

FAHP News, March 26, 2018 Story

Along the Seaboard Air Line: The Seaboard was not an airline at all but one of two main line railroads that connected Florida with the northeastern states. When it was named, there were no airlines. Its competitor was the Atlantic Coast Line, with its main line in most places from 20 to 40 miles east of the Seaboard. The Coast Line was almost entirely in the Coastal Plain and was therefore a more level railroad with fewer curves. The Seaboard, on the other hand, ran through the edge of the Piedmont with curves, grades, and slightly higher mileage on its way to Florida.

For their fast name trains, both railroads depended on the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) from New York to Washington and the Richmond, Fredericksburg and Potomac from Washington to Richmond. Coast Line trains down Florida's east coast south of Jacksonville ran over the Florida East Coast Railroad, the old Henry Flagler railroad, long managed by Ed Ball, brother-in-law of Alfred I. du Pont. The Coast Line trains to Florida's west coast had their own tracks to Tampa and other west coast cities. The Seaboard, however, was a larger railroad with many more branches extending into Alabama and toward New Orleans. In Florida south of Jacksonville, its main line ran through the middle of the State, along Lake Okeechobee, into West Palm Beach, and then south to Miami.

The Seaboard and the Coast Line ran side-by-side from Richmond to Petersburg, Virginia, but then diverged. The Coast Line went south on a double-tracked railroad, passing through Rocky Mount and Fayetteville, North Carolina; Florence and Charleston, South Carolina; Savannah, Georgia; and on to Jacksonville. The Seaboard went southwest on a single-tracked line with many long passing tracks to South Hill, Virginia; Raleigh, Sanford, and Southern Pines, North Carolina; Columbia, South Carolina; Savannah, Georgia; and on to Jacksonville.

My experience with the Seaboard was at Southern Pines, in North Carolina's sand hill country, six miles east of Pinehurst, where the Tufts family of Boston had established a famous winter and spring resort in the 1890s. My parents rented houses at Southern Pines for three months in 1932 and for six weeks in 1935, before the advent of Diesel locomotives on the Seaboard's main line through the center of town. My father had little trouble in interesting me in the locomotives, passenger and freight, that passed through Southern Pines in both directions. A 2-mile-long siding (passing track) paralleled the main for as far as the eye could see in both directions from the passenger station. Sometimes northbound and southbound passenger trains would pass here, but more often a long freight would be parked on the siding until the passenger train had passed. Not only the sight but also the sounds of the railroad were enticing. From our small cottage, a short three blocks from the tracks, I could lie in bed in early evening and hear the locomotive's whistle "call in" the rear brakeman (five "shorts" for northbound, four "shorts" for southbound) two or three minutes before "two shorts" signaled the forward movement of the train. Without an automatic signal behind, the brakeman had dropped off the rear platform as the train stopped and walked back about 500 feet with his red lantern to warn approaching trains. Then, on a clear evening, the sharp staccato barks of the locomotive's exhaust as the train picked up speed was a sound I never forgot. Locomotives on this portion of the Seaboard ran through from Richmond to Hamlet, North Carolina, just over 250 miles (30 miles south of Southern Pines), where they were serviced and returned over the same route. From Hamlet, another Seaboard "main" ran west to Atlanta, Georgia and Birmingham, Alabama, in addition to the line to Florida.

The Seaboard, like other southern railroads, had racially discriminant policies regarding employees of color. Except for Pullman porters, those coming in contact with the public could not be black. In engine service, no locomotive engineers could be black, and on passenger trains, even the firemen had to be white. Black firemen were used on most of the freight trains, but there was no chance for advancement. Most of the passenger trains consisted of from six to eight cars and were pulled by 4-8-2 Mountain-type locomotives with drivers of about 70 inches in diameter. The freights were pulled by 2-8-2 Mikados with approximately 60-inch drivers. If we happened to be in town after dark, my father would park along the railroad a few blocks from the station and show me how you could see the red under the locomotive's grate as the train picked up speed and the fireman was shoveling like mad.

Pinehurst was a longtime sports destination. The first hotel, the Holly Inn, was built in 1895. First, it was outdoor polo and championship croquet. In the 1910s and '20s, it was trapshooting, and Annie Oakley and Frank Butler were hired by the Pinehurst Gun Club to teach people how to shoot. Finally, golf took over and still reigns supreme in Pinehurst and Southern Pines. The large luxury hotel named the Carolina was built in 1906 and is now operated as

the Pinehurst Hotel. Before the 1930s, nearly everyone arrived by train on the Seaboard. A sleeping car or cars would be set off a Florida train at Aberdeen, on the main line 5 miles south of Southern Pines and towed up grade on a tiny railroad called the Norfolk Southern (no relationship to the present railroad by that name) to Pinehurst. This was a slow process, however, and many Pinehurst passengers got off the train at Southern Pines and went by car or cab the six miles over the road to Pinehurst. This 6-mile trip was over one of the first dual highways in America, nicely landscaped between east and westbound lanes.

In the mid-1930s, one of the first New York-to-Miami name trains was the Seaboard's *Orange Blossom Special*, with its cars painted in bright purple and orange colors (a gaudy combination). Occasionally, I saw this train as it passed through Wilmington on the PRR. It did not stop at Southern Pines, as it went through about 2:00 a.m. Soon it was Dieselized, but everything else on the Seaboard was steam-powered until World War II. Soon thereafter, the *Special* was joined by the *Silver Meteor* and the *Silver Star* on the Seaboard, and the *East Coast Champion* and the *West Coast Champion* on the Atlantic Coast Line. These were high-speed streamliners that were popular into the 1960s. The running time from New York to Miami was about 26 hours, so it took four "train sets" to operate daily service from both ends.

When railroad mergers took place about 1970 and thereafter, the Seaboard and the Atlantic Coast Line were merged into the Seaboard Coast Line. This combined line was taken over by the CSX Corporation in 1980, which had been formed after the C&O had absorbed the B&O in the late 1960s. With a lot of the former trackage abandoned, CSX, with its headquarters in Jacksonville, Florida, still operates through Wilmington on the old B&O line.

Work Report: Activity this week was severely impacted by the weather. Bob Koury will report separately on Auburn Valley Railroad achievements. On Tuesday, March 20, Steve Bryce (supervisor) and Brent McDougall were the only two volunteers on hand.

One of the trucks from car #854 was painted. Tools were assembled for the removal of engine packings from the Model 740. Also on the 740, the Diplag was trimmed and patched where needed around the boiler. The Diplag roll was stored on top of the tool bins in the garage. The heating boiler in the museum was checked, and all was working correctly.

On Wednesday, March 21, the session was canceled as the Auburn Heights property was closed because of the snowstorm.

On Thursday, March 22, four volunteers turned out as follows: Steve Bryce (in charge again as Dave Leon could not make it), Larry Tenny, Stan Lakey, and Mark Russell. Attempts to remove all the old packing from the engine glands on the Model 740 were unsuccessful, as some very old metallic packing could not be dug out. When better weather comes, the car will be fired up and these glands blown out with steam.

More of the museum floor in the vicinity of the steam locomotive displays was scraped, and large chunks of old paint were removed. The linoleum and trim strips for the Model 76's running boards were worked on.

AVRR Work Report: Volunteers: Mike Ciosek, Anne Cleary, Bob Koury, Mike Leister, Brent McDougall, Tom Sandbrook

Accomplishments: 1. Water tower is connected to waterline, tested, and operating; 2. Build retaining wall around the water tower fill in with gravel; 3. Finished painting the "A" truck from the 854 car; 4. Finished replacement of track in station, tested, and ready for operation; 5. Completed realignment for 50 feet of track between the back retaining wall and the maintenance shed; 6. Worked on driveway crossing near the tunnel entrance and the one in the back near the state garage.