

# The Rockton-Rion Flyer

News and Information from the South Carolina Railroad Museum  
Volume 43 Number 1 Winter 2015

## **CHRISTMAS TRAINS MAKE 2014 SHINE!**



Christmas lights decorate No. 2028 as she leads the longest and heaviest passenger train in years on a warm December Saturday.

### **FLYER NEWS FLASH:**

2014 was a very successful year. We increased revenue 5% over 2013, despite not having a steam train event. The Santa Trains and Twilight Trains were a huge success. Gene and Rodger are introducing QR readers for narrated tours of our displays. The sold-out Valentine Dinner Trains were very well received by passengers.

**UPCOMING EVENTS:** The Easter Bunny Eggspress will be on March 28<sup>th</sup> and April 4<sup>th</sup>. We need members to help out with the trains and on the ground at Greenbrier. Contact David or Rodger to participate.

**HOT TOPIC:** The Gramling's steam train will be operating on the RR&W on April 25<sup>th</sup>, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, and May 9<sup>th</sup>. Passengers will detrain at Greenbrier and see events related to the steam train. Contact Rodger or David to be a part of these events.

**MEMBERSHIP MEETING:** Saturday, April 11, 2015 at 10 A.M. in the Rion office building. All members are encouraged to attend.

### **NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS:**

Please send articles and pictures to:  
SCRM, P.O. Box 7246, Columbia, SC 29202  
email: [libreez@carolina.rr.com](mailto:libreez@carolina.rr.com).

**Vince LiBrizzi, Editor**

## **Making Tracks**

*By Phil Woodell*

Our track maintenance recently has consisted mostly of identifying and marking ties to be replaced. Some 300 ties between the east end of the cut at Greenbrier and the Guardian switch have been removed and replaced with new ties and plates. These ties need to be spiked as soon as time and weather permit. If we do the spiking ourselves, we save the contractor labor cost of \$14.54 per tie.

In the old days, when everything was done by hand, the standard labor for a track worker was to un-spike, dig out and remove the tie, then install the new tie, gage the rail, and spike. The ballast would be replaced and tamped with a pick or bar at the rate of one tie per hour per worker. This is a rate most of us not accustomed to such hard labor can't even approach today. The gasoline-powered hydraulic Tie Master we are using is capable of changing out 12 ties per hour. Quite an improvement over the old fashioned method, and many less calloused hands for the crew!

We need your help to pull spikes, remove tie plates, line new ties, set tie plates, and spike ties. Spiking ties is done with a pneumatic hammer, so don't worry about visions of John Henry swinging a heavy hammer! The hard labor of the past has been replaced mostly by machines. The 15 member tie gang of yore is now 5 members capable of producing the same effort. You don't need to be especially muscular or expect to work until you're exhausted; the machines now do the hard labor. Call Charles Weber, our track maintenance coordinator at 803-317-7187 and try your hand as a "gandy dancer" for a day!



No. 2028 is all lit up pulling the Twilight Santa Express.

## **Twilight Santa Express is Instant Sellout**

*By Vince LiBrizzi*

In 2013, we introduced the Twilight Santa Express, complete with storytelling, cookies, hot chocolate, and a visit with Santa. The train, with a capacity of 80 passengers, sold out instantly with numerous inquiries for additional runs. In 2014, we increased the event to December 6<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>. The trains were not advertised except for flyers and on our webpage and Facebook. Both trains were sold out in a matter of two days of being posted to the website and Facebook. This was three weeks in advance of the event!

We added new special touches to the event this year by stringing hundreds of white Christmas lights on locomotives No. 2028 and No. 2015 and playing Christmas music in the background on the train and in the gift shop and ticket office. This added to the festive holiday atmosphere for the passengers. Clearly, this train is in very high demand and plans are being made to increase both the capacity and operation in 2015. We will need another coach with operable lights and have a schedule for storytelling, Santa, and food service that can handle the capacity.



Henry and Kelvin in the *Lake Rion* before the Dinner Train.

### **Valentine Dinner Trains Sold Out Success** *By Vince LiBrizzi*

On February 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup>, the Rockton Rion & Western ran two sold-out Valentine Dinner trains. Both trains departed Rockton at 6 PM so the passengers could enjoy a twilight ride to Rion while enjoying snacks and wine or beer before the meal was served. Guests enjoyed a delicious Italian style meal of pork loin or mushroom ravioli in Alfredo sauce, salad, vegetables, beverages, and sinfully rich chocolate cake on the *Lake Rion* dining car. Every need of the guests was seen to by our white-coated attendants, while romantic music played in the background. Chocolates and carnations were given to the passengers after the train returned to Rockton as another special part of the experience.

Both trips were posted on Facebook and the Museum's website, and were completely sold out within 7 days! The *Lake Rion* has a capacity of 40 guests per trip, so there were a limited number of seats available. We even had a waiting list of 20 guests after the trains sold out! Judging from the feedback from the passengers on the train and the comments on our Facebook page, everyone had a wonderful time and was very impressed with the experience. We even had one couple request reservations for 2016! Thanks to all that made the Valentine Dinner trains a success.

### **2014 Financial Summary** *By Henry Nechemias*

The Museum continues to be financially stable, with a strong balance sheet and a solid bank balance. Compared to 2013, 2014 had a small dip in ridership at just shy of 9,000 passengers carried, but with a 5% gain in ticket revenue. This was due to the increased use of the *Lake Rion* dining car and more special trains and charter trips. Many of these trains, such as the BBQ dinner trains, Spooky Special, and a second Pumpkin Patch train, were new or expanded events in 2014 and were a huge success. What's remarkable is that this revenue increase was without a Steam Train event, which accounts for about 1,000 passengers. We have a Steam Train event this spring, so we should build on 2014's success!

We continue to fund important projects such as maintenance of track and equipment, upgrades to our buildings and grounds, significant work on the Gallery and new explanatory signage. We have added a public address system throughout the train, purchased new locomotive radios, rebuilt the roof of the Seaboard caboose, and completed the survey of our last piece of unregistered property.

In 2015, we plan to expand our special events, start a search for grants, and increase our membership. This will allow us to grow as an organization and improve our operation. Here's to a successful and enjoyable year!

**South Carolina Railroad Museum**  
**PO Box 7246**  
**Columbia, SC 29202-7246**

*Return Service Requested*



This is the QR code for the RPO car in the display train.  
(Go ahead and scan it with your smartphone now!)

### **QR Reader Enhances Museum Experience** *By Gene Allen*

QR (Quick Response) codes are machine-readable optical labels which carry information about the items to which they are attached. They are in stores, newspapers, and magazines but not often seen in museums. They can be instantly read with a free app on your smartphone.

Hal VonNessen, Rodger Stroup, and I decided to use QR codes at the Museum. The first task was the display train. I prepared copy and photos for the four cars and sent it to our webmaster Bill White. Bill created a sub-directory on our website and generated the QR codes. The system also allows us to track the number of scans for each QR code used. Rodger requested audio so I wrote the copy which Hal narrated. QR reader placards are now in each car of the display train. When a visitor scans a code, the file is downloaded and the audio begins. Additional QR reader placards are being created and all will replace the “old” signs at the museum soon.