

*"...the only way to do
great work is to love
what you do."
- Steve Jobs*

HENRY E. FRICK

Engine Service 1979—1986

Train Dispatcher 1986—2013

Burlington Northern and BNSF Railway

Compiled by Earl J. Currie



HENRY FRICK

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February 2020

Following military service (including combat duty in Viet Nam) Henry Frick sought employment in the rail industry. From 1975 to 1979 Henry found that good jobs were hard to find in the area of the eastern part of the country where he was living. Friends advised Henry to “go west.” He made a week-long unsuccessful job search trip on the Union Pacific. He decided to take a chance and call Burlington Northern. Henry wrote, “After a couple of calls a pleasant gentleman in the Denver office told me they were taking applications at Alliance, NE. He put my call through to Alliance and the personnel person said, ‘Yes.’ I made my way there and the next morning, I filled out the forms for employment and the physical.

“After all of that, I went back home on a ‘red eye’ flight to New York. Shortly after I got home I got a letter for the Brakeman training class in Alliance. I loaded my VW “bug” at my parents’ house in Connecticut on the July 4 weekend and headed west.... After the Brakeman class I drove to Gillette, WY, to go to work. When I got to the highway exit for Gillette my first impression was that I wanted to turn around, but I didn’t have a choice. I found the depot and checked in. The next morning I made the first of three student trips and marked up.

“After about three weeks on the extra board, six of us were called and forced to Guernsey.... We worked the yard jobs and the night work train. The work train took ballast and supplies to the contractors working on the new Orin line. I got to ride over the entire line before it was open for service. The job was an unusual crew situation. The poor Conductor had almost 40 years and had to work with people who had only 40 days. He was very patient with us.”

The crushed rock ballast was loaded at a quarry at Guernsey and used in the construction of track on the new line of 111 miles between Orin and Belle Ayr. The day and night work trains hauling ballast worked 12 hours per day on a seven-day basis. Elven Marshall, a Brakeman on the crew that switched the quarry recalls, “(We) worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week, spotting and pulling cars at the ballast pit three times a day and then having the train built and ready to go.... They were on a very tight time-frame and there was a minimum amount (80-90) of cars per train.”

Crews working those trains had no days off due to the shortage of qualified employees in either train or engine service, and pressure from the construction company building the track and BN’s Engineering Department to get the new track ready for service without delay for any reason. Henry recalls being in the depot at Reno when Jolene McIlravy, the Operator, copied the order issued by the Dispatcher to authorize movement of the first train to be run after the last spike was driven on the new line.



My first try as a Fireman was with engine 7189 type SD40-2 built by EMD at London, Ontario; unit had been in service for only about two weeks.

Credit: Lyle Engdahl

Henry soon qualified for the Locomotive Engineers training program. He established March 11, 1980 as a seniority date for engine service, and was promoted to Engineer in October 1980. He then worked on the extra board covering mine loading jobs and regular train service on the new Orin line. On July 23, 1981, not long after starting to work as a Fireman, Henry encountered the kind of incident that never leaves one's mind. Henry wrote, "Early that morning we were called for a Gillette ballast train. We had two GE road units. The lead unit was almost brand new. All went fine until we got to the Cassa siding. We took the siding and pulled all the way to the signal since we had a short train. My Engineer and I, both feeling a bit sleepy (it was around 4:30 A.M.) stepped off the engine for a break and a smoke. Shortly after we stepped off, our coal train meet showed up. He had a 10 MPH slow order so we didn't hurry to get going. We highballed the coal train and the Dispatcher got the reverse switch.

"Then, within only a few seconds comes this crane and flat cars in the siding. It hit our engines and a fire started. We saw it all, so we called the Dispatcher. Needless to say, he was surprised. He said he had trouble with the switch. He asked if we were okay and we said yes. A few years later the Dispatcher who worked that night told me he thought something was wrong. Trainmaster A.B. Cross was the first to arrive. By then it was daybreak, so we got a good look. The lengths of rail had punctured the fuel tank from the impact. Mr. Cross said it was a miracle nobody was hurt. After that when we would see Mr. Cross, he would always give us a little wink." In a very short time a derail was placed on the track where the crane had been tied up.

At the time there was no operator on the crane, as it had been shut down at the end of the work day, several hours before the accident. One could surmise that the crane had not been secured adequately by setting a hand break or other means, allowing vibration from the passing coal train to set it in motion. Without knowledge of the result of an investigation following the accident by the company and possibly the FRA, this statement should be viewed only as conjecture on the part of your author.

At the time of his hiring, it was expected that newly-hired employees would have work on the Alliance Division for about 20 years. As it turned out, the amount of coal moved by BN and the Union Pacific far exceeded that projection made in the 1980's. It was predicted that by about 2000, electric power generation would convert to atomic energy or hydrogen. For about 30 employees each at Alliance, Gillette and Edgemont, their careers with BN were suddenly interrupted in 1984 when the C&NW (with support from the UP) succeeded in raising the money needed to acquire 50 per cent ownership on the new Donkey Creek – Orin line, and with it, the opportunity to serve any and all of the new mines already producing coal, or that were planned for opening within a few years.

Immediately, the C&NW and the UP jointly negotiated lower rates with the power companies than BN was able to charge at the time. This outcome was unfortunate for BN, its shareholders and its newer employees, for having taken a risk by investing huge amounts of capital to serve the mines and their customers. The employees had taken a great risk as well by moving to a vastly different environment than they had grown up in, and in most cases, given up the jobs they had held elsewhere before committing to work for BN.

In recalling those times, Henry wrote, "When the C&NW came in mid-1984, job cuts and bumps caused me to be set back to Fireman. Soon, I was forced to Edgemont where they needed Engineers for about two months. When the new updated Engineer seniority roster came out, I was number 600 out of 630. That sealed the deal to make a change. I applied for the Dispatcher training program and was accepted in October 1985 to work in the Alliance office. After six weeks of school and learning all of the dispatching positions, I worked all of the Powder River lines including those on which I had run trains. I was one of the first Train Dispatchers who had not been an Operator or Clerk. I assume they were short of people. I worked there until June 1995 when the jobs were moved to Fort Worth. I was the last person

to work the final shift in Alliance. That morning, after I had transferred the information to Fort Worth, it was ‘lights out.’

“When I got to Fort Worth, we initially worked the same desk we had worked in Alliance. After a year the seniority rosters were all changed, giving everyone ‘system seniority.’ This allowed anyone to bid or bump on any desk. I eventually worked several territories including the Fort Worth commuter lines, the iron ore lines and former GN line. The last desk I worked was Grand Forks. When I started on that job I had the least seniority – 21 years. If I remember right, the night man told me the desk was the third largest territory in terms of miles. It had a lot of branch lines. I retired in February 2013.”

A BNSF employee newsletter reported that Henry was given a rousing send-off. The title of the article in the newsletter read, “Frick Makes Trains More Than a Career.” The writer began the article with a quote from Steve Jobs, ‘Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do.’ The article continued, “There is perhaps no greater example of this than recent BNSF retiree Henry Frick.” Henry recalls that he had been a “fan” of Burlington Northern ever since it was formed in 1970.

Mike Lunak, one of the Locomotive Engineers working in the territory that Henry dispatched, says that Henry was an exceptionally fine Dispatcher. Even with his dispatching desk very remote from his territory in North Dakota, Henry worked very well with the train and engine crews. In his retirement Henry has become recognized as an expert photographer and rail historian, having written several articles and provided photographs for rail-oriented publications. Among those articles was “The End of Train Location Lineups” written for the *Expediter*, the newsletter of the Friends of Burlington Northern Railroad, a railroad historical group. Henry covered the evolution from the historic use of train location lineups for occupying a main track for inspection or maintenance work to today’s greatly improved system for authorizing such work.

All in all, Henry had a good career with Burlington Northern and the BNSF Railway. We are fortunate that Henry is willing and able to “give back” by sharing his knowledge and experiences through his writings and the photographs he has taken.



Henry at his Train Dispatcher's desk. Among his recollections was, “The DFW job was the closest I came to a ‘cake job.’ This was a former Rock Island line purchased by DART and dispatched by BN under contract while the line was being redone for the TRE trains. Most of the trains were UP. What was interesting was that all of the crews were from pre-UP (MKT, BRI, Rock Island and SSW). To them, UP didn’t exist. Editor’s note: TRE stands for Trinity Railway Express, a commuter service operating between Dallas and Fort Worth.

Credit: Allison Dooley

RECOLLECTIONS AND HOW THE JOB OF A DISPATCHER HAS EVOLVED

Editor's note: Following are excerpts of Henry's interview conducted in 2003 by Dave Poplawski of the Friends of Burlington Northern Railroad (FOBNR), a railroad historical group. At the time Dave was working as a Professor in the Computer Science Department at Michigan Tech University. To read the full interview refer to "The Expeditor," the quarterly newsletter of the FOBNR, July, 2003, "An Interview with Henry E. Frick, BNSF Casper Subdivision Dispatcher."

Henry's comments depict very well some of the many changes in operating practices, staffing, technology, information systems, and organization structure that affected the role, responsibilities and job requirements of a Train Dispatcher as of 2003. Overall, a study of the entire interview and the supporting "displays" of information used by Dispatchers would serve any "student" of rail operations very well.

"I started out (as a Dispatcher) in the Alliance, Nebraska, office that covered all of the Powder River coal lines....One of the basic conflicts and /or frustrations occurs because decisions have to be made based on current information...whether they later turn out to be right or wrong. Often there isn't a lot of time to ponder or meditate. No decision will often mean more delay. It is very easy to hindsight something a few hours later.

"Dispatchers have all kinds of personalities, but those with a combative or argumentative disposition don't get a lot of cooperation in tight spots or difficult situations. Sometimes conflicts and tempers overflow out of frustration more than anything. I remember a piece of advice I received in my early stages of training: 'Sometimes you have to stick (i.e., delay a train) somebody to make the railroad run right.'

"The many clerks and operator jobs have now been almost completely eliminated....One advantage in having operators and clerks was an extra set of eyes and ears at various locations. Not having clerks at terminals adds about one hour to terminal delay....Recently some yards have been eliminating the Yardmaster positions. A lot of the clerical work has now been split between the remaining crafts. There are some yards that have no clerks or yard engines on some shifts, thereby making the Dispatcher the Yardmaster. Also, we used to have Assistant Chief jobs that did a lot of the paperwork that we (Dispatchers) do now. Most of this work is done by the Chief Dispatcher now, which makes them spend most of their time tied up on the phone....

“We have one job on the Powder River area – the Orin line – that has two people one each shift. One does the paperwork and handles the phone calls while the other does only train movement related tasks....Since there are no clerks (or Yardmasters) in either Greybull or Casper (we have them but they are van drivers hauling crews), I am in charge of the yard in Greybull. I get a printout from the night switch job that tells me where the pickups and setouts are and what tracks are clear. From there it’s up to me to get the trans moved and the work done...It often takes 45 minutes of my first hour but I have to do it right away because the trains are on their way to Greybull.”

Dave asked Henry what advice he would give a new Dispatcher. Henry replied, “Work safely and ask a lot of questions. This job is easier said than done...Sometimes attitudes can make a difference. Naturally all of us function better on good days, but this job requires a person to function at 100 per cent even on the worst of days.”

Meet the dispatcher: Henry Frick

Meet Henry Frick, the voice heard over the radios on the Grand Forks Subdivision.

Q: Which desk do you work?

A: I work second trick Grand Forks and have been on that job for approximately 3 1/2 years.

Q: Have you worked on any other desks in the past?

A: Before Grand Forks I worked Casper/Montana Branches, which covered Wyoming and Montana. I also worked Fort Worth, Dallas and Houston on the Fort Worth and Denver Railway Company lines, which included dispatching the Trinity Rail commuter trains when they first started.

Q: How long have you worked for the railroad?

A: I began my career in 1979 as a conductor and locomotive engineer out of Gillette, Wyo., and Edgemont, S.D. There was not an Extra Board at the time, so to hold my seniority I spent two weeks in Guernsey, Wyo., and worked a night work train job that delivered ballast and supplies to the Burlington Northern and its contractors when the Gillette to Orin line was being built. Before moving to Wyoming to work for the railroad, I lived in Greenwich, Conn. My previous work experience included freight clerk for a trucking company and the mailing and literature distribution for a nonprofit education group. I served in the military from 1969 to 1971, which included one year in Vietnam.

Q: How long have you been a dispatcher?

A: I began dispatching in February 1986 in Alliance, Neb., and mostly worked the Powder River coal lines.

Q: What make the territory you work unique?

A: I think what makes the Grand Forks territory different is that we have a lot of area with both mainline and branch lines. I can't prove it, but I believe we have the most territory in the Twin Cities Division in terms of mileage. The job is all track warrant except for a small piece of CTC at Grand Forks. It is combined with the Superior desk on second and third shifts. We have a mixture of train traffic — grain, coal, merchandise, through trains A, B, D and three turnaround locals out of Grand Forks. We also run the Amtrak Empire Builder.

Q: Why is your work important?

A: Our work is important and has to be done safely and by the rules. At any given time, we are responsible for people's lives and large amounts of equipment and property.

Q: What can employees in the field do to make your job run smoothly, thus improving theirs?

A: I have found that the attitudes of the men and women I work with to be fantastic. They are interested in getting the job done and working with the dispatching team.

Q: What do you enjoy about your job?

A: Every day is different and some days are better than others. Almost every day there are situations that require everybody to work together. I usually find that we can get the job done if I explain to everyone what we need to do.

Q: What are your interests outside work?

A: I'm interested in transportation and military history. I have a large collection of railroad slides and timetables from the 1960s to present. I have employee timetable issues from the Burlington Railroad, Burlington Northern and BNSF. I also have some from a May 1968 series that were issued for the first time for the BN merger, but had to be called back due to the Supreme Court, postponing the merger. I also have a complete set of Penn Central Railroad employee timetables — 70-plus issues — and the last employee timetables from the pre-Conrail railroads in the east as well as a set of first and last Conrail issues. If anybody wants to see a slideshow, I have approximately 8,000 railroad slides from the late 1960s to present.

Q: Brag a little — tell us about your family.

A: My wife's name is Pam, and we have three grown children, two daughters and one son. My son is working for Union Pacific as a conductor.



Henry Frick, dispatcher

Grand Forks

Note: Frick retired at the end of January.

The End of Train Location Lineups

by Henry Frick

One of the last vestiges of the train order dispatching era on class one railroads is about to vanish. A combination of F.R.A. directives and improved communications technology will spell the end of the track car lineup, more recently known as train location lineup, on the BNSF Railroad. At the beginning of 2003 lineups were used on only a few small subdivisions. They were eliminated on the Cody line on February 15th, and finally the last train location lineup was issued in Nebraska shortly thereafter.

Lineups were once a vital part of the timetable—train order dispatching method of train operation. They were developed individually by railroads around 1900. The Standard Code of Operating Rules, one of the early rule books, did not address the movement and protection of employees working on the track. The only information employees had was from timetables and flagmen. Lineups furnished information to track maintenance employees, bridge forces, communications linemen and other employees that worked on or around the main track. Train dispatchers issued lineups which listed all trains on the road, on duty at a terminal, or expected to run on a territory within a specific time. The information on the movement of trains, especially trains running late, trains running in sections, extra trains operating could be included in a lineup.

Almost all railroads in the U.S. issued lineups except some of the busier Eastern roads, where a block could be established between interlocking stations and a written authority issued to a motor car operator (New York Central and Pennsylvania). Lineups were issued by the train dispatcher at designated times. Some, such as the Wabash, issued a lineup which was only good for three hours. Other railroads, like the C.B. and Q., for example, issued lineups twice a day, around 7 AM and 12:30 PM. Once the lineup was issued, the times could not be changed until the next lineup, or after the lineup time limit expired. If a train was operated that was not shown on the lineup the train had to proceed at reduced speed and whistle freely where vision

was obstructed. Some railroads would not allow this practice. If an employee was called out in the middle of the night, the dispatcher had to either issue a lineup or hold all trains until the employee completed his work or cleared the main track.

Lineups were traditionally given to the station agent or operator. Employees receiving copies of a lineup were required to sign for them. This information allowed maintenance employees to plan their work without interfering with train movements. A lineup allowed a much higher level of safety than the “dodge ‘em” method. Failure to properly flag by maintenance employees could produce the same disastrous results as failure of a trainman—flagman—an accident.

As station agent and operator jobs vanished lineups were put out directly from the dispatcher to maintenance employees. When CTC was implemented a direct written track authority was issued to employees by the dispatcher. As the F.R.A. developed additional rules for roadway worker protection the idea of employees using the “dodge ‘em” method was considered unsafe. Improved methods of direct communication in non-signaled territories allow movement and work authorities to be issued directly by the dispatcher. A change to the General Code of Operating rules—a new rule 11.5—a new rule was added to allow employees using a lineup to communicate directly with trains listed on the lineup. Prior to this rule, maintenance employees were not allowed to talk to trains to determine their location. A further advance in technology resulted in BNSF dispatchers using a recording device to put the lineup out every morning. The lineup was copied from the recording by employees.

The protection of maintenance employees is now equal in priority to the protection of trains. Directives from the F.R.A. concerning worker protection have set a deadline for the elimination of lineups, so memories of train orders and lineups will soon vanish from the railroad scene. They may not be missed by today’s maintenance employees, but may be missed by those who have memories or have read stories of historical railroading.



One of my first jobs was when I was forced to Guernsey WY in September 1979. One of the jobs was a nightly work train delivering ballast and supplies to contractors working on the Orin line before the line was finished and turned over to BN. Those of us who were forced there had approximately six-eight weeks on the railroad and the Conductor had a 1949 seniority date. This was all dark territory, REAL DARK in more ways and no radios. Job worked mostly at night, took this shot at Bill, WY, on one of my trips driving back. Location is about MP 78. Today there is triple and four tracks in some spots.

Credit: Henry Frick collection



Directors Special Gillette WY May 1980 operated Seattle to Lincoln, NE. Train is at Gillette early A.M. for service and fuel so can make trip down Orin line in daylight. Had two brand new SD40-2 engines just arrived from EMD.

Credit: Henry Frick collection



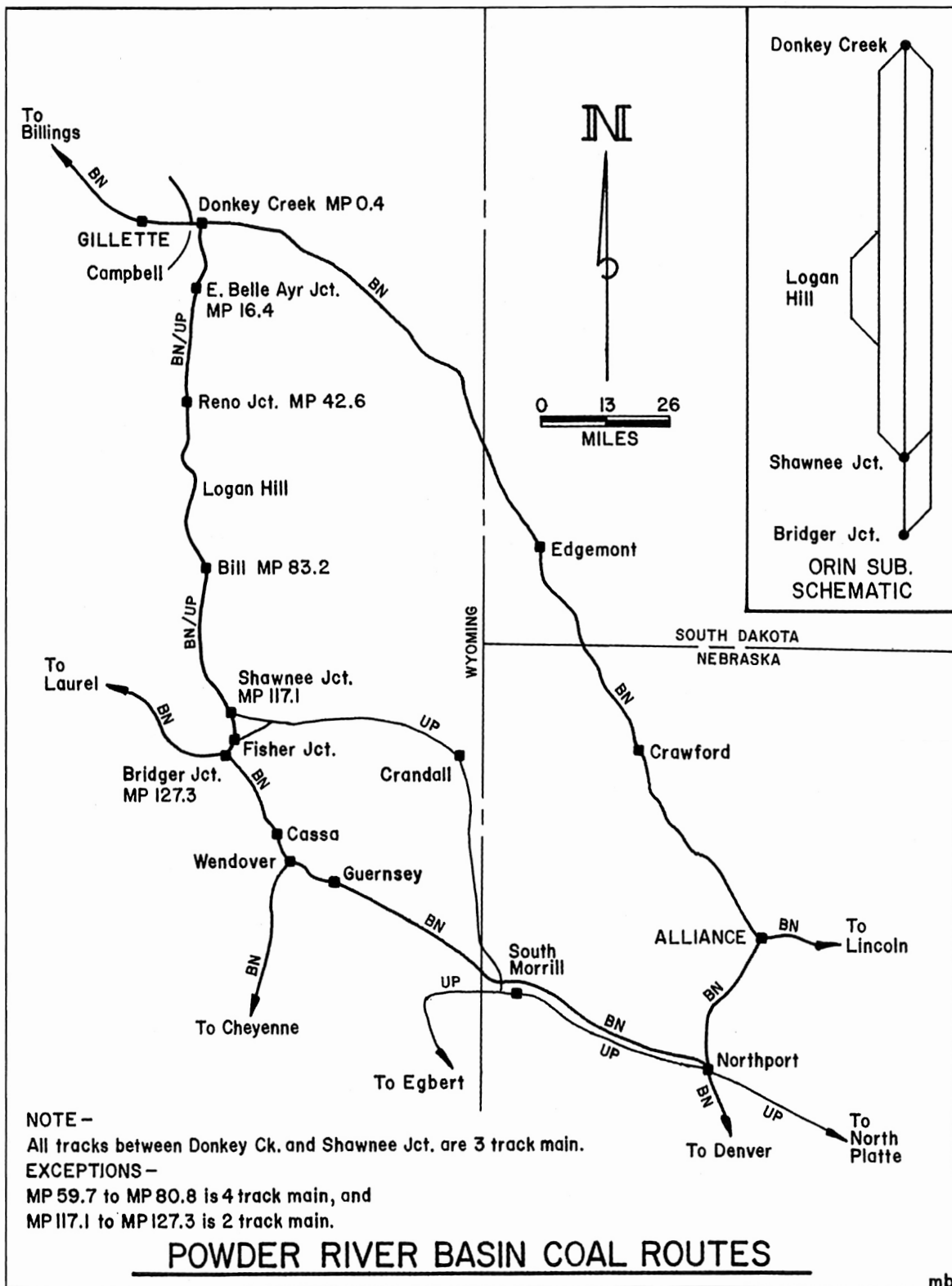
Odd consist - actually a fuel conservation test consist. Engines were connected to test car behind to monitor fuel consumption on loaded coal train and wind resistance and fuel consumption on empty unit trains.

Credit: Henry Frick collection



Coal train on the move on the three-track main line between Donkey Creek and Orin Jct., the world's highest tonnage railroad, handling over 400 million gross tons per year at its peak on the superbly maintained track, bridges and signal system. A fourth main track of 21.1 miles is in service near Logan.

Credit: k2radio.com AM 1030, Wyoming radio station



Credit: Mike Bartemstein



This train is handling 50-some loads of ballast through downtown Minot. Very soon, a fleet of six westbound trains ran, followed by a fleet of five east-bound trains, and then a steady parade of trains. Thumbs up to everyone involved in the clean-up, it being the fourth of July.

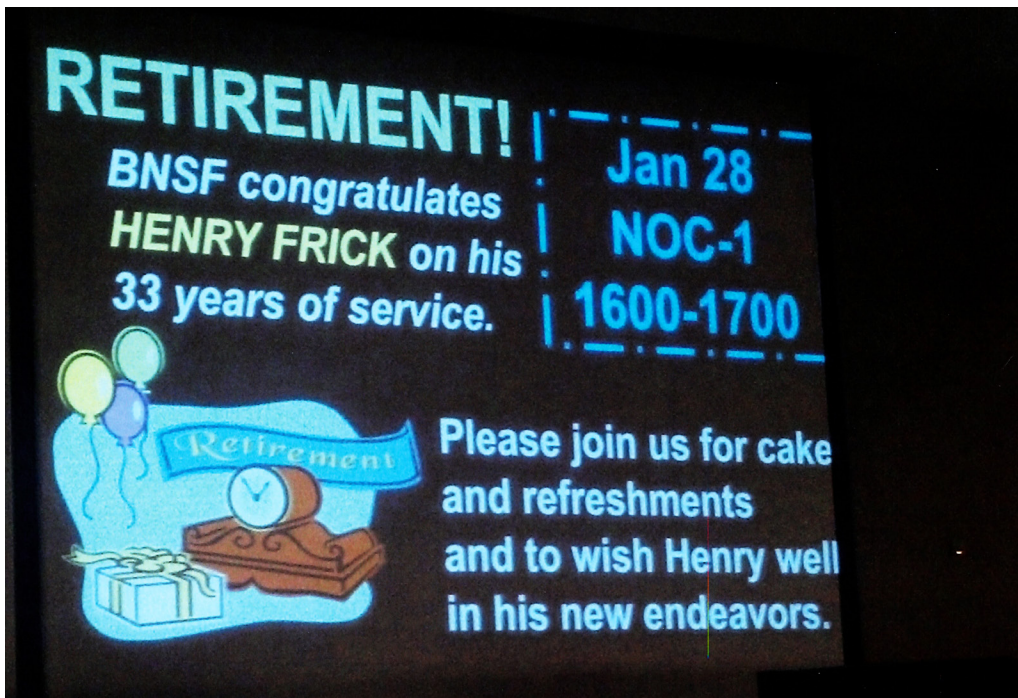
In viewing this picture of high water at Minot, Henry recalled a day on which high water washed out the track at the lake called Devils Lake that is a short distance west of the community named Devils Lake. Amtrak No. 7, the westbound Empire Builder, was approaching the lake and had to be stopped by order of the track maintenance force at the point of the high water. The train had to be backed to Devils Lake the siding was blocked with cars. It took two hours to move the units, one by one, after uncoupling the cables for multiple unit operation and for the train's lighting and temperature control systems. By the time the train was run back to Fargo, to begin a detour move on BNSF's

Surrey cut-off, No. 7 was about 18 hours late in arriving at Minot (source: correspondence with Henry Frick and Bob Johnston, "Riding Through the Flood, Part I," Trains blog posted by Matt Van Hattem, July 21, 2011, photo by Dennis C. Opferman, Henry Frick collection).



BNSF Network Operations Center where Henry worked as a Dispatcher.

Credit: BNSF Railway Company newsletters



Light display at the gala put on by fellow workers at the Network Operations Center on Henry's last day of work.

Credit: BNSF Railway Company newsletters

Frick Makes Trains More Than A Career

The late Steve Jobs once said, "Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do."

There is perhaps no greater example of this than recent BNSF retiree Henry Frick.

Frick's passion for trains began at an early age. He remembers his mother taking him to the train station to meet his father, who commuted from New York to their home in Connecticut.

"It's funny, I loved trains, but my railroading career sort of came about by accident," Frick said. "I wasn't going to take a railroad job, because I wasn't sure mixing a career and a hobby would work. But, I figured I would try and if I didn't like it, I could always quit. In the end, it worked out very well."

Frick's railroading career began as a conductor and locomotive engineer out of Gillette, Wyo., in 1979. He clearly remembers his first day riding into Gillette.

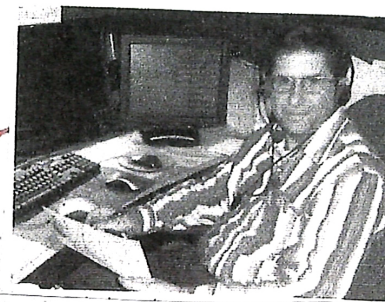
"I had almost everything I owned in the back of my car," Frick said. "It was one of those moments when you realize there's no turning back. So, I decided to stick it out and see where it would take me."

Frick began running work trains on the

newly constructed Orin Line and became a locomotive engineer in 1980. In 1986, Frick began dispatching in Alliance, Neb., mostly working the Powder River coal lines. Then, in 1995, he moved to Fort Worth and began working the various Texas routes and the Casper and Montana Branches, before ending his career as the Grand Forks Subdivision's second-shift dispatcher.

Through all the years working the railroads, Frick's passion for trains and railroad history never diminished. It wasn't long before he became known for his collection of railroad history and memorabilia.

To date, Frick has been credited in several publications for assisting writers and providing photographs, interviews and information. Pieces of his collection have appeared in *Classic Trains Magazine*, *Friends of the Burlington Northern*, the *Penn Central Railroad Historical Society's* publication, "POST" and the *National Association of Timetable Collectors' publication*, "The Timetable Collector". Many of Frick's slides also appear on Christopher Palmieri's page of <http://www.rpic-turearchives.net>.



Though his full-time days dispatching have ended, Frick's days working with trains are far from over. He continues to collect and proudly display his life's work, helping fuel the passion of fellow railroad enthusiasts and teach others about railroad history.

Asked what words of wisdom he would share with the next generation of railroaders, Frick answered without hesitation, "Keep your eyes and ears open and take advantage of all the new experiences and information people have to offer, because you can learn something new every day."



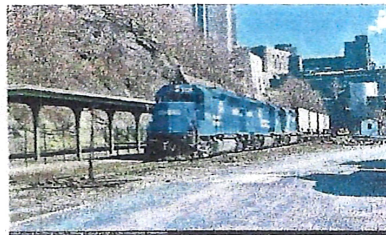
Henry Frick is honored for his years of service by Assistant Corridor Superintendent Duane Buckley.



Gillette, Wyo., 1979 — the beginning of Henry Frick's career.



NH 2025 and 2027 arrive at their destination with New York to Springfield train No. 66, the northbound "Ambassador." This scene was taken just five days after the New Haven-Penn Central merger.



Another favorite from Henry Frick's slide collection is a photo of Conrail intermodal TV 10 in West Point, N.Y., in April 1979.



A Conrail local working on the New Haven Line in Port Chester, N.Y., in 1983. This is the location where young Henry Frick saw his first train.

Questions? Comments? Please email JointLeadershipTeam@bnsf.com

Credit: BNSF Company newsletter for employees, title of publication and date not shown in author's collection.



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