

# Carolina Conductor



Volume 4 Number 4 Monthly Newsletter of the Carolina Railroad Heritage Association, Inc. April 2017

## Preserving the Past. Active in the Present. Planning for the Future.

Web Site: [hubcityrrmuseum.org](http://hubcityrrmuseum.org)  
Facebook: Carolina Railroad  
Heritage Association

**Meeting Site:**  
Woodmen of the World Bldg.  
721 East Poinsett Street  
Greer, SC 29651-6404  
Third Friday of the Month at 7:00 pm

**Hub City Railroad Museum  
and SOU Caboose #X3115:**  
Spartanburg Amtrak Station  
298 Magnolia Street  
Spartanburg, SC 29301-2330  
Wednesday 10-2 and Saturday 10-2

**Officers:**  
President:  
**David Winans** — 864-963-4739  
Vice-President:  
**Mac McMillin** — 864-624-9658  
Secretary:  
**Marv Havens** — 864-292-3852  
Treasurer:  
**Terry Brelsford** — 864-320-6201

**Directors:**  
**Milton Ashley** — 864-504-5202  
**Charles Conn** — 864-326-6070  
**Lee Dobbs** — 864-268-3939  
**Bruce Gathman** — 864-850-3642  
**Bob Klempner** — 864-431-5409

**Mailing Address:**  
Suite #129  
2123 Old Spartanburg Road  
Greer, South Carolina 29650-2704

**Editor:**  
**Bruce Gathman**—  
[shaygearhead@bellsouth.net](mailto:shaygearhead@bellsouth.net)  
Articles and club news due by the  
2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of month.

## Amtrak's Beech Grove Shops

By: David Winans



Shop construction circa 1910 and modern day view of parapet.

The Beech Grove Shops were built starting in 1905 by the Big Four Railroad, more appropriately called the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad. It was designed to maintain steam locomotives, passenger cars and freight cars. In 1922 the parent company, New York Central, absorbed the Big Four Railroad and took control of the shop. New York Central continued to make improvements and expanded shop operations.

During the war years, there were more than 5,000 employees. This was certainly the peak of activity at Beech Grove. After World War II, passenger train travel began a gradual decline, which resulted in a decrease in the operations at the Beech

Grove Shops. Financial difficulties arose within the New York Central Railroad as well as the Pennsylvania Railroad. These two merged to form the Penn Central Railroad which took over operations of the Beech Grove Shops. Penn Central's financial difficulties resulted in the shops falling into a state of disrepair.

In 1971, Amtrak came into existence and took over passenger rail service for all railroads except for the Southern Railroad and the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad. An ambitious program was undertaken to repair old and uncared for passenger cars and bring them into a useable state of repair. In 1973, Amtrak contracted with the Penn Central Railroad to have its passen-

**Continued on Page 3 - Beech Grove**

# Arrivals

## Greenville & Western Promotes Julian & Martin

The Greenville & Western Railway Co. last week announced two personnel changes, including the promotion of Brandon Julian to general manager.

Julian will oversee all other managers, rail operations, federal and state regulatory compliance, and the development and implementation of employee training for the railroad and its sister company, the Aiken Railway Co. LLC.

Julian started with the company as a rail transportation specialist in 2006, later adding track and bridge inspection duties. Martin joined the company as a rail



GRLW GP30 #4204 freshly repainted from ATSF freight scheme.

transportation specialist in 2011. In 2014, he was promoted to manager-compliance and training.

Also last week, Greenville & Western officials announced Dennis Martin has been promoted to manager-mechanical and transloading. Martin will be responsible for freight-car and locomotive maintenance for the railroad and Aiken. Additionally, he will oversee daily operations of Big Creek Machinery Distribution Hub on the Greenville & Western.

## Florida East Coast Sold

GMéxico Transportes S.A. de C.V., the transportation business unit of Grupo México, and the Florida East Coast Railway Holdings Corp. have entered into a purchase agreement to acquire FEC in an all cash transaction for an undisclosed value.

FEC President and CEO Jim Hertwig says, "The FEC team looks forward to working with [GMéxico Transportes] to grow our business, execute our key strategic initiatives, and take advantage of new opportunities." The railroad, now owned by affiliates of Fortress Investment Group LLC, serves a diverse mix of intermodal, aggregate, auto, chemicals, metals and lumber customers, handling about 550,000 loads per year. New York-based Fortress, a subsidiary of Japan's SoftBank Group Corp., also owns the Central Maine & Quebec Railway, which is not included in this deal.

The sale does not affect All Aboard Florida or its Brightline passenger service, which remains with Fortress.

Grupo México subsidiary Ferromex operates more than 6,200 miles track covering major industrial and commercial zones in the country. It serves eight seaports



An artist's mock-up shows a Ferromex locomotive leading a Florida East Coast train at St. Augustine.

and six border rail crossings, handling more than 1.4 million loads per year.

"The acquisition of FEC is an important strategic addition to our North American transportation service offering. Our acquisition of the FEC will significantly enhance the scope, scale and diversification of our service," Alfredo Casar, president and CEO of GMéxico Transportes, says. "We are excited to welcome FEC to our transportation team as we work together to provide safe, reliable and efficient rail and trucking services to our customers."

# Departures

Continued from Page 1 - *Beech Grove*

ger cars repaired and refurbished at Beech Grove. After much negotiations, Amtrak acquired 62.5 acres of the shop for approximately \$3,500,000. Beech Grove shops officially became part of Amtrak on April 1, 1975.

The National Model Railroad Association's convention was held in Indianapolis in 2016. My wife and I attended the convention, and one of the tours the NMRA had scheduled was of the Beech Grove Shops. We were able to go through both car and locomotive repair shops as well as a painting shop and a shop working on mechanical systems.

The buildings at Beech Grove are the original structures built by the Big Four Railroad and are still being used over 100 years later. Here are some photos we took dur-

spend the State's money for the trains. "I didn't order them". They were in storage temporarily at Beech Grove until a new buyer can be located for the trains.

One interesting thing we noticed was that all the



Top to Bottom:  
 Passenger car truck removed for maintenance.  
 Wheel turning lathe. Tour group.  
 Locomotive shop area with special paint job on loco.



ing our tour of the shops.

Outside of the shops there were some interesting trains made by Talgo. Apparently, the state of Michigan ordered the trains for commuter service. A new Governor was elected and he refused to



Continued on Page 4 - *Beech Grove*

# Manifest

Continued from Page 3 - Beech Grove

“company cars” ha Federal license plates, apparently because Amtrak is a government entity.

Top to bottom: Passenger cars in maintenance bay. Diesel locomotive in paint booth. Diesel tuck in rehab. New train-sets awaiting disposition. Government license plate.



# Rare Mileage

## Swamp Rabbit Railroad

The original railroad was founded by a group that included members of the Wagener merchant family of Charleston. The Blackville, Alston, and Newberry road was originally intended to develop the open-pit kaolin clay mines in eastern Aiken County along the North Fork of the Edisto River. The railroad would allow the white clay, said to be of superior quality for porcelain and paper making, to be connected at Blackville to the Charleston-Augusta line of the South Carolina and Georgia Railroad (SC&G), by

which it could be marketed to the world through Charleston.

Construction started in Blackville about 1886, where it connected to the SC&G, and proceeded to the kaolin mines. The towns of Springfield and Salley were founded between Perry and Blackville. The new towns of Perry and Wagener (named for the major investors) were created along this section of the line. The village of Sievern near the mines (a.k.a. Seivern or Selvern) was named for the old hometown of the Charleston Wagners: Sievern in Saxony, Germany. The railroad originally

ended at a turntable in Sievern.

The kaolin venture ran into some temporary difficulties soon after the railroad was completed to Sievern in 1888. Meantime, the railroad very quickly became a boon for the area's turpentine and pine lumber business, as well as crops such as cotton and asparagus, the town of Wagener's signature crop for many years. Watermelon, which grow particularly well in the Sandhill country, were another high quality crop for which Wagener became recognized well outside South Carolina. Wagener melons were said to be superior even to those



Continued on Page 6 - *Swamp Rabbit*



# Marker Lights



Continued from Page 5 - *Swamp Rabbit*

grown elsewhere in the Sandhill's region. They were shipped as far north as Rhode Island in open

ventilated produce cars. The railroad made the hitherto sparsely populated region so prosperous that an unsuccessful movement to establish a separate "Batesburg

County", in a region stretching from Batesburg to Blackville, flourished in the early 1890s. Another 1888 railroad venture, the Barnwell Railway, continued from the end of the BA&N in Blackville south to connect the county seat and agricultural center of Barnwell to the evolving system.

By the 1890s, the railroad, or the regular train it operated, came to be known locally as the "Swamp Rabbit". Some of the colorful history attached to the railroad included the October 1895 shooting in Sievern of a notorious criminal fugitive who had terrorized the area, by a pugnacious railroad conductor whom the outlaw was rumored to have threatened.



## 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. With Jim Sheppard's passing your editor needs more contributions of local railway history and news.



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