

Steam line memories remain vivid

October 13, 2013 | Evansville Courier & Press (IN) | Evansville Courier & Press Joe Aaron

Let us dip back in time to the early 1900s and the days of the old E. S. & N., a **suburban railroad** from **Evansville** to **Newburgh**. To a time of Sunday picnics and concerts in the park. It sure was a lot more relaxing, as Homer E. Durham is about to tell us

"Some of my early recollections revolve around this most interesting train (the **Evansville, Suburban & Newburgh** steam line) and I can remember quite well when my father and I had spent the afternoon and evening hunting doves just back of Barnett's Grove.

"It was growing dark and Dad was consulting his watch. He suggested that we had better hurry to get on down to the track, for it was about time for the Dummy to arrive.

"There was a little shelter just across the track, large enough for eight to 10 people to crowd into in foul weather, and we waited there and listened for the first sounds of the approaching train.

"At last we could see the flashes of the headlight, and just as the locomotive rounded the bend with a full beam focused on us, Dad stepped out on the track and lighted a bunched-up newspaper, waving it back and forth for a stop signal.

"Immediately we could hear the whistle blast, indicating they had seen us.

"Surely not before nor since has anything like that locomotive known as the Dummy been created. It looked like a streetcar, all glass-enclosed, but upon closer examination you could look through the windows and see the boiler, with a short funnel emerging from the center of the top. In the front and rear, cowcatchers were attached, and the running gear was all in plain view underneath the carriage.

"It could be operated from either end like a streetcar, and when they reached the end of the line, they would uncouple the locomotive and tender, switch her back to the rear of the train, the engineer and fireman would trade places and they were in business for the return trip to **Evansville**.

"It had the most peculiar three-toned whistle .. and in town it could be heard at all hours of the day and night.

"The **Evansville** terminal was on Sixth Street (now a parking lot across from the Ford Center) and the route proceeded south on Fifth Street to Canal, then east through the city and in the direction of **Newburgh**.

"I always thought the best part of the trip was when we entered Stockwell Woods (Wesselman

Park area). The cool, dark shade seemed to engulf us like a tunnel, the big trees went flashing by and the sounds of the train were magnified.

"We would nearly always go to **Newburgh** because that was Dad's territory, and the trips were of a business nature. I always got near the window when we approached **Newburgh**. The train passed over a long trestle just before entering the town, and I liked to look down and imagine we were flying.

"The line was well patronized. Barnett's Grove (along the line) was a popular recreation area and catered to church picnics and other festive affairs

"In the summertime they switched over to open cars, with running boards along the sides and the seats arranged at right angles to the tracks.

"Once when my cousin and I were at Barnett's Grove, the Dummy, hauling a load of freight, stopped there, and we engaged in conversation with one of the crew. He kindly offered us a free ride to town, and we rode the caboose! Boy, what a thrill."

Durham says "all the glamour left" after the steam line was replaced by electric traction cars; the line was abandoned in 1930.

This Morning Assignment was published originally in The **Evansville** Courier in the early 1970s.

Editor's note: For 30 years Joe Aaron banged out more than 7,000 of his "Morning assignment" columns, touching readers with his humor. Because you asked, we are reprinting his columns on Sundays. Enjoy.