ever made her first trip. Once Myra or "Donald Duck" as her fellow employees knew her, started her regular runs on The Southerner this was a typical trip. She would start the day in Washington aboard The Southerner with a Pennsylvania Railroad crew; from here she would travel north to New York's Penn Station. While in New York she would have a three-hour layover while the entire train was cleaned inside and out. During this layover she would walk around New York near the station. Often times when she would



go on these walks men would approach her and ask what the "SR" on her uniform stood for. To assure they would leave her alone she would tell them one of two things; first was that it stood for Soviet Russia and second, she was one of Sally Rand's girls both had the same effect, they left her alone.

After the fun, she would always tell them it stood for Southern Railway, she never left them wondering. After the layover they would leave Penn Station and would start her journey south back to Washington Terminal. From Washington Terminal the Southern would take the train to New Orleans. Once in New Orleans she would spend the night at the hotel and start the return trip to Washington the next morning. The life of a hostess was three days on duty, two days off. Each trip she traveled approximately 2600 miles and was on the train for approximately 58 hours. As a point of interest, a contributing factor as to why the hostess could work such long hours was because they were not members of a union. Instead, they were members of the National Passenger Traffic Association. This was the same organization that Airline stewardess were members of.

The hostess was the only employee on the train to make the com-

Continued on Page 4 - Hostess

plete trip. They referred to this as “a run with one set of equipment.” Because of this the hostess was responsible for keeping up with everything that went on, while she was on the train. She had to make a written report of every employee that worked the trip, both from the Southern and the Pennsylvania Railroad. She had to keep up with every conductor, engineer, flagman, porter, and dining car steward that was on her trip. She had to list any complaints. She would keep up with large groups that were on the train, or prominent passengers. If she gave a passenger an aspirin, she had to list it and all of this writing had to be done while working on the trip standing, not sitting. The interesting thing about this report was when the hostess got back to Washington she had to turn the report in at the main headquarters before she could go to her apartment. The trip was not complete until the report was turned in, and then she would “crash” for about six hours.

On the train Myra had many responsibilities; first she was to speak to every passenger on the train. On a complete round trip this amounted to approximately 1000 people, that’s a lot of talking. She was in charge of filling any need the passenger might have. She gave out pillows, warmed many baby bottles, (this was done by running hot water over it in a sink, no microwaves). She handed out pocket schedules, recommended places to eat, places to stay, and things to do in cities along the route. Many times, she would have children traveling alone in her cars and would have blind or other disabled passengers she would look after. Another responsibility was to police the restrooms. Myra had to make sure they were clean, she didn’t have to do the actual cleaning, but she was accountable for making sure the porters did their job.

At each station she was to be very visible. She would walk on the concourse and speak to both passengers and onlookers and help people in the direction they needed to go. At night on the train, she had to make sure that all the window shades were level and at the same height. The reason being, when the train was seen from the outside speeding through the night it would look “spiffy.” Myra commented that everyone needs to try keeping up with this in eight cars with children riding the train!

At 10:30 each night the porters would start dimming the lights and at this time she was allowed



to go to her room. It was a private comfortable roomette equipped with everything she needed, located at the center of the club/observation car. The bed in the roomette was positioned parallel to the end of the car, because of this Myra commented that on more than one occasion she was knocked out of bed in the middle of the night when the train would take on another car. This especially happened on The Tennessean.

The hostess’s job was to be available at all times. If a passenger needed her in the middle of the night she would get up, get dressed in her uniform and help. I guess the logo was right “The Southern did serve the south.” When morning came at 6:30 am Myra was back at her duties. The only car she didn’t work in was the club car; it was not fitting for a lady to be in this car. Another thing the hostesses did not do was serve food and drinks, unlike their counterpart on the airlines -the stewardess.

Myra spoke of many highlights and experiences of her days with the Southern. Occasionally she had the opportunity to visit with President Harry Truman when his Private Presidential Car was added to The Southerner. Since he did not like to fly,

Continued on Page 6 - Hostess

several times she even had occasion to talk with him in his private car. Myra spoke very highly of the late president and remarked what "a nice man he was." She said she had taken care of movie stars, many other politicians, and once even a Shah. She said once she almost even had to deliver a baby, thankfully the baby decided to wait.

She said one of the scary parts of the run was crossing Lake Pontchartrain during a storm on The Southerner. 'The water in the lake would be so rough that the waves would splash up on the windows on both sides of the train and there was no land in sight. She said the train would barely creep along the six-mile-long bridge and it was always a relief when you had crossed the bridge even in good weather.

Other highlights of her days with the Southern was when she toured the Federal Reserve in Memphis. One of her passengers on The Tennessean was a high-ranking official with the Federal Reserve and he arranged a special visit for her. Before she took her first trip to Memphis on the Tennessean, all the other hostesses told her not to dare get off the train in Johnson City, TN because all the men there were really dangerous, she believed them! A not so fond memory on The Tennessean occurred when the train was traveling through the mountains of Virginia. As she was eating lunch in the dining car all of a sudden a balance spring broke on the engine and the car started moving violently to the left. Myra said everything on the right side of the car slammed to the left showering her with chairs and flatware. Some of the cooks were scalded and the train almost derailed. Myra said she preferred The Southerner to The Tennessean. As I think about it, maybe that's the reason some of the silver pieces have those big nasty dents



in them, blame it on a balance spring. Once, while on The Southerner in south Mississippi, her train hit a car at a grade crossing. Knowing that the railroad always needed a witness if possible, she chased down a young lady that she knew had seen the accident. By chasing her down and getting her account of the accident it would prove the railroad was not at fault. Needless to say, the train conductor and engineer were very happy men that day.

Myra also commented on some of her favorite foods on the train.

She said the chicken dinners were the best and another of her favorites was baked beans with whole sausage patties in them. And last but not least her most favorite memory of her days with the Southern was when she met her future husband, Vernon Garrett, in Potomac Park. In May of 2011 they will celebrate 63 years of marriage. Myra worked with Southern from 1946 to 1948. While on the train she traveled approximately 500,000 miles. She ate only after everyone else had been fed. She slept when she could. She worked long hours and probably made less than anyone else on the train. But even today when she talks about being a hostess on 47 & 48 and 45 & 46 you can see the love and the pride she had for her job. To the fifty or so ladies that had this opportunity it was a wonderful part of their lives. It was a good job, it involved travel, it was adventure, it was hard, yet enjoyable work, and it was a life that most of us can only dream of. Speaking for myself I am one of those dreamers. Are you?

If anyone happens to know of any other hostesses that would like to get in touch with Mrs. Garrett please email me at rub1458@charter.net and I will get this information to her. —

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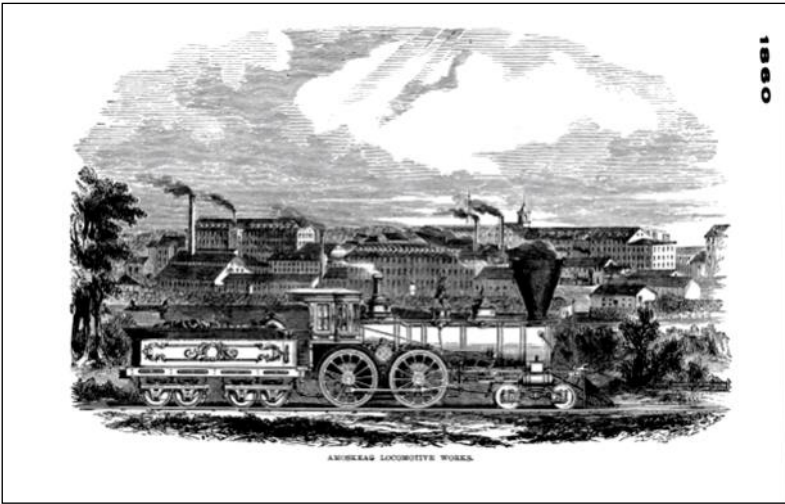
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