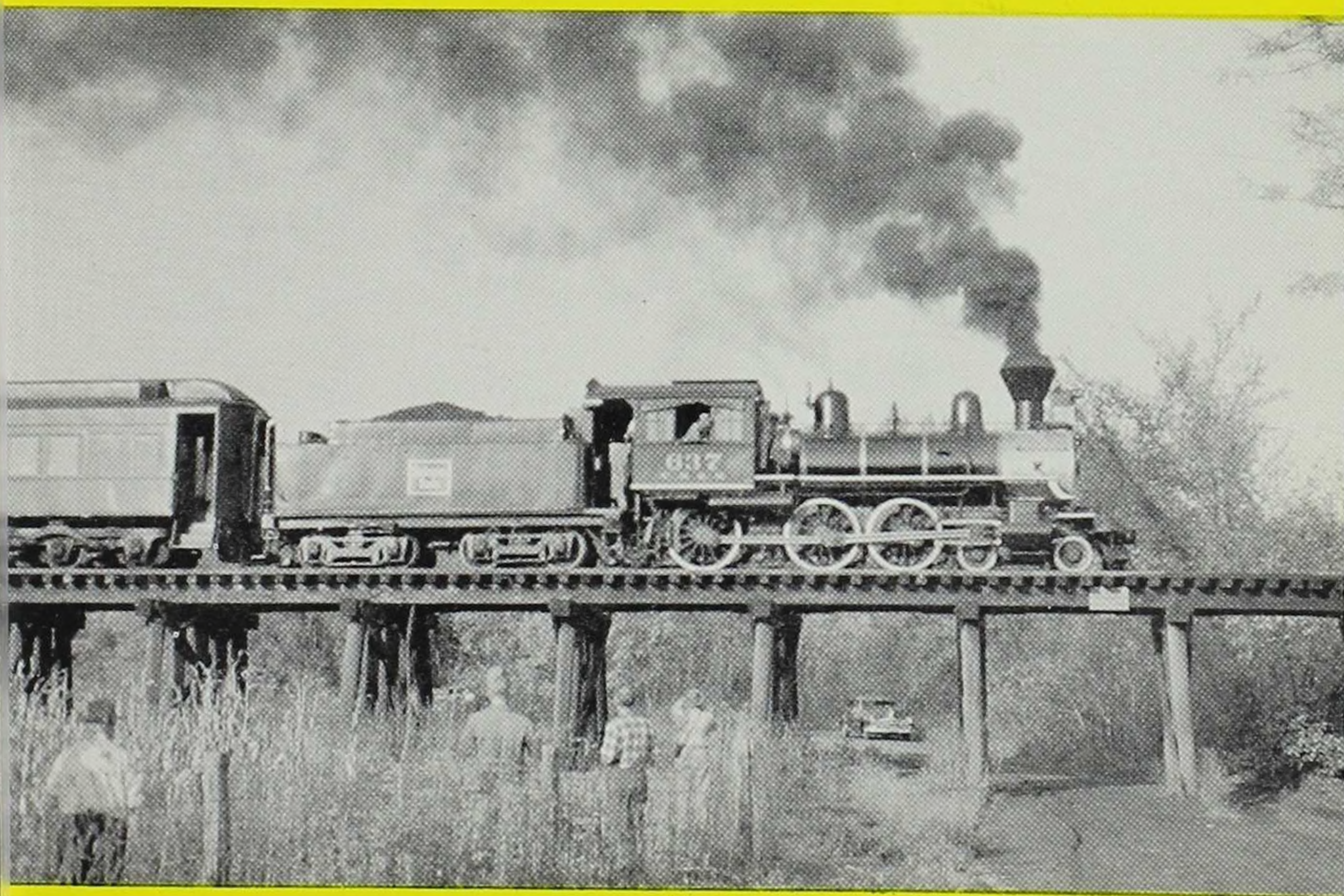


# *The* **PALIMPSEST**



Picture-stop near Indianola on the Burlington's "Fall Foliage Trip" in 1956.

Iowa Railway Historical Museum

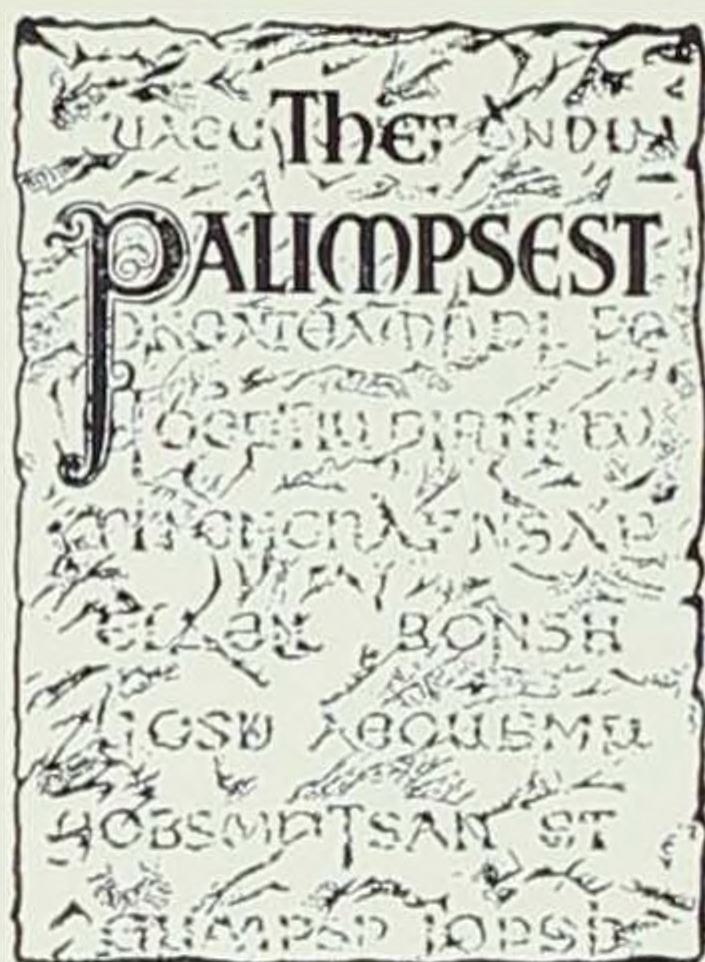
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Iowa City, Iowa

OCTOBER, 1959





## *The Meaning of Palimpsest*

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the record of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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FRANK P. DONOVAN, JR.

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## *Illustrations*

All illustrations were collected by the author. The front cover photo was furnished by Dr. Robert C. May, and the inside back cover by Richard M. Billings.

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Frank P. Donovan, Jr., is the author of *Mileposts on the Prairie* and has written articles on the Minneapolis & St. Louis, the Chicago Great Western, Interurbans in Iowa, the M & O, and Harry Bedwell—Railroad Raconteur, the latter appearing in previous issues of THE PALIMPSEST.

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# THE PALIMPSEST

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## In Quest of a Museum

During the 1950's one after another of Iowa's once-proud electric interurban lines was discontinuing passenger service and dieselizing its freight service. For a half century they had linked farm and town in many sections of the state; now a way of life was rapidly passing from the Iowa scene. Big inter-city trolleys had whistled through the countryside, had helped "drummers" cover their territory, had taken shoppers to market, and boys and girls to picnics, movies, or just for the ride. Electric locomotives had shunted cars of coal, grain, livestock, and natural ice. "Trolley freight" cars had hauled milk set out in ten-gallon cans on raised platforms at village crossroads or picked up express from the town depot.

The "interurban" was going, indeed was all but gone, when a group of historically-minded Iowans determined to act. They wanted to obtain a typical high-speed car which would in years to come be reminiscent of the electric railway in all its glory. This trolley must be a car that would



run, with a right-of-way on which to run it, and the track, trolley wire, and "overhead" to facilitate operation. How the interested parties met these needs is the story of the Iowa Railway Historical Museum.

The initiative for an operating railway museum came from the Iowa Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society. The NRHS had been organizing train and trolley trips, circulating a news sheet, and holding periodic meetings to stimulate interest in railroads. It had been particularly successful in sponsoring excursions on the 16-mile Southern Iowa Railway, operating between Centerville and Moravia. This electric line had a small passenger car on its roster, although the road had been operating for freight service only since 1933. The NRHS had been chartering its passenger car for "fan" trips at a nominal fee with considerable success. Furthermore, the road was not planning to dieselize, and it would still remain a trolley line in the foreseeable future. If a large old-fashioned interurban car could be procured there was no better place in Iowa on which to operate it.

Getting a car, however, proved to be the hardest task. Several de-electrifying interurban roads were contacted but a satisfactory price could not be agreed upon. Finally, the Waterloo Railroad, successor to the Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern, donated a large interurban car.



Membership in the Iowa Chapter of the NRHS is thinly scattered throughout the state and in adjacent states. Very few reside in any one community. Fortunately, several members in the vicinity of where the car was then located and where it was to go, did much of the work in preserving the vehicle. James S. Levis in Waterloo, with the help of Elmer R. Carr, of Ottumwa, took care of getting the trolley. Carr, in addition, made the necessary arrangements for the delivery of the vehicle to the Southern Iowa Railway, whose headquarters are in Centerville. A temporary "Governing Body" for the Chapter's interurban car was set up with Levis as chairman and Carr as secretary-treasurer. A. P. Wheelock, formerly president of the Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway, and Robert Levis also served as members of the body.

It was felt a separate organization should be formed to have custody of No. 100 and other equipment in what would be a permanent operating museum. To fulfill this need, the Iowa Railway Historical Museum was chartered in the state on March 22, 1958. Wilson B. Lemberger of Wever was appointed president, James S. Levis, vice-president, and Elmer R. Carr, secretary-treasurer. Late in 1958 Lemberger turned over the presidency to Levis and Richard M. Billings of Cedar Rapids became vice-president.

The Iowa Railway Historical Museum, Inc.,



is a non-profit organization which has its annual meeting in June, usually in the Continental Hotel in Centerville. As of 1959 it had seventy-six members scattered in fifteen states. Thanks to the friendly relationship with the Southern Iowa Railway, the Museum has in effect a 16-mile operating line on which to run its equipment. This happy situation came about through the interest of Edward L. Shutts, president of the railway, in the museum project. No less enthusiastic was Traffic Manager C. J. Poffenberger, General Superintendent L. W. Breeze, and all the personnel of the road.

The principal business of the Southern Iowa Railway is to transport coal mined in the territory it serves and to act as an intermediate carrier of freight received from or billed to other lines. It interchanges with the Burlington Lines at Centerville, the Milwaukee Road at Trask, and the Wabash Railroad at Moravia. The freight operation is such that the Museum can operate its car so that it is sandwiched between the running of the daily freight trains. There is no freight service on Sunday, thereby leaving the entire railway virtually to the pleasure of the railroad fans.

The No. 100 is currently stored on a spur track running through the car barn to the south side of the building. It is quite a feat to operate the trolley so it will clear the barn door and not overrun the spur, as the latter is just about the



length of the car. But qualified club members who usually maneuver the vehicle (always under the supervision of company personnel) have become as adept as the railway's veteran motormen. Ultimately it is anticipated the Museum will build its own car barn or use part of the present building which temporarily houses equipment of the Iowa Southern Utilities Company.

Since the railroad fans and historians have started informally sharing in the electric railway operation, the line has taken on a new look. Several times a year the Museum runs what may be called a "work extra," which is filled with hatchet-and-axe-carrying volunteers wearing old clothes. They chop down brush along the right-of-way, making the road look trim and well kept. This is not done so much for aesthetic reasons as to keep the brush and brambles from scraping the sides of the repainted No. 100. Museum members have erected signs at road crossings and repainted switch stands and depot names.

The Museum's big interurban car is now its sole equipment. But the organization plans to include other rolling stock from steam and electric lines. It is in the market for a standard, double-end street car to handle the overflow on the popular "rail fan" trips over the line. The Museum is also hunting for a caboose.

Luckily the Southern Iowa has kept No. 9, one of its suburban cars, in good condition. When a



large crowd shows up for summer trips the railway has graciously permitted the Museum to handle the overflow in its "standby" vehicle for a modest fee. The rail historians in turn have a standing rule that the Southern Iowa can use No. 100 whenever it desires, with the compliments of the Museum. This option was exercised in 1958, when the directors of the Iowa Southern Utilities Company made a trip over their line in it. Coffee and doughnuts were served on the inspection trip, reminiscent of the trolley a quarter century ago.

Not only has No. 100 been saved, but the sounds associated with its operation on the Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern have been preserved. Thanks to William A. Steventon, five recordings were made of its last run over the "Cedar Valley Road." As the disc revolves one hears the trolley's door slam, the traction motors whine, the quickening cadence of the wheels clicking over the rail-joints, and, finally, the hauntingly beautiful sound of the air horn. On the same phonograph record is the whistle and other sounds of Southern Iowa's No. 9, recorded by the Railroad Record Club of Hawkins, Wisconsin.

FRANK P. DONOVAN, JR.



## Car No. 100

Car No. 100 of the Iowa Railway Historical Museum epitomizes the grand old tradition of electric railroading. The big vehicle represents the high point in interurban development: in size, in decor, in speed. A 60-footer, it matched the standard steam railroad coach of its day in length. Its weight of 52 tons likewise was representative of trunk-line rolling stock. Its height, width, and general contour helped make it a glamor car of high-speed interurbans. Indeed, the well-built car was regarded as the queen of the Iowa electrics.

The trolley was strictly a de luxe product, slated to run in limited service at extra fare. As originally operated the car ran as a second unit of a two-car train. Classed as a buffet-parlor-observation unit, the all-steel, clerestory-roofed vehicle was built to match the luxury of the finest steam trains without the latter's dirt and cinders. With its quartersawed oak interior and Wilton carpets it was as far removed from the typical trolley as an old-fashioned day coach was from a Pullman.

A passenger had his choice of a restful lounge chair or a leather upholstered davenport. Ladies,



in particular, appreciated the large, plate glass mirrors which decorated the bulkheads. For the businessman and commercial traveler there was a writing desk, complete with stationery bearing company lettering.

And the meals. They were served from a tiny kitchenette by a uniformed attendant. An attractive menu card with the imprinted insignia of the "Cedar Valley Road," as the line was called, listed a variety of a la carte items. A typical bill of fare about 1915 featured braised beef a la jardiniere (50¢). But one could settle for a ham sandwich at 15¢. Several entrees were included, along with side dishes of pickles and olives. The vegetable consisted of green peas or asparagus (hot or cold), but curiously enough there was no Iowa corn listed. Iowa being a "dry" state, the road did not serve spirited beverages, yet it more than made up for this lack with nine kinds of soft drinks. The Grecian-sounding "lemonade, apollinaris, splits," was said to be a hot-weather favorite.

The No. 100 was one of three cars manufactured in 1915 by the McGuire-Cummings Company for the newly-completed Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern Railway. All three were identical and designed to operate on the 64-mile Cedar Rapids-Waterloo run. Most of the route was on private right-of-way with track and road-bed built to steam-road specifications. Geared to



exceed 60 m.p.h., they were among the fastest interurban units in the country. Due to their fleetness the WCF&N polled fifth place in running time (excluding stops) in a national speed survey covering electric railways.

Such was the heritage of old No. 100. That is why it is a prize possession of the Iowa Railway Historical Museum, a cynosure for railroad fans, and an item of interest to all historically-minded Iowans.

The "traction orange" vehicle was the last electric interurban passenger car to operate in regular service in Iowa. Incidentally, the Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern, on which it ran, was the last interurban line to be built in the state. In 1956, when the No. 100 was donated to the Museum, the road became the Waterloo Railroad, jointly owned by the Illinois Central and Rock Island railroads. Dieselization was in the offing and passenger service by interurban car ended in February, 1956. Being in good condition, the No. 100 was towed on its own wheels in a Milwaukee Road freight train from Cedar Rapids to Trask. At the latter point it ran under its own power on the rails of the Southern Iowa to its permanent home in Centerville.

Unfortunately, the No. 100 was a single-end car, whereas the Southern Iowa, on which it was to be operated, did not have a loop or wye at the end of its line for turning. Not to be daunted,



the new owners put the matter before the friendly little railroad company on whose property the car was to be housed. Short lines are resourceful, and the Southern Iowa is doubly so. It agreed to have its general superintendent, Lawrence W. Breeze, an ingenious electrical engineer, convert the museum-car to double-end control. With nothing to guide him but his own intuitive skill Mr. Breeze personally re-wired the car so it could be operated from either end. In addition, Jim Levis and his son, Bob, spent nearly a week in Centerville installing brake equipment for double-end control.

To get the full significance of this operating museum on an operating railway one should ride on a weekend excursion. Let us go on the popular "fall foliage excursion," as run in October, 1958. On the day of the trip fifty-five railroad fans and historians converge in Centerville from all over Iowa and neighboring states. They come by automobile, bus, and train. They are of all ages, the men predominating in number. In several instances wives and children go along. But the most noticeable feature is the prevalence of cameras.

No. 100 is spotted a block from the "square," and long before its departure the fans and visitors have congregated. Outside the freshly-painted trolley, passengers are buying tickets, signing waivers, and taking pictures. At the appointed



time the whistle is blown for late-comers, and the car leaves for Moravia. James Levis is at the controls with Elmer Carr as conductor. Both of these Museum officials have trainmen's caps and take their responsibilities seriously. Also up in the motorman's cab is Master Mechanic Harley Ashby, while back in the aisle is Charles Poffenberger, the traffic manager. Operation is at all times closely supervised by one or more of the railroad officials or platform men.

A stop is made at the car house, where camera fans disembark to take photographs of the Southern Iowa's rolling stock. The historically-minded gaze at the nineteenth century, single-truck line car, while others "snap" the relatively modern Baldwin-Westinghouse steeple-cab electric locomotive. Going along West Madison street calls for more picture-taking. Here the No. 100 rumbles down the center of the tree-lined street creating a nostalgic scene of rural interurban railroading at its best.

Presently the car veers onto the private right-of-way going down a toboggan-like dip through woods. Then climbing a steep grade toward the junction, it is switched to the north. Now the car is on the roadbed of the old steam route which formerly extended beyond Moravia to Albia. Built in 1880, it was not electrified until 1914. A few miles north of the junction Levis applies the air brakes, and the trolley stops for no apparent



reason. Then, taking the controller-handle, he walks to the other end of the car and prepares to run the vehicle in the other direction. Meanwhile willing hands pull down one trolley pole and raise the other. Why? The party is to go up a spur to Mine No. 4, worked by the Sunshine Coal Company. It is said to be the largest shaft mine in Iowa. From its tipples comes the coal which accounts for the largest share of the electric line's revenue and its main reason for existence.

Returning to the main line, the car makes a photo stop on the deck-and-truss bridge spanning the Chariton River. Leaving the river bottoms, the No. 100 speeds by Trask and travels through flat farmland. Pine trees line the right-of-way, and quail scamper in the underbrush. With windows open wide passengers get a close-to-nature exhilaration on the novel outing. At Moravia the trolleyists swarm out of the car to inspect the station and look over the town.

Meanwhile, the volunteer crewmen switch poles, marker lights and white flags (signifying an extra train) for the return trip. Notwithstanding the holiday spirit, the men who operate the car are all business. Safety is their first requisite. Others may refresh themselves with the plentiful supply of soft drinks stowed in the baggage compartment. But the temporary trainmen tend strictly to the job at hand.

The run back to Centerville is varied in that



it includes a jog down the Belt Line to the Burlington interchange and freight yard. The "Belt" starts at the junction, branching to the southwest and circling around the western city limits. Also at the junction one sees about a thousand feet of the partly abandoned branch which once served a large coal tipple at Appanoose and then continued on to Mystic. It had trackage to both the Midway Mine and Sunshine Mine No. 3.

Going down the Belt the operator stops the car at State Highway 2. Here the conductor gets out and flags the well-filled trolley across the busy thoroughfare while gaping motorists look on. In a few minutes the ponderous 100 sways over the yard tracks which connect the Burlington with the electric line. Nearby is a large brick yard, a source of revenue for both railroads. After seeing the industrial area, the party goes back to downtown Centerville, end of the ride.

The fifty-five trolley tourists have been on the longest railway operating Museum in America.

FRANK P. DONOVAN, JR.



## Iowa Chapter National Railway Historical Society

During the summer of 1952 a young lad in Spencer was busy writing his friends to stir up interest in forming an Iowa railroad club. Donald S. Hofsommer collected railroad material, took photos of rail scenes, and was never happier than when riding on a train or trolley. He thought there were others in the state with a similar interest. But how was he to know who they were? He broached the matter to Ralph L. Cooper, vice-president, Central Region, of the National Railway Historical Society. Although Cooper lived in Kansas City, he was aware of several railroad historians and "fans" in Iowa. With Cooper's help Don Hofsommer zealously set out to get six NRHS members in the state, the minimum number required to start a chapter.

On December 17, 1952, he proudly posted a mimeographed memorandum stating he had the required number. At the same time he asked for suggestions concerning the place and time of meeting so as to launch an Iowa Chapter. No two charter members came from the same community. Eastern Iowa was represented by James J. Kreuzberger of Dubuque, and J. P. Vander



Maas of Muscatine. Hofsommer, coming from Spencer, was considered "a northwestern member." The remainder of the sextet, namely Basil W. Koob, Guyon C. Whitley, and George Niles, Jr., were from Fort Dodge, Ames, and Des Moines. They spoke for central Iowa.

Of several nation-wide railroad historical organizations, Hofsommer and others believed the NRHS was the best suited to Iowa. For one thing, Iowa's members were scattered throughout the state. The NRHS was very active in promoting trips, and it was apparent these excursions would bring far-flung members together as nothing else could. Apart from this, the National Railway Historical Society, Inc., whose headquarters are in Baltimore, Maryland, was one of the largest organizations of its kind.

While plans were being made for the first meeting, the enterprising Hofsommer started a mimeographed sheet called *The Switch Lamp*. Published "at odd intervals exclusively for Iowa members," it did much to keep the historically-minded abreast of Iowa's railroad developments. At the same time, the paper focused attention on the need for an Iowa Chapter. The initial issue of January 15, 1953, pleaded for an early meeting but not before "mid-March or April," due to the condition of the highways in the event of snow or sleet. It was further suggested that the place of meeting be either Des Moines or Waterloo.

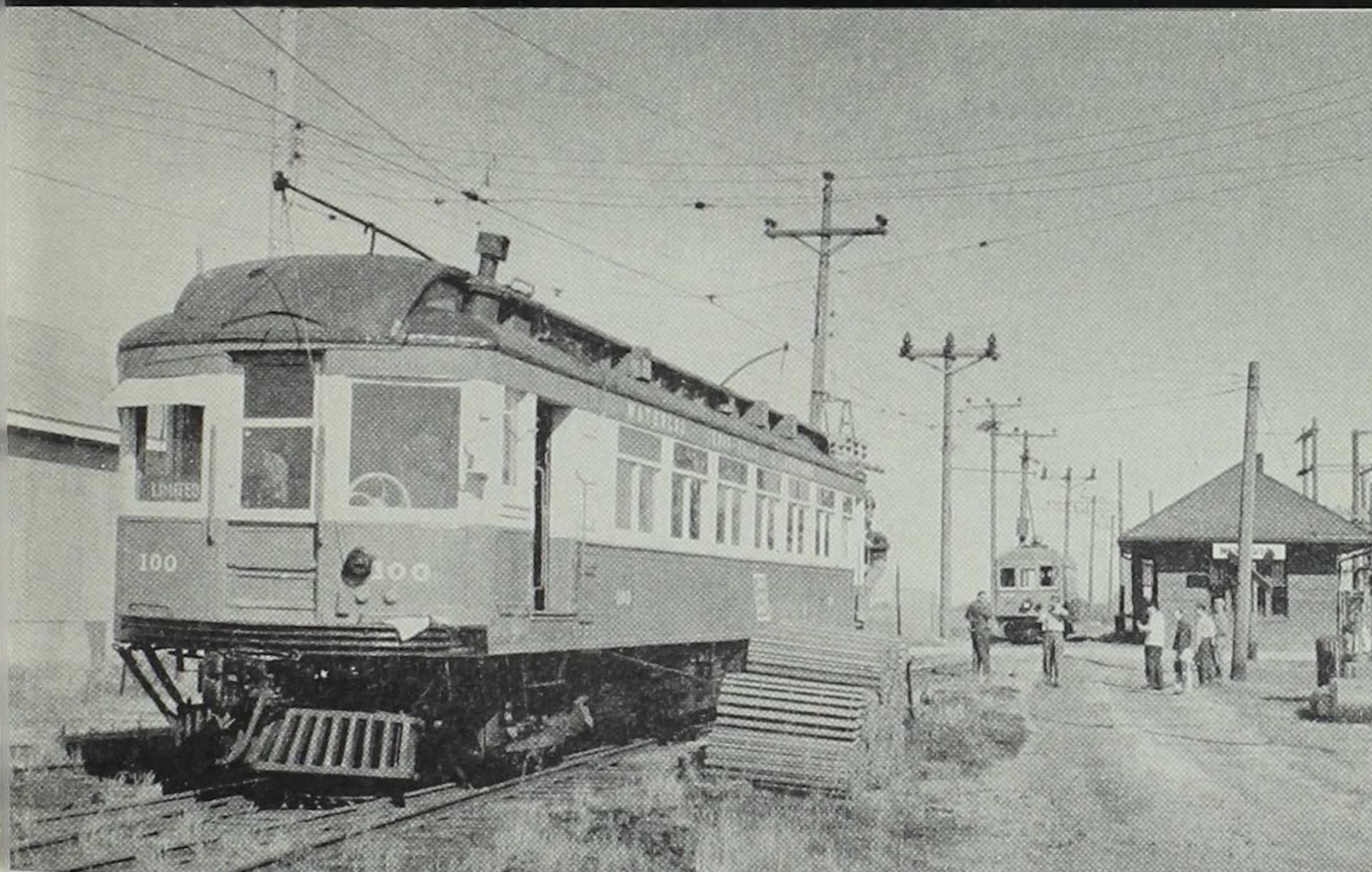


To appease the Capital advocates and those of Waterloo — Marshalltown, a half-way point between the two was selected. At any rate, "ten members and two visitors" met on March 28, 1953, in Hotel Tallcorn to launch the new chapter. According to the by-laws, they needed a president, vice-president, secretary-treasurer, and a director. The group elected George Niles, Jr., Edward H. Meyers of Boone, Thomas A. Gane of Des Moines, and Wilson B. Lemberger of Wever to these respective posts. Don Hofsommer was to continue editing *The Switch Lamp*, which was now enlarged and published monthly. Ralph Cooper presided over the meeting. After a dinner and a business session the historians and hobbyists toured the Minneapolis & St. Louis car and diesel shops in Marshalltown.

Once having been organized, the Iowa Chapter grew rapidly. By midsummer it had obtained twenty-three members, and by the end of 1953 had grown to forty-six. Late that year there was a change of officers. Meyers became president, James Kreuzberger, vice-president, and Dr. Robert B. May of Knoxville was elected secretary-treasurer. About the same time C. J. Lehnhardt of Dubuque took over the editorship of *The Switch Lamp*.

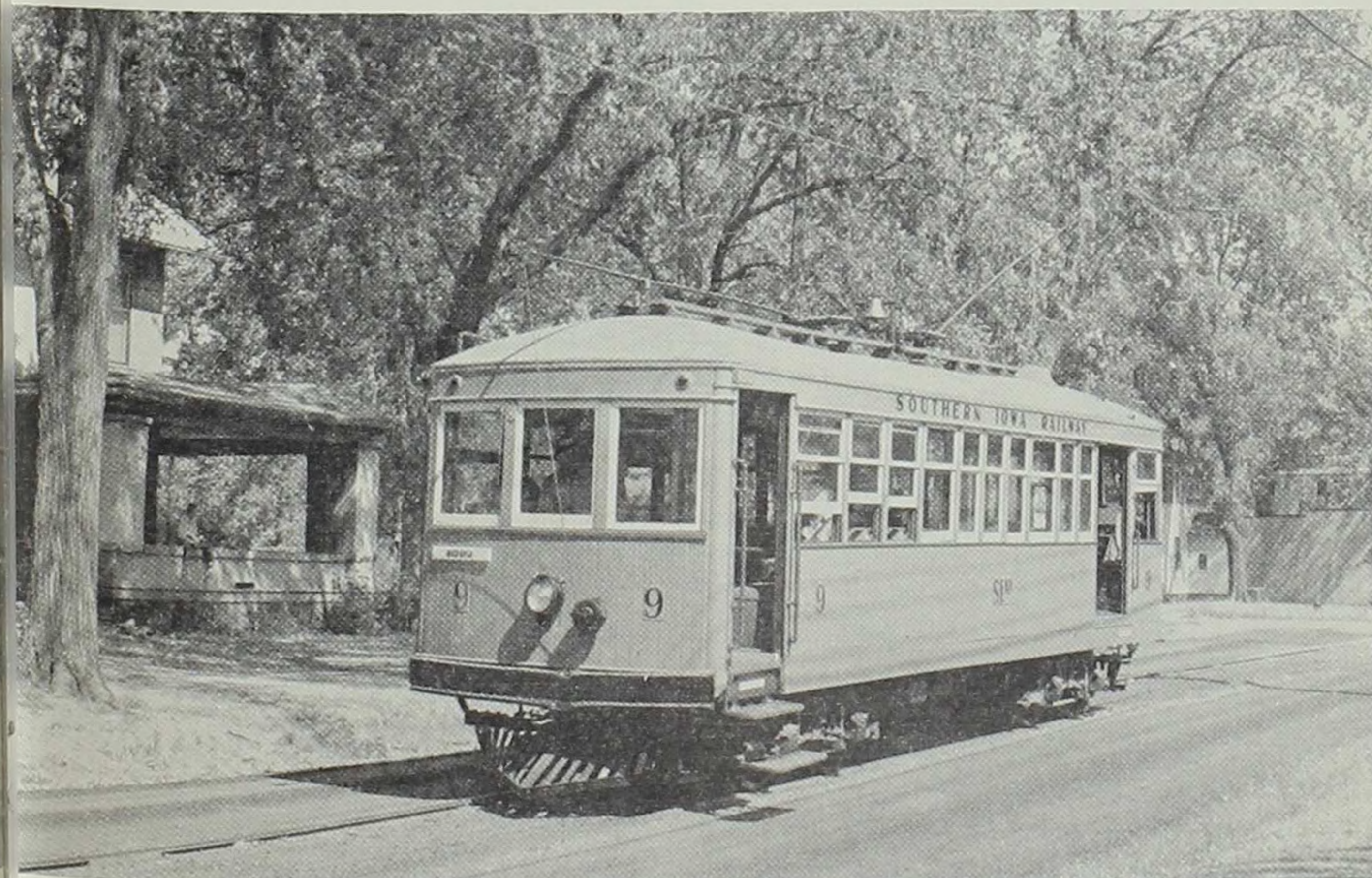
Dr. May chuckled in recalling how he was practically conscripted to hold office. He explained that it was not so much that they wanted





*Wilson B. Lemberger*

Iowa Railway Historical Museum's No. 100 on fan trip at Moravia, fall of 1958. Southern Iowa Railway car No. 9 in background.



*Wilson B. Lemberger*

No. 9 as repainted by NRHS members for use on special trips. Trolley is pictured on Centerville's tree-lined West Madison Street.



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## Menu

### MENU

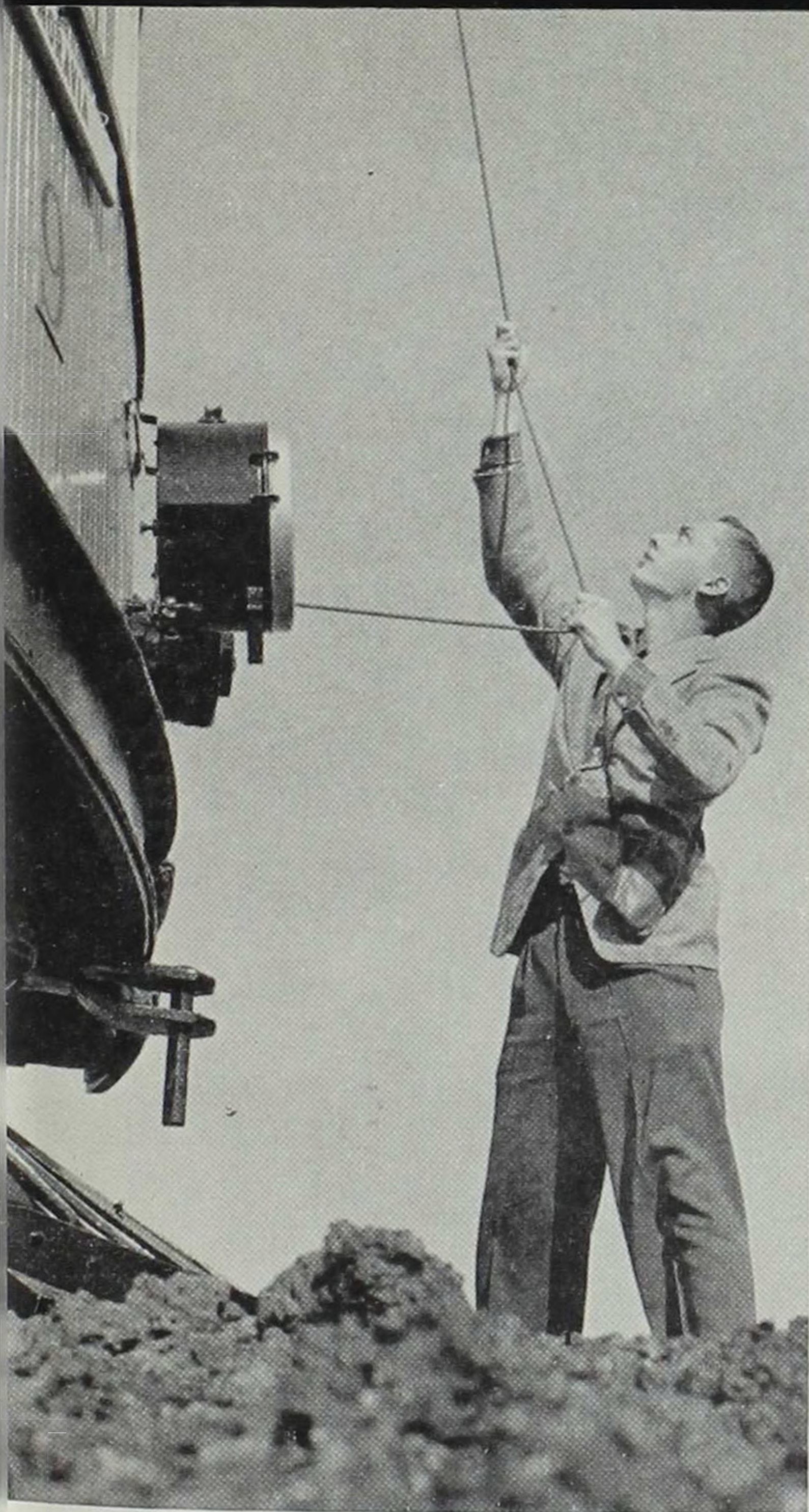
ORANGE (1) 10; SLICED ORANGE (1) 15	
POST TOASTIES WITH CREAM, 25	
GRAPE-NUTS WITH CREAM, 25	
CHICKEN SOUP, 25	
CLAM CHOWDER, 25	
PICKLES, 15	OLIVES, 20
CORNED BEEF HASH, 40	
BAKED BEANS (HOT OR COLD) 25	
BRAISED BEEF A LA JARDINIERE 50	
BOILED EGGS (2) 25	
SARDINES (IMPORTED) 35	
COLD BOILED HAM, 40	
SMOKED TONGUE, 40	
HAM SANDWICH, 15	TONGUE SANDWICH, 15
GREEN PEAS, 20	
ASPARAGUS (HOT OR COLD) 35	
BREAD WITH BUTTER, 10	
BROWN BREAD (HOT OR COLD) WITH BUTTER, 15	
NABISCO WAFERS, 15	
PRESERVED FIGS WITH CREAM, 25	
PEACHES OR CHERRIES, 25	
CHEESE WITH CRACKERS OR BREAD	
IMPERIAL, 25	ROQUEFORT, 25
COFFEE, 10	TEA, POT, 15
	COCOA, 15
	MILK, 10

### TO DRINK AND SMOKE

WHITE ROCK, SPLITS, 15
APOLLINARIS, SPLITS, 15
CLYSMIC, SPLITS, 15
IMPORTED GINGER ALE, 25
IMPORTED SASSAPARILLA, 25
LEMONADE, APOLLINARIS, SPLITS, 25
LEMONADE, PLAIN, 15
SPARKLING APENTA WATER, SPLITS, 15
RED RAVEN SPLITS, 15
CIGARS
10 — 15 — 25
PLAYING CARDS — 25

Menu used about 1915 on car No. 100 when it featured dining service. The vehicle provided de luxe accommodations on the Waterloo-Cedar Rapids line of the Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern Railway.





*Edward H. Meyers*

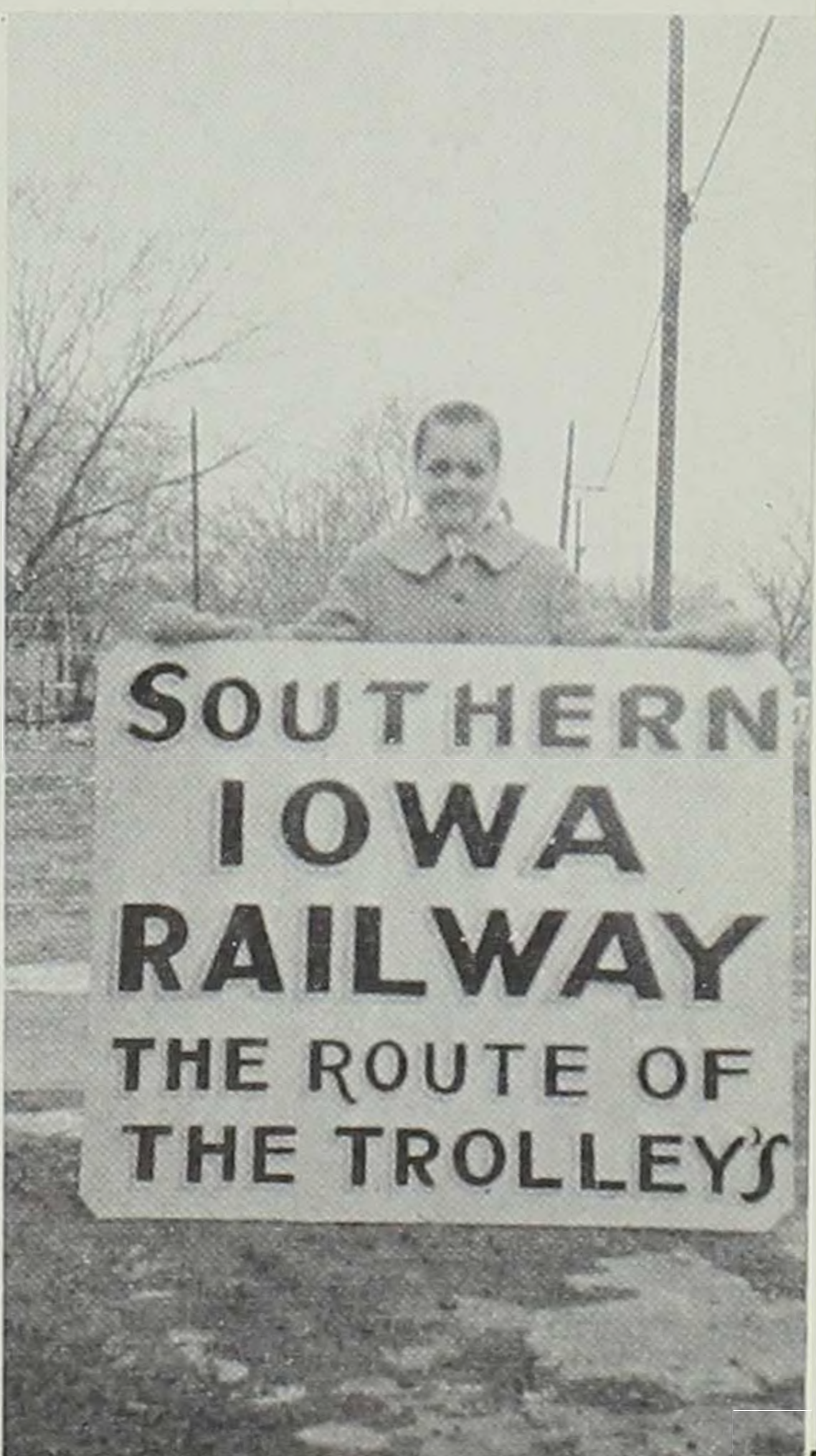
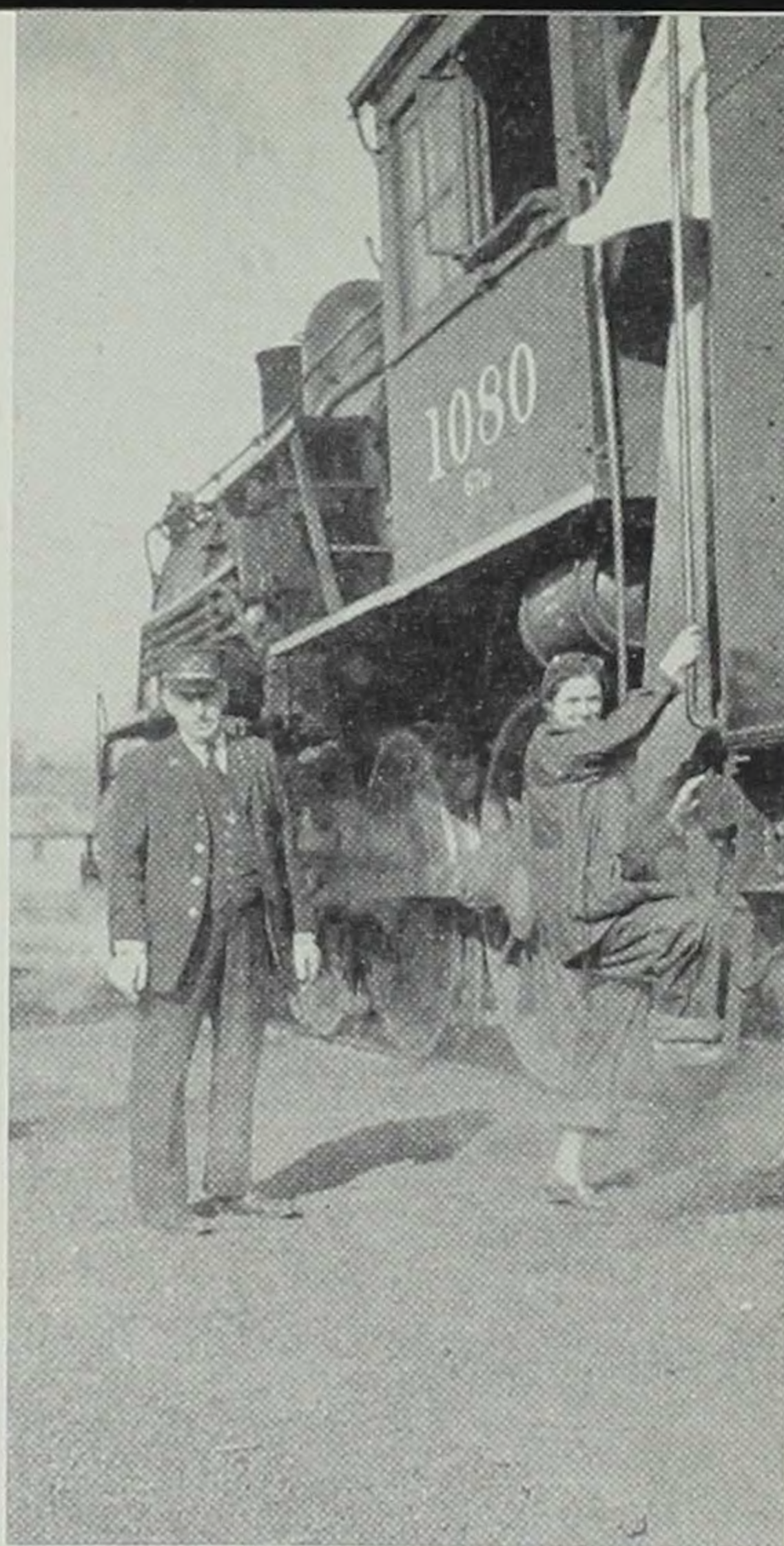
Putting the trolley back on the wire. Dick Billings performs this once-familiar operation, formerly seen on a thousand electric lines in the United States.

*Upper right* — NRHS member, Mrs. Floyd Parker, donned overalls to ride cab on Milwaukee Road trip at Strawberry Point, November, 1953.

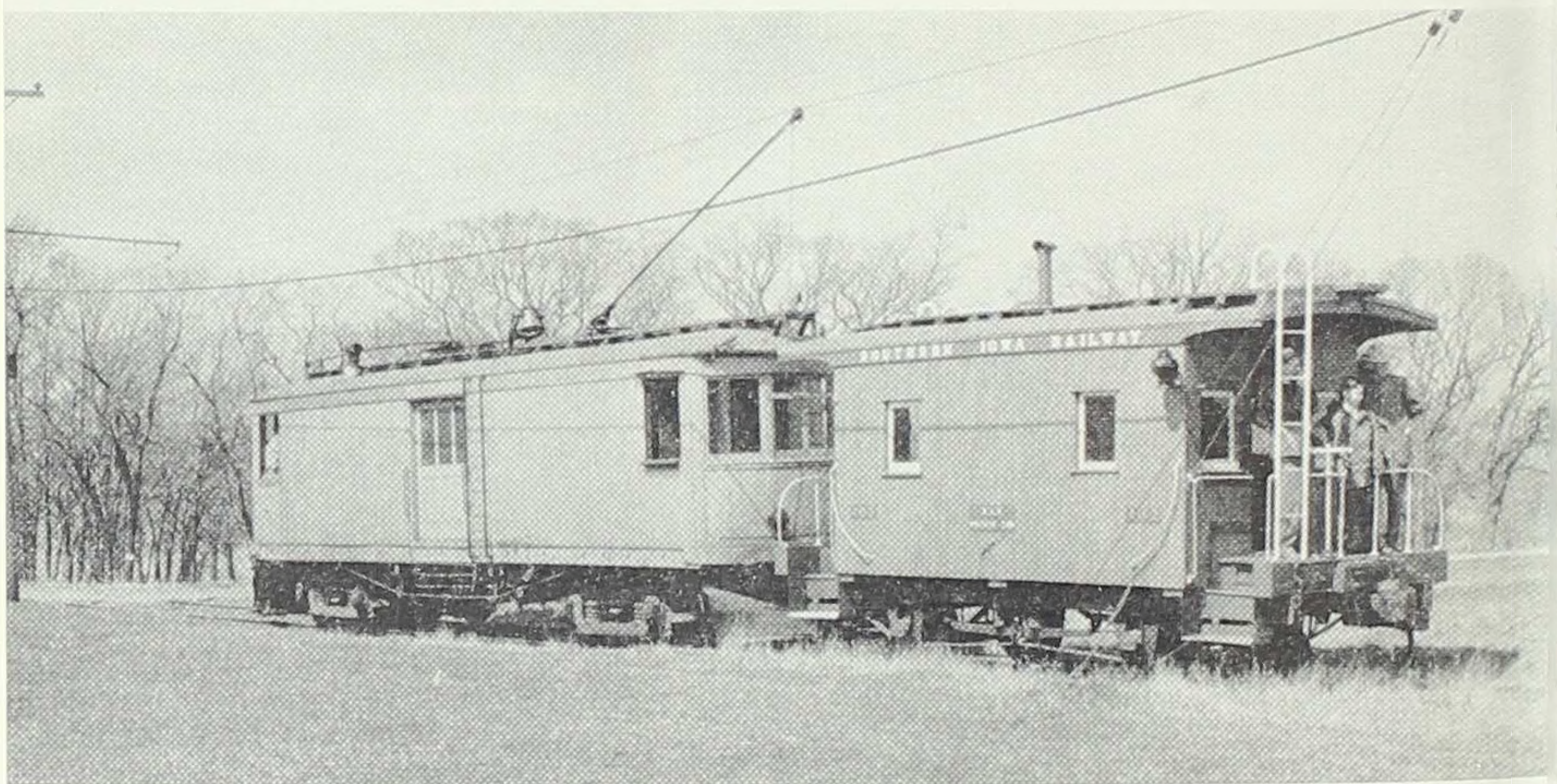
*James J. Kreuzberger*

*Lower right* — Eleven-year-old "railfan" Cathline Reck poses behind new sign for Centerville. Photo taken in Ottumwa.

*Elmer R. Carr*

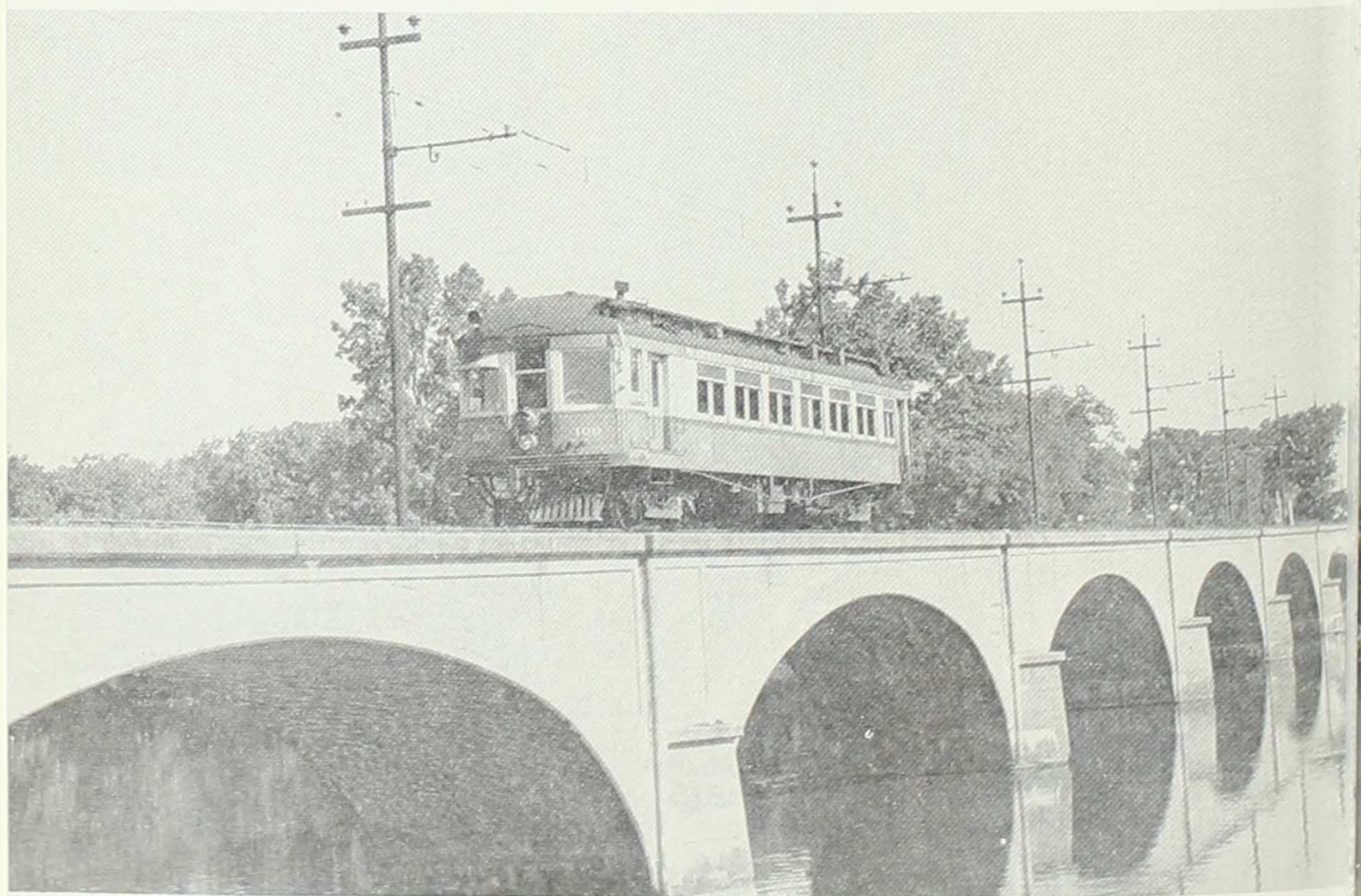






*Wilson B. Lemberger*

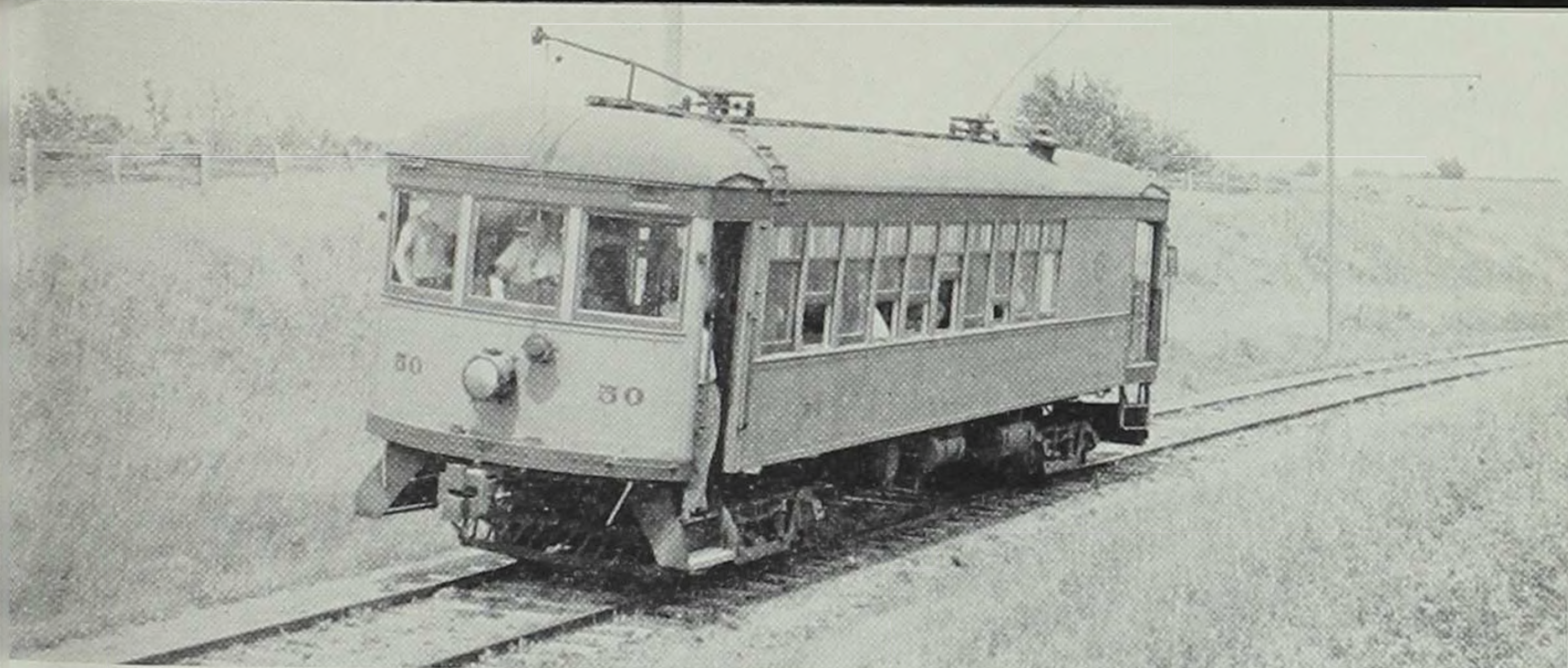
"Caboose hop" near Centerville featuring Southern Iowa Railway fan trip, April, 1958.



*Richard M. Billings*

No. 100 on Elk Run Bridge south of Waterloo in June, 1956, on the last "fan-trip" over the Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern. Car was donated to the Iowa Railway Historical Museum by the electric line.





*Top*—Lace-curtained interurban car on Charles City Western excursion, June, 1955.

*Richard M. Billings*



*Middle*—NRHS special at Hope Junction on the Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern Railway, July, 1953.

*Wilson B. Lemberger*

*Bottom*—M&StL rail-motor-car at Mason City used on "Iowa Circle Tour" over that line and the Illinois Central, March, 1954.

*Wilson B. Lemberger*







*Wilson B. Lemberger*

Crowd greeting special at Eldora in June, 1955. This Tama-Alden trip sponsored by the NRHS with the State Historical Society of Iowa cooperating, was over the Chicago & North Western. It was under the direction of Basil W. Koob.

"Railfan" special on Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern at milepost 25.8 in July, 1954. Many Iowa Chapter, NRHS officials are shown.

*James J. Kreuzberger*





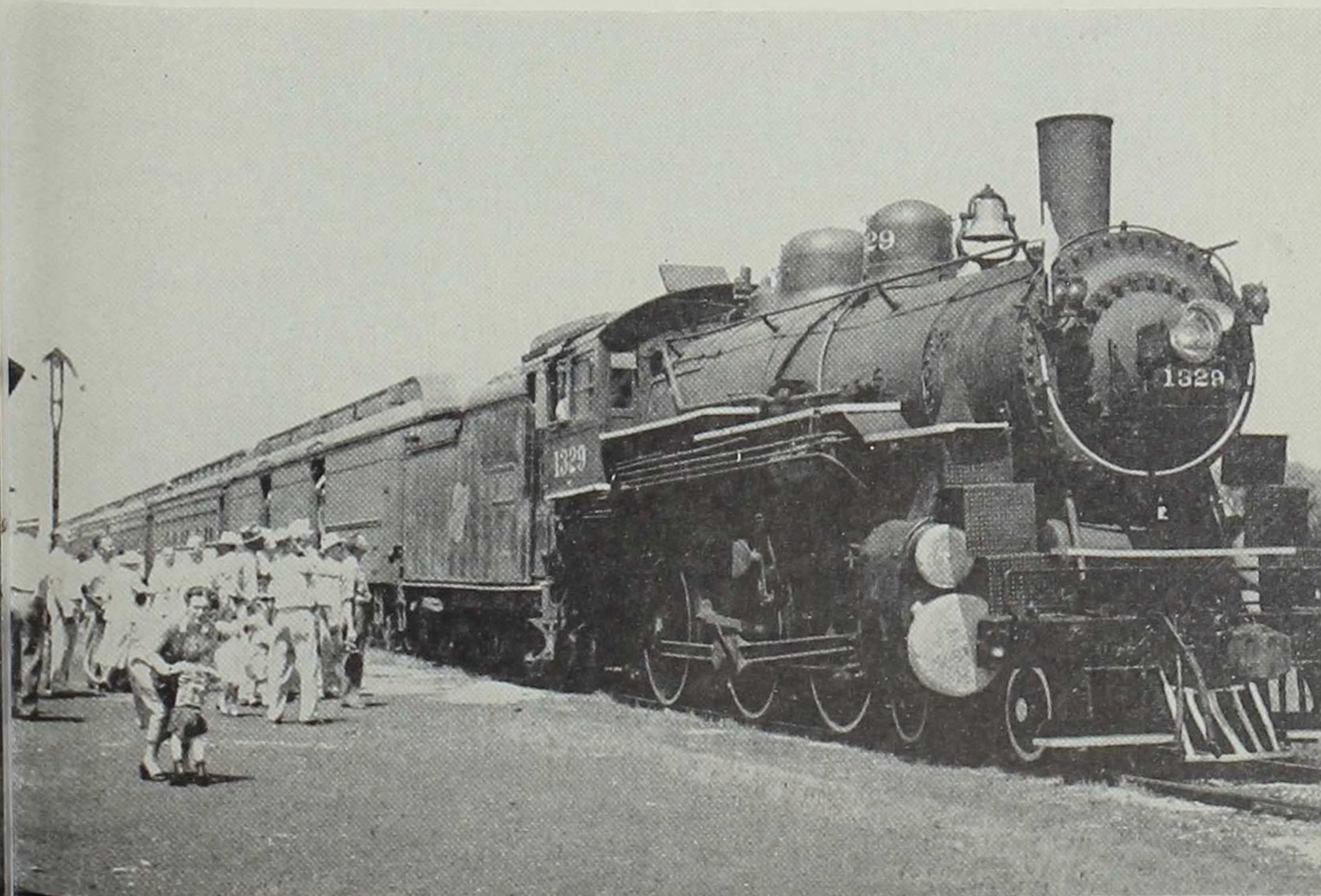


*Wilson B. Lemberger*

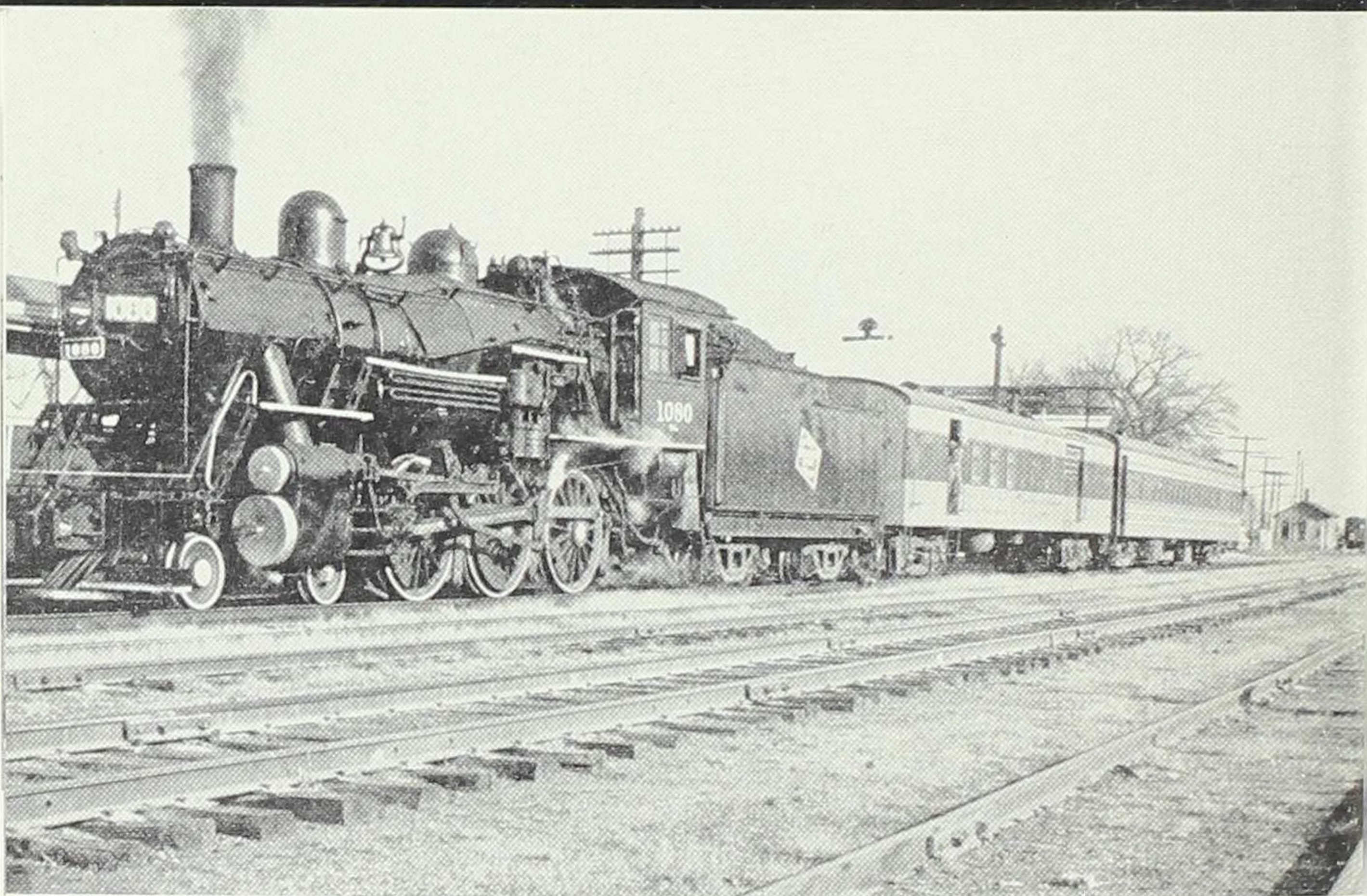
The Fort Dodge Line's NRHS special crossing High Bridge north of Boone, July, 1953.

NRHS excursion of June 27, 1954, at Hubbard. About 200 people were on this C&NW train ride, from Webster City to Alden, in charge of Dr. Robert B. May.

*Basil W. Koob*





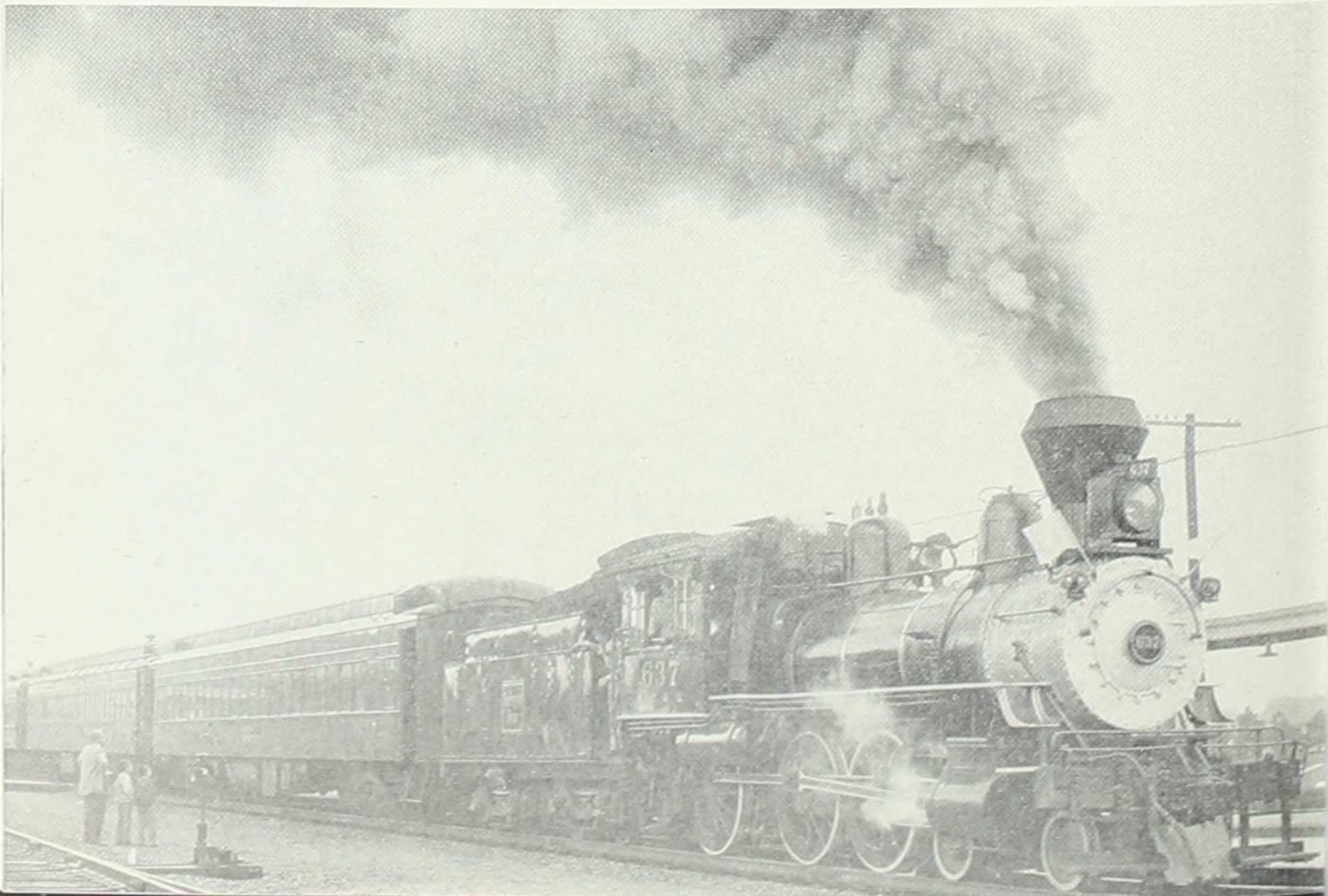


*Richard M. Billings*

Shown at Calmar is the Milwaukee Road train on NRHS trip November 7, 1953. The white trim on wheels and cylinders was painted by "fans" to accentuate the lines of the engine for photographers.

Historic diamond-stacked, Ten-Wheeler at Ottumwa ready to leave for Indianola. The trip was jointly sponsored by the State Historical Society of Iowa and the National Railway Historical Society over the Burlington in October, 1956.

*Elmer R. Carr*





him, but they knew he had a secretary, Kathryn Nichols, and her services would be very valuable to the Chapter. Mrs. Nichols did fine work, too, although she almost quit when she had to learn how to spell Kreuzberger, Lehnhardt, Lemberger, and Vander Maas, all in one day. As for Dr. May, he gave the Chapter direction, stability, and unity — to say nothing of long hours of arduous work.

To offset organizational problems posed by scattered membership, small groups met informally. They went on short train trips, trolley rides, or just to visit yards or terminals. But the lodestone of Iowa members was the well-planned excursion, generally open to the public. Frequently a Chapter meeting would coincide with a trip, and both would be held on the same weekend.

One such meeting will be long remembered. It was the get-together of the Iowa, Kansas City, and Topeka chapters of the NRHS in Boone, July 25, 1953. Arthur P. Wheelock, president of the Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern, invited the group to meet in his business car. The car was spotted in back of the Boone interurban station especially for the "convention." Under normal circumstances this would have made an admirable place for a meeting. But with three chapters convening, the plan had to be given up, for the car was much too small. Mr. Wheelock had his guests move into the railroad's general offices



nearby. Here the room was ample — and the heat intolerable.

Once again Wheelock came to the rescue. He instructed the shopmen to round up all the chairs they could find and put them on one side of the main-line tracks. They put a screen on the opposite side of the tracks for showing slides and motion pictures. The group then continued its program out in the open under the stars. Near midnight President Wheelock reluctantly brought the meeting to a close. He told the members they were virtually tying up his railroad!

With a wave of his hand he pointed to the bright rays of a headlight, not 200 feet away. It was the night freight from Des Moines groaning to a halt. How the motorman of the evening "hot-shot" had "sneaked up" without anyone's hearing the traction motors or observing the beam of light was a mystery to all.

In 1954 differences in policy led to a new slate of officers. Dr. May, nevertheless, continued in his post, whereas the presidency was turned over to Edward P. Wilkommen of Davenport, and the role of vice-president to H. E. Reisner of Webster City. Basil W. Koob, one of the charter members, took on the job of editing *The Switch Lamp*.

The policy of vigorous solicitation for members was continued, along with emphasis on numerous excursions. The chapter kept growing, and in December, 1955, it had seventy-eight members.



About one-third of the members came from outside Iowa. They were recruited largely from passengers on widely-publicized fan trips.

In almost every instance the officers of the Chapter worked diligently to keep the organization running smoothly and to promote weekend trips. Yet the very nature of the Iowa Chapter presaged frequent turnover in management. The majority of members came from the smaller cities and represented their communities singly. During the earlier years there were, curiously enough, no members from Council Bluffs or Sioux City and only two from Des Moines. As a result of this diffusion, officers had to drive sometimes up to 300 miles in order to attend a meeting or ride a chartered train. This meant long and uncertain hours, many of which were on the road. It is little wonder new names were frequently seen on the Chapter letterheads.

It is literally true that officers were "railroaded" in or out of their positions. To get a quorum, business meetings were often held on a train or trolley or in stations wherever a trip was scheduled. This was about the only time a majority was present, and it called for a meeting on the spot. During the next two years the procession of officers continued. Nineteen fifty-five saw the veteran trip-planner Wilson B. Lemberger, president, with Wilfred E. Tlusty of Cedar Rapids, vice-president, and Edward P. Wilkommen



changing over to the post of secretary-treasurer. The following year Fritz Britt of Renwick filled the top office, Basil Koob served as vice-president, and Elmer R. Carr of Ottumwa held the busy post of secretary-treasurer.

James S. Levis of Waterloo, was elected president in 1957. Koob and Carr held their same positions. Koob later resigned from the vice-presidency, and his place was filled by Richard M. Billings of Cedar Rapids. As of midsummer, 1959, the above men held office.

Under the editorship of Basil Koob, *The Switch Lamp* very adequately covered the Iowa railroad scene. Indeed, the periodical gives a graphic picture of the changes in Hawkeye transportation. The disappearance of the steam locomotive and of the trolley, the virtual elimination of the branch line passenger local along with the closing of many small depots, is recorded. Being a retired telegrapher and having worked at many country stations in Iowa for the Milwaukee Road, Chicago & North Western, and Minneapolis & St. Louis, Koob writes as an experienced railroader. At the same time he has the zeal of a "fan" and the painstaking research methods of a historian.

When Koob retired from his two-year service as editor early in 1956, the editorship was briefly filled by Richard Billings. Due to the latter's being called into the armed forces, Edward Meyers then very creditably filled the position.



In June, 1958, James C. McMeekin of Wheatland took over the work as editor. He printed the organ in offset in an illustrated magazine-style format. The enlarged publication was titled *Midland Railfans News — The Switch Lamp*. This arrangement proved too costly, and the periodical returned to its former style in May, 1959. Koob again became editor.

At this point one may ask: What makes a railroad historian or a "railfan?" The answer, of course, is a love of railroads. Apart from that, further generalizations seem futile. Take the matter of vocation. Fritz Britt is a banker; Elmer Carris, captain of a fire department; Donald Hof-sommer is a college student; James Kreuzberger is an auto supply buyer; Wilson Lemberger operates his own lumber yard; James Levis is a tractor-plant employee; Dr. Robert May is a psychiatrist; Edward Meyers is a postman; George Niles is owner-manager of a toy store; Wilfred Thusty is a metalworker; Elmer Reisner manages a municipal power plant; and Edward Willkommen is a mining engineer, who is now in Venezuela. Aside from their interest in railroading, the only thing they have in common is that they are all of widely *different* callings.

Like all historical societies the Iowa Chapter has had differences of opinion. One of the most controversial issues is the relationship between the parent organization and the Chapter. Some mem-



bers believe a separate local society should be formed; others are of the opinion that affiliation with the parent society adds prestige and stability.

The wonder is that such a scattered chapter can hold together at all. Most chapters of railroad historical organizations are centered in population centers such as New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, or in smaller cities like Minneapolis or Kansas City. But in Iowa the situation is just the reverse. The major Hawkeye cities scarcely account for any members, whereas the smaller widely-scattered communities provide the backbone of the Chapter. Finally, those who know the Iowa group are unanimous in their appraisal: they are among the friendliest, most wholesome and dedicated railroad historians and "fans" to be found anywhere. Perhaps that is the answer.

FRANK P. DONOVAN, JR.



## NRHS Activities in Iowa

Aside from issuing a monthly periodical, the Iowa Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society sponsors trips. These excursions have covered many out-of-the-way places in Iowa. They have opened to the public, if only for a day, branches and short lines which have not seen passenger service for years. They have brought visitors from all over the nation to see Iowa and her railroads.

From 1953 to 1958 the Chapter sponsored forty trips. Some were conducted on a charter basis, others made use of regular trains. A few have been on mixed trains, and one or two featured caboose operation. Their participants have ranged in number from a scant dozen to 500. Their friendly informality has drawn "outsiders," who have come for the ride with no particular interest in railroading. Often visitors are amused by leisurely schedules, frequent halting for picture stops, and use of equipment something less than modern. But they soon learn this is characteristic of railroad fans. When long stops are made to inspect roundhouses and terminals, they read their copy of *Life* or the *Post*.

The first trip in July, 1953, brought a turnout



of 140, representing fourteen states, including New York and California. They came to ride the Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern, one of the last of about a dozen interurban lines still operating in the United States. For a day Boone became a mecca for traction lovers. At 9 a.m. a special three-car electric train left town to cover most of the railroad. Hardly had the special got under way when it stopped so that delighted fans could photograph it crossing the high bridge north of Boone. And so it went all the way to Fort Dodge. Then the excursionists were taken to Webster City, which had not seen riders on the line since passenger service was discontinued in 1921. The day was hot, but with windows open and soft drinks provided gratuitously by the trolley line everyone had a good time.

Doubling back from Webster City, the special went to Evanston Junction, where it was shunted south to Lehigh. Here passengers were given a miniature drainage pipe manufactured in the nearby kilns. On the return run the party made a side trip to Rockwell City. The Milwaukee Road had obligingly taken a small steam engine out of its roundhouse there so it could be photographed. The old locomotive and a stub switch at Gowrie proved to be the major attractions and accounted for many a roll of exposed black-and-white, color, movie, and still film.

The train arrived in Boone three hours behind



schedule, but nobody cared. How could they? They were the ones who made it late. Among the visitors was Rogers E. M. Whitaker, an editor of *The New Yorker* and dean of American railroad fans. He has ridden every mile of line having passenger service and came that day to "pick up more mileage which could not otherwise be covered." Another rider was A. J. Olmsted of Arlington, Virginia, a retired associate curator of the Smithsonian Institution. He recounted how his father, a North Western fireman, had met his death when a pilot engine fell through the flood-weakened Honey Creek bridge near Boone in 1881. This was the time the celebrated Kate Shelley crawled along the storm-swept right-of-way and saved a following passenger train.

For scenery and comfort the outing on the Milwaukee's Cedar Rapids-Calmar train in November, 1953, had much to commend it. The railroad added one of its luxurious Hiawatha-type, air-conditioned coaches that day. The run in Fayette and Winneshiek counties is among the prettiest in Iowa and ideal for picture-taking. As an added attraction, the crewmen permitted hobbyists to ride in the engine-cab, two at a time. Fortunately, a couple of overalls were brought along, and the fans took turns in wearing them. Although the jumpers were several sizes too large, Mrs. Floyd Parker, an avid Newton fan, did not miss out on this feature of the trip.



In 1954 the most successful trip was the Webster City-Alden run over the North Western. It had all the requisites for the fans: steam operation, an itinerary covering two branch lines, plus a "branch on a branch," and antiquated, turn-of-the-century equipment. The result was a sell-out.

About two hundred were on the June excursion, which started at Webster City, on the road's north-and-south line running through the center of Iowa to Des Moines. The special went south to Jewell; thence east on the Wall Lake-Tama branch to Eldora Junction. From the Junction the train wended its way over the little-used route to Alden. West of Iowa Falls the light, 54-pound rails followed the scenic Iowa River. The special included a baggage car (for refreshments and lunch concessionaire), four superannuated ex-Chicago commuter cars, and one air-conditioned coach. The railroad decorated the baggage car with historic pictures of the Iowa Division and blueprints of the original line as proposed in 1880. To heighten this period-picture, an old Stanley Steamer met the train at Owasa station.

The air-conditioned car was for those who liked their history in comfort rather than in vintage rolling stock. It was also used by the railroad men to whom the run was just a day's work. But the air-conditioning broke down in the "luxury coach," and its occupants sweltered in the air-tight vehicle. Those in the outmoded cars, on



the other hand, enjoyed a refreshing breeze through open windows.

The banner year for excursions, however, was 1955. That period marked eleven successful trips. It also witnessed the biggest turnout in the Chapter's history. This all-time high came about through another North Western special. It featured the run from Tama to Eldora Junction, thence a repeat of the 27-mile branch to Alden. The outing had all the characteristics of an old-fashioned train ride at the time an automobile was a novelty.

The "Big Steam Passenger Excursion" sponsored by the Iowa Chapter, NRHS, with the collaboration of the State Historical Society of Iowa, had eight cars; and all were packed. The train stopped at every station so local riders could be picked up along the route. As the handbill described the rail ramble, there were "Many Photo Stops — Lots of Smoke," also "Sandwiches — Soft Drinks — Candy On the Train." Prospective passengers were adjured to act quickly: "Steam Passenger Trains are History. This May Be the Last."

About five hundred crowded aboard. At every stop townsfolk surrounded the train. People who had not ridden the line in decades climbed aboard to relive an experience they had not had since childhood. At Gladbrook, thanks to the promoting of A. C. West, publisher of the *Gladbrook*



*Northern*, 75 people boarded the coaches. Twenty-five Eldora Boy Scouts made the round-trip to Alden.

High point of the tour was the half-hour stop at Conrad. Here 300 excursionists swarmed into the Franzenburg Smokehouse for a complimentary roll of bologna. The meat plant had estimated only a modest give-away, and had wrapped samples accordingly. When the whole train disembarked at the smokehouse, all hands were hard put to keep up with the crowd. Only when the last engine-whistle tooted did the meat packers relax — and wonder if the plant would still operate at a profit that month.

The State Historical Society also helped to publicize the Chapter's "Indian Summer Special" from Ottumwa to Indianola and return in October, 1956. The jaunt boasted of a venerable 4-6-0 type engine manufactured by Rogers in 1892. It is the oldest locomotive in limited service on the Burlington line. Passengers were entreated to "get a deep breath of good old coal smoke once more" as this would "positively be the last steam passenger train in the state." The four-car special made a fast run on the Burlington's main line to Chariton, thence up the 30-mile branch to Indianola.

When it was learned that the Burlington planned to abandon a 26-mile segment of its Keokuk-Humeston Branch, the Chapter officers



planned a commemorative last day excursion. So did the Wayne County Historical Society. The Iowa Railway Historical Museum also participated. (All NRHS trips since 1958 have been sponsored jointly with the Museum.) The three groups cooperated to make the last passenger train between Centerville and Corydon a gala affair. Actually, the diesel-powered train rattled on to Humeston, but the Centerville-Corydon section was the part to be scrapped and the reason for the special trip. When the four-car excursion left Centerville, March 22, 1958, it had about 100 comfortably-seated participants. When it reached the end of the line 426 were aboard and packed like proverbial sardines.

At Promise City a parade and band met the train. The star attraction in the parade was eighty-six-year-old Mrs. Iona Robertson, who rode up to the depot in her carriage. She had ridden the line in 1879, when it was opened, and wanted to ride the last train before it closed. West of Promise City a hold-up was staged and the train "looted." Another delegation and band greeted the special at Corydon.

Riding on fan trips is fun, but for those who plan and execute them it is a headache. Railroads understandably want to make a special train pay, or at least meet out-of-pocket expenses. To do this they set up a minimum. But a \$1,000 minimum to a chapter with about 100 members is a



lot of money. Then the underwriters of a trip have to put up with the possibility of rain or a slow advance sale of tickets. This causes sleepless nights for Chapter officers. Occasionally a special run can be cancelled in time to avoid a thumping deficit. More often it is too late to do anything — the trip must go on.

Other things militate against special trains. Frequently passenger cars have to be "deadheaded" hundreds of miles to the locale of an excursion. Then, if the extra train crosses a division point, another crew must take over, even if it only goes a few feet on the second division. Again, there are the full-crew laws. Most trains have a minimum of five men, although four or even three may suffice to do the work adequately. Finally, some railroads are not interested in borrowing equipment or otherwise going to the trouble of scheduling a special passenger train.

Trolley lines by their very nature are more readily equipped to run extra cars and special trips. For this reason the Chapter has had many enjoyable outings over the Waterloo, Cedar Falls & Northern, the Fort Dodge, Des Moines & Southern, and the Charles City Western. One by one, however, these interurbans have "gone diesel." An exception is the latter road, although at this writing its sole passenger car is out of repair and may not be put in running order again.

There is, nevertheless, one bright spot in the



realm of Iowa trolleydom. This, as we have seen, is the friendly little Southern Iowa Railway, an "operating appendage" of the Iowa Railway Historical Museum. Each year a half dozen fan trips are run for the faithful. And each season sees stimulated interest, which bids well to make the "Route of the Trolleys" an operating rail-mark for Iowa and the Midwest.

Railroad fans look for the novel, the strange and even the bizarre. Give them a caboose to ride, and they are as happy as millionaires of yesteryear riding private railroad cars. Besides, cabooses are plentiful, whereas "varnish" cars are not. In view of this situation, it is not hard to promote a caboose trip, provided a railroad is willing. An informal excursion of this nature was held on the Wabash from Bluffs, Illinois, to Keokuk in 1954.

The North Western went even further. It tied on four passenger cars and an extra caboose to its time freight running through Iowa's midriff from Eagle Grove to Elmore, Minnesota. Moreover, it was doubleheaded with steam! About 185 people made the run one rainy April day in 1955, including some 50 Boy Scouts.

From freights it is a step up to mixed trains. Instead of a shabby way-car bringing up the rear of the Burlington's "mixed" on the Fort Madison-Bloomfield run one balmy summer day in 1955, there was a string of clean, well-filled coaches.



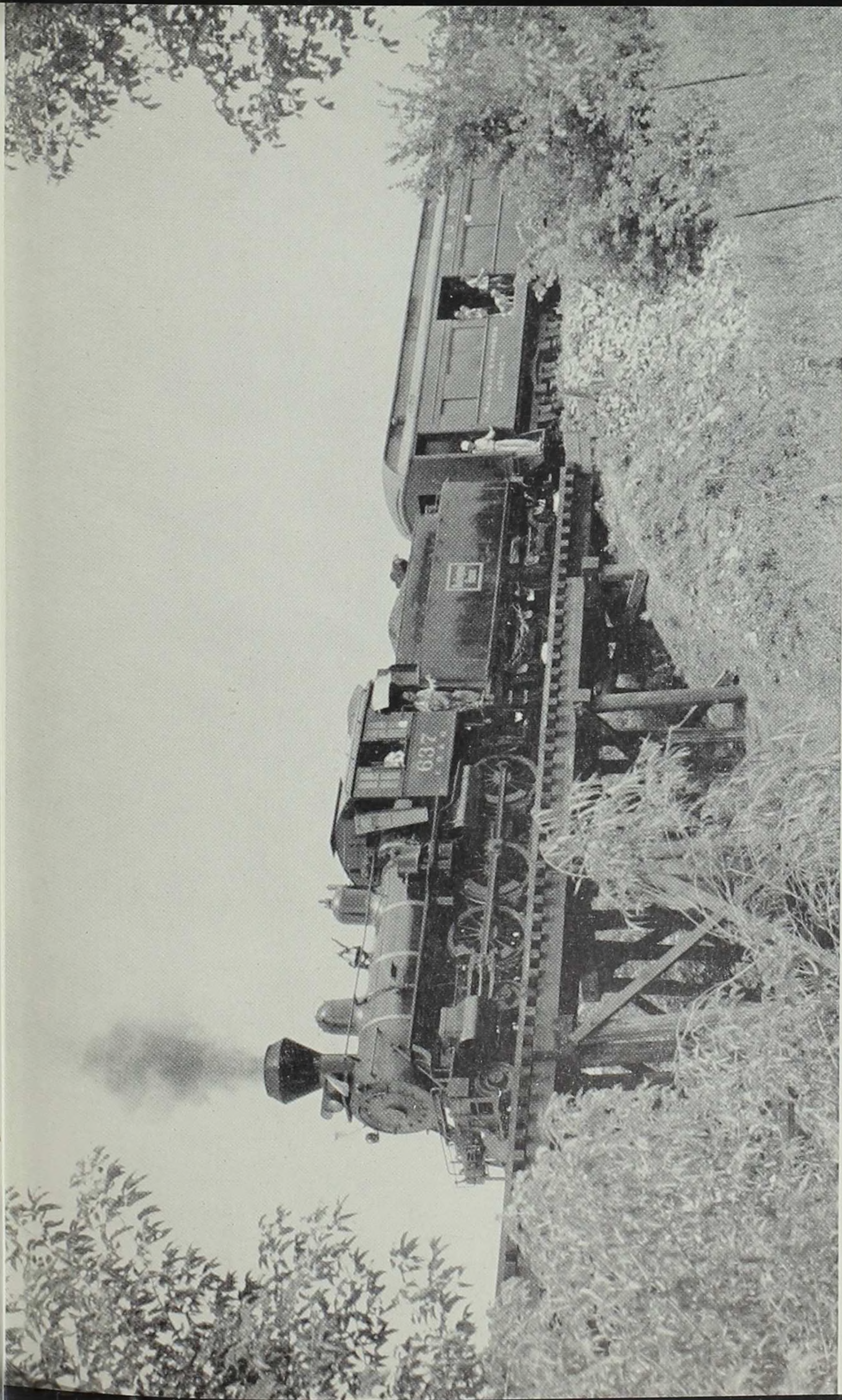
About 140 passengers enjoyed the scenic hill section in the southeastern part of the state. It likewise featured steam: the historic Ten Wheeler No. 637, equipped with a diamond stack.

There is one type of motive power almost overlooked. It is the rail motor car, once a familiar sight on many an Iowa branch line. To include such an item in the Chapter's trips, the first excursion of 1959 ran on the Burlington's Creston-to-St. Joseph, Missouri branch. It featured the regular motor car operating on the line, along with a trailer, to provide extra accommodations for the fans. Despite an unexpected snowstorm which blocked the highway, the run was made on schedule. It was the last motor car operating in Iowa; the train has since been discontinued.

If it runs on rails — passenger train or freight, mixed or motor, steam, electric or diesel on main line or branch — the Iowa Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society has ridden it.

FRANK P. DONOVAN, JR.





Old Burlington No. 637 poses for camera on the Fort Madison-Bloomfield Branch in August, 1955.  
Wilson Lemberger supervised this colorful NRHS trip.

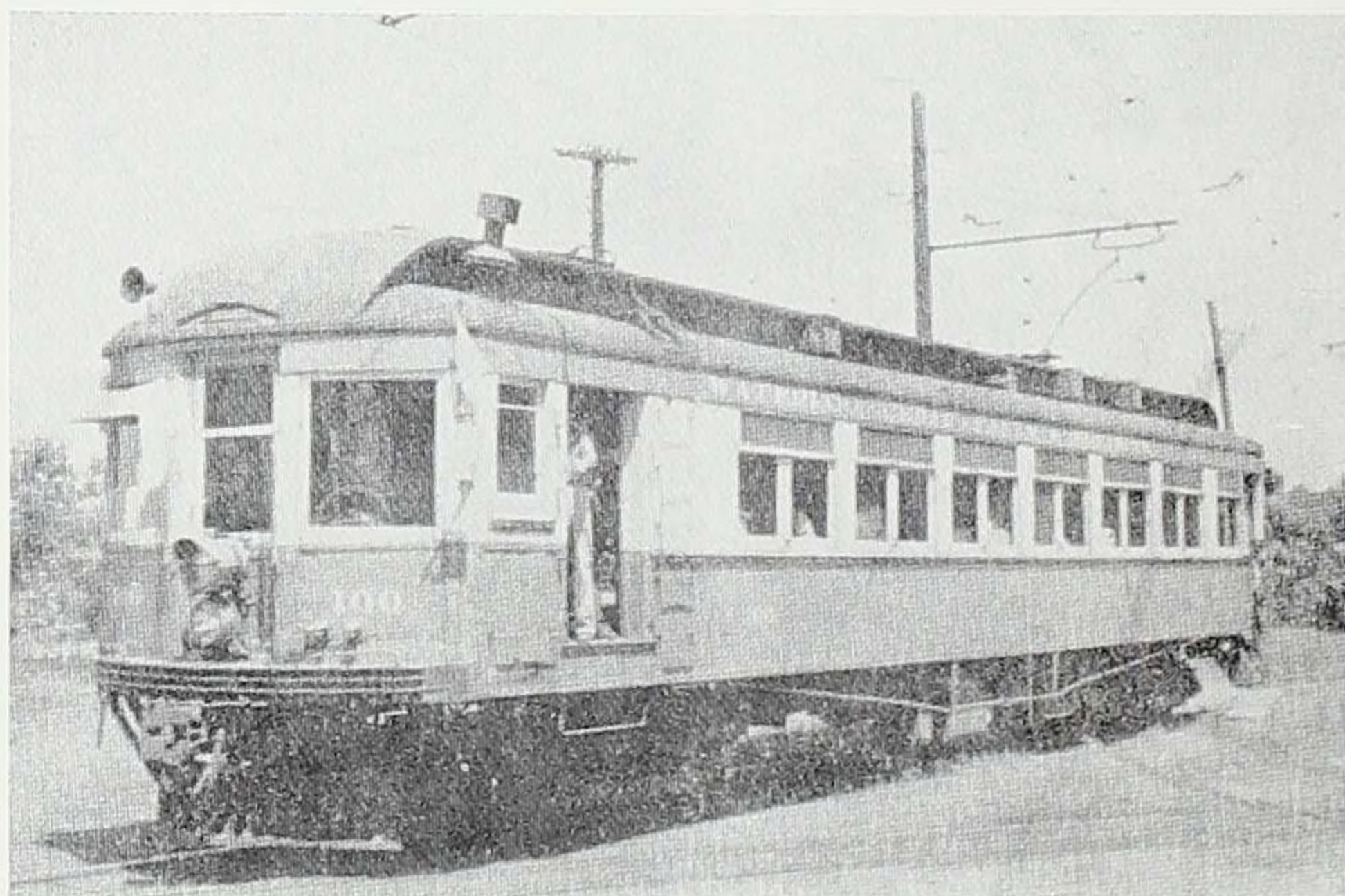


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