

Steamtown National Historic Site Railfest 2014

A Celebration of Railroading!

By David Sigafosse

Friday, August 29

Got up early Friday morning and was very excited about what tomorrow might bring, as Craig Hartman, MAMA president, had arranged a second year for MAMA



Ken Ciparis repairing his Fairmont M9

to participate in the Steamtown National Historic Site "Railfest 2014" event. It also coincided with the annual Italian Festival, La Festa Italiano, being held around the Courthouse in Scranton, but more of that later.

Since I was bringing my BC2M Beaver Car, first thing was general maintenance on my motorcar. Maintenance checklist is very different from most railcars. First, checked the hydraulic oil level. I had a problem with a broken o-ring on my previous excursion and lost over 2/3rds of my hydraulic oil before discovering it. I replaced the o-ring and was happy to find

no puddle of oil under my speeder. Next, had to check the air pressure in the Firestone air mounts that make up the suspension on the Beaver car. Needed to add air, as I keep the air mounts at 25 psi to provide a smooth ride. The rest was easy: add engine oil, add gasoline, and check all of the lights, battery, and start the engine. Of course, there were two trailer lights burned out. I have been replacing a lot of trailer lights this year, so am keeping spares of three different bulbs that the trailer lights use. I had also just replaced my trailer tires with Goodyear Marathon tires as I have had very good luck with them on my 2 axle trailer, and didn't want to

take a chance with my old tires. Took a few hours to get everything ready as I planned to just get up early Saturday morning, jump in the pickup truck, and go.

I recalled that I needed to bring half a dozen clip boards. Not a good idea to go to Staples just before the start of school in NJ. Picked up 6 clip boards and a box of 12 pens in

about 5 minutes, and then spent 20 minutes waiting to checkout as the checkout line snaked through the store.

Around 10 pm I remembered that I should have made up name tags as I had done the previous year. Trouble was, that I had no name tag holders and it was too late to buy them.

Saturday, August 30

Up at 06:00 am, and was able to leave the house by 07:00 am. The weather was perfect, mostly sunny but not too hot and no chance of rain. About a 2 hour drive to Steamtown, which is located in Scranton, PA. Got to Scranton, following my GPS, which took me



Motorcars stored inside Steamtown shops on Saturday evening

on Spruce street. I immediately

found myself trying to negotiate between tents and literally about 100 propane tanks on the right side and parked cars on the left side that forced everyone into a single lane. Not possible to backup, I was expecting to have to get out of my pickup and move a propane tank or tent support weight. Slowly creeping along the street and watching both mirrors, I was finally able to get to Washington Street and make the left turn to the back entrance of Steamtown. The planned seton time was 09:00 am, and when I arrived at 09:10 am, due to the above, everyone else had already seton.

Seton was uneventful, except that I got stuck in the sand at the crossing and needed some assistance to get things moving.



Phoebe Snow with Craig Hartman and his TMC-2

Steamtown National Historic Site is a railroad museum located in downtown Scranton, Pennsylvania, at the site of the former Scranton yards of the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad. The museum is built around a working turntable and a

roundhouse that are largely replications of the original DL&W facilities. The roundhouse, for example, was reconstructed from remnants of a 1932 structure. The site also features several original outbuildings dated between 1899 and 1902.

Most of the steam locomotives and other railroad equipment at Steamtown NHS were originally collected by F. Nelson Blount, from New England. In 1964, Blount established a non-profit organization, the Steamtown Foundation, to operate Steamtown,

USA, a steam railroad museum and excursion business in Bellows Falls, Vermont. I had visited the Vermont site and just found a number of old steam engines sitting around a turntable overgrown with grass.

In 1984, the Steamtown moved to Scranton, conceived of as urban re-development and funded in part by the city. But the museum failed to attract visitors, and within two years was facing bankruptcy. By 1995, the National Park Service (NPS) had acquired Steamtown, USA, and improved its facilities.

We had been given 8 tracks to operate on which are located behind their maintenance shop building. These tracks merge into a single track via a number of switches with self-guarding frogs. The park officially opened at 10:00



Beaver 2m next to Lowville & Beaver River Alco 2-8-0

am, but we seemed to have visitors there well before 10 am.

While waiting, I setup the MAMA banner which announced our presence to everyone. Last year we used two poles consisting of two 16" Fairmont wheels on each pole, but had wind load problems as the sign kept blowing over. This year we changed to a single 20" Fairmont wheel on each pole and experienced no problems.

Next I setup the sign and sign base that was made out of Luan and 1x3 pine with the "NARCOA & AFFILIATE General Release" in 24 point font stapled to both sides.

I thought it would be a slow day, but we had very large crowds starting almost immediately at 10 am. Mike Heaton with his custom

built #3 and Tom Schmeider with his Fairmont M-19 operated on a separate track. Ken Ciparis also operated on a separate track with his Fairmont M-9. Craig Hartman displayed his Tamper TMC-2, and did not give rides. The remaining group consisting of Paul Sternitzke with his Budda, Hank Walther with his Fairmont M-9, Bruce Tracy with his Woodings, Steve Knobloch with Bruce's S-2, Carl Megonagle with his Fairmont Tomah cab MT-19, and I with my Beaver car BC2M84.

We originally thought the signing of the releases would be a cumbersome process slowing things down, but we did not know that Lillian Mello would be there to solve the problem. She took charge and took care of the release signing, leaving the operators just to run the motorcars. The only problem was that we kept running



Ken Ciparis giving rides on the Steamtown handcar

out of release forms as people just kept lining up to ride. Frequently we had to ask to have copies made by Steamtown.

At one point we had 9 motorcars all operating at the same time. And Lillian was essential in getting all of the releases signed and

assigning people to the different cars.

For 3 hours straight we just loaded up people, ran down to end of track, about 1000 feet, returned, unloaded people, and loaded the next group. We staggered our lunch breaks so that we always had some cars available to give rides. It was amazing to see how much everyone enjoyed riding on our motorcars. I particularly enjoyed instructing our younger passengers on train horn signals and letting them activate my air horn (no air tank, so it really wasn't very loud).

As we had extra tracks, we designated one as a lunch break track and put motorcars on that track while the operator went to lunch.

That is how I ended up on the track closest to the Lowville & Beaver River #1923 steam engine. #1923 was used in regular service until it was retired in 1957 and is now part of the Steamtown collection.

During my lunch break we had a visitor to our area, none other than Phoebe Snow. Phoebe Snow was actually a fictional character created by the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad in 1902 as a marketing symbol for the railroad. The Lackawanna

owned anthracite mines in Pennsylvania, and could claim that the clothes of their passengers would remain clean after a long



Mid-Atlantic Motorcar Association

trip. The first advertisement featured the image of Phoebe and a short poem:

Says Phoebe Snow about to go upon a trip to Buffalo, "My gown stays white from morn till night Upon the Road of Anthracite"

There are many poems that were used in advertising for the railroad.

One favorite:

Phoebe says and Phoebe knows, That smoke and cinders spoil good clothes, 'Tis thus a pleasure and delight, to take the road of anthracite.

Another favorite:

Devoid of fear with roadbed clear, The engineer notes green and white of signal light, 'tis the road of Anthracite.

We were all very busy all afternoon giving rides, with very little time to rest. The only rest that we had was while passengers were loading and unloading. We finally stopped a little after 4 pm



Park Superintendent, Debbie Conway with Craig Hartman

and then moved the motorcars inside the shop for the overnight.

In addition, thanks are also due to Dick Forde, who is a Steamtown volunteer as well as being a NARCOA member, who helped coordinate our activities.

I was finally able to leave about 4:30 pm, very tired and sweaty and drove to my motel, checked in, showered, changed clothes, and then left again in a very short time as Craig had made arrangements for a special benefit dinner aboard one of the original Phoebe Snow dining cars, starting at 6 pm

In November 1949, the DL&W inaugurated a new streamlined passenger train named after Phoebe Snow. Phoebe Snow represented the DL&W's modernization of its

passenger fleet. The Phoebe Snow ran on a between Hoboken, New Jersey and Buffalo, New York.

Diner 469 is owned by the ELDCPS, Erie Lackawanna Dining Car

Preservation Society, who sponsored a benefit dinner for Saturday evening. As the event was sold out, we only had 4 seats, so just Craig & Shirley Hartman, Steve Weiss, and I attended.

Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Diner 469 was built by the Budd Company in 1949 for the DL&W's premier train, The Phoebe Snow. Renumbered 769 after the merger forming the Erie Lackawanna, the car also ran on the EL's version of the Phoebe Snow. DL&W 469 was purchased by ELDCPS in 2010, and moved to Scranton in 2012. Their web site is: <http://eldcps.org> if you are interested in learning more about their preservation efforts.

I found the dining car, but as I arrived a few minutes after 6 pm, was the last person to be seated. I spent about 5 minutes trying to figure out how to enter the dining car as all doors appeared to be locked, but actually, I didn't

understand the technique for raising the handle and pushing hard.

The meal was exceptionally good, and made more enjoyable by eating in an original Phoebe Snow dining car. We also enjoyed a very pleasant and informative conversation with Paul Cappelloni, one of the ELDCPS board of directors. We are hoping to repeat the dinner during the evening of October 23rd after the MAMA excursion of the Delaware & Lackawanna railroad.



Steve Weiss leading the consist

I then asked Craig how many people had signed releases today, and he proudly answered,

“450 people”.

None of us could believe that we had given rides to so many people. The actual number is much higher as many people rode multiple times on different motorcars.

Back to the motel and was sound asleep my 09:30 pm as the plan for Sunday was that we be at Steamtown by 08:30 am.

Sunday, August 31

Up at 07:00 am and stopped at Krispy Kreme on the way to Steamtown, with a dozen doughnuts. They were freshly made at the store the same morning. The sales girl had about 100 dozen already made and ready for customers to purchase. Arrived at Steamtown and offered them to everyone and they disappeared in about 10 minutes. As the park opened a 10:00 am, we had a bit of time to relax. I reassembled the MAMA banner and 'release' sign in preparation for the days and enjoyed a second Krispy Kreme.



Carl Magonigle in his MT-19 & Lillian Mello in an M-19

The weather forecast was for rain, rain, and heavy rain. However, the skies were cloudy and overcast, but no rain at all. Things started more slowly on Sunday as I think many people were kept away by the weather forecast.

Steve Weiss arrived and set on his home built TCM-1279 motorcar. I asked him for a ride, and rode in it, and found it quite comfortable and roomy.

Then a funny thing happened, visitors started showing up and wanting to ride our motorcars.

Although the pace wasn't as hectic as Saturday, again we basically loaded all the motorcars, ran down to the end of track, reversed, and returned to our starting point.



Paul Sternitzke with his Budda car

the public, we were the hit of the show. Barb Klobucar (events specialist) was also extremely pleased as well, and Craig will start planning for next years event

very soon.

Park Superintendent, Debbie Conway stopped by again for a ride and informed us that their volunteer that runs the handcar was not available for Sunday, and asked if we could provide

someone to operate the handcar with visitors. Craig immediately volunteered Ken Ciparis who then spent the day shuttling up and down the track with visitors on the handcar.

With the Steamtown turntable out, and little visiting equipment, and our active participation with

At around 12 noon I took my lunch break, and when I returned, Lillian decided to take her lunch break, so I was put in charge of the signing of the 'releases' by all visitors, and assigning people to an appropriate motorcar.

After Lillian returned, I decided to take about 15 minutes to walk around Steamtown. Highlights were seeing the UP 4012 Big Boy, and a 7 1/2" gauge propane powered real steam engine, named "Pompei Body Co.", number 99.

Then a quick walk back to our operating tracks behind the shop area.

I rejoined the group giving rides, and then about 3 pm, the sky turned dark and we experienced a heavy rain. Assuming it was all over, I took down the banner, and put the sign, sign base, my lunch

container, and folding chair in my motorcar, preparing to leave.

The rain stopped after 30 minutes, there were no other visitors wanting rides, so everyone started bringing their trailers and setting off.

Even Mike Heaton had completed loading his motorcar before I went to get my trailer. Carl Megonigle had his trailer lined up and ready to load, when all of a sudden, a crowd of 25 people arrived and told us they were promised motorcar rides.

So, I unloaded my lunch container, etc. onto the pavement and prepared to make a few more trips.

Carl did not already have his car on his trailer, but he was on the wrong track. So he brought his motorcar across the concrete and set on behind me. And with Hank Walther as the 3rd remaining motorcar, we made an additional 6 trips.



Steve Noblock starting Bruce Tracy's S-2

We were then informed by Dick Forde that we really needed to clear off the tracks as Steamtown needed them back for storage. So, I loaded up my motorcar again with my lunch container, etc. and as I am getting ready to leave, it is now 4:30 pm, a few more showed up wanting rides. Dick informed them that we were done for the day, and they should come back next year.

I then asked Craig how many people had signed releases today, and he proudly answered,

"347 people".

This made a total for the two days of

"797 people".

Last year Craig Hartman was responsible for at least five people joining NARCOA. Craig personally handed out 14-18 of his cards to very interested people (two with speeders), and all of us that gave rides had interested folks as well that rode with us, so hopefully we have helped keep our hobby alive and growing.

Finally, I was able to have the time to get my

trailer, about a 5 minute walk away, and bring it over to the setoff location. Setoff was extremely easy as we were able to align with the tracks. Tied down my speeder and prepared for a long slow Sunday night drive home, as I usually spend about 30 minutes stuck in traffic on I-80 where I-380 joins it from Scranton. But I was very lucky as there was no traffic and I was able to make the 90 mile drive in just under 2 hours. Drove up my driveway, got out, went



Bruce Tracy guarding Craig Hartman's TMC-2

inside and went to bed.

It was an extremely exhausting and extremely enjoyable weekend. I know that all of us that participated are looking forward to repeating this experience next year.



Mike Heaton's Railmobile