

LONG FORM (for historical record) Entertainment Report for October 3, 2015

October 3, 2015. The Bachelder's NRHS Convention Adventure Part 2. Leonard and Nancy Bachelder attended the 2013 NRHS convention in Alaska, making a 6-week trip through Canada and Alaska, of which we saw part 1 in March. Part 2 picked up as Len and Nancy rode in a 15 passenger van from the Yukon Territory into Alaska. The first photo was of the customs house at Poker Creek, Alaska, the most northerly land border port in the USA. Then we saw Chicken, Alaska, once somewhat populous as a Gold Rush town, but now of estimated population 10 to 20 (7 according to the US Census of 2010); it was supposed to be named Ptarmigan, but people could not agree on the spelling, so the US Post Office had good reason to believe that people in general would not be able to spell the proposed name, and refused to accept it; thus, the town wound up with its current name. Gold mining still takes place in the surrounding area, but the population of Chicken is occupied with operating the town as a tourist trap. Next stop was Fairbanks, with still over a week before the convention, so Len and Nancy went to the University of Alaska, where they found out about removal of Aleutian Islanders during World War II. We also saw a monument in downtown Fairbanks to American pilots who brought airplanes to Fairbanks for Russian pilots to pick up for use during World War II. Len showed us a photo of the Alaska Pipeline (much of which is elevated a short distance above ground) and map of the Alaska Pipeline route, then a device (known as a "pig") used to clean Alaska Pipeline on display at the museum, mounted for display in a cut away section of pipe. At University of Alaska's Large Animal Research Center, we got to see musk oxen (which were shy and not easily photographed) and reindeer (which were willing to come up for close-ups). Fairbanks is Alaska's 2nd largest city (incorporated Fairbanks population 32,324; Fairbanks North Star Borough population 100,807). It is served by Metropolitan Area Commuter Systems (operation started in 1977), with 10 bus routes coded by color (9 at the time of Len and Nancy's visit), some of which connect with bus routes of the University of Alaska at Fairbanks (also color-coded, to match the colors of connecting routes) and Fred Meyer East. The bus routes do not have signage to indicate their destination (the signs just indicate the line), but they all connect downtown. All routes accept senior citizens for free. (Note: Some web sites still have outdated information about MACS and list only 6 bus routes.)

Here, Len and Nancy got the first of several rides in this trip on the Alaska Railroad. As the mainstay of its passenger business, the Alaska Railroad caters to cruise ship passengers, and hauls bi-level cars in cruise line livery, such as the Holland America "McKinley Explorer" car we saw first, and similar cars owned by Princess Lines (ten total, built in 2003 - 2005 by Colorado Railcar, and named for various Alaska locations); these cars have 88 seats on the upper level and 44 seats on the lower level, which also includes a dining area. The cruise line coaches are attached to the train after the Alaska Railroad's own coaches, of which we also saw considerable numbers, often forming very long trains, as we got to see from a photo taken from the rear of a Denali Star train going around a curve. We got to see the Fairbanks station built in 1977 next to the Alaska Railroad's freight yard. The Alaska Railroad has revenue motive power of vintage from the late 1960s up through the 2000s: eight GP38-2 (at least five being rebuilds from Penn Central locomotives originally built in 1968 - 1969), fifteen GP40-2, and twenty eight SD40MAC. The Alaska Railroad also has ex-Amtrak F40PH locomotives that no longer provide traction but are often used as cab control cars and head-end power generators. Len showed us one of several coal-fired power plants (advertised as "clean coal") in Alaska that burn coal mined within the state, which is valued for its relatively low sulfur content; the plant in this photo started operating in 1998. We got to see another transportation provider -- Alaska sled dogs, which we saw in the breeding kennel, including a large number of puppies. At an intermediate point in the train trip, Len and Nancy (and many others on the Denali Star) got off the train for a 48 hour layover to visit Denali National Park via tour bus while the train continued on. (Denali National Park was originally Mount McKinley National Park, founded in 1917, and renamed in 1980.) At Denali National Park, we saw photos of the terrain and wildlife, including moose, caribou, Dall sheep (at a great distance, high on steep mountainsides to avoid predators), and a grizzly bear

(at a distance, but down in brush); after this, we got another view of the Denali Star train before getting on board to continue the journey to Anchorage. The park scenery features the highest mountain in North America, Denali (formerly known as Mount McKinley), which reaches 20,320 feet above sea level (20,310 according to the US Geological Survey of September 2, 2015), as well as other tall mountains, although all of these often have their tops obscured in clouds. (Denali is one of the native Alaskan names for the mountain; it got the name Mount McKinley in 1896 from a gold prospector supporting candidate and future US president William McKinley; the state of Alaska changed the official name back to Denali in 1975, and the US Department of the Interior changed the official name back to Denali in August 2015. Relative to the land around its base, which is from 1,000 to 3,000 feet above sea level, Denali is actually taller than Everest, which starts from terrain 13,000 to 17,100 feet above sea level.) Private automobiles are only allowed about 15 miles into the park; to see the rest, you have to hike or take one of the aforementioned tour buses on the treacherous single lane road (which does not even have guard rails).

Next stop was Anchorage, where we saw a stuffed and mounted 0-4-0ST steam locomotive (Alaska Railroad Number 1) built by Davenport in 1907, originally for Panama Canal Railroad construction, and then shipped to the Alaska Railroad (originally the Alaska Engineering Commission Railroad) in 1917 -- this locomotive was built narrow gauge, but converted to standard gauge for use in Alaska. In 1903, a series of private companies had started trying to build a railroad from Seward (at the time Alaska's premier port city) north to Palmer and then Healy to bring coal from the mines to the port, to serve the US Navy. Anchorage originated not from interest in nearby resources, but from the US Congress-mandated construction of a railroad into the interior of Alaska, starting with Alaska Engineering Commission's choice of the site in 1914 for a railroad construction port for the building of the Alaska Railroad, which was founded with the purchase of the bankrupt Alaska Northern Railroad, the latest in the aforementioned series of mining railroads, which at the time had only 70 miles of (3' gauge) track. We also saw a photo of an "Anchorage Trolley" tour bus (actually rubber-tired and powered by internal combustion, and which Len reported was not worth the cost and time, being entirely a tourist trap operation). After this, Len showed us some photos of more useful transportation: the rail-served Anchorage container terminal, and the Anchorage "People Mover" bus system of 14 lines (13 at the time of Len and Nancy's visit), which started operations in 1974, and which also serves the suburbs Eagle River and Birchwood. The city and Unified Borough of Anchorage officially include a land area of almost 2,000 square miles, larger than the state of Rhode Island, so in addition to the modern and prosperous inhabited areas, it includes considerable uninhabited wilderness area, of which we got to see several photos, as well as small villages such as Girdwood, which was relocated to high ground after being destroyed in the 1964 Alaska Earthquake (see below), and which serves a popular ski resort. The official population of Anchorage is 291,826, and the estimated population is 300,950. Anchorage is undergoing a feasibility study for a light rail system and commuter rail service to the following cities: Whittier, Palmer, Seward, Wasilla, and Eagle River (however, this is not sufficient reason to assume that such a system will be built). Interleaved with this, he showed us the Captain Cook memorial, which commemorated the exploration in 1778 by one of Captain Cook's officers (William Bligh) to try to find the Northwest Passage, which instead led to the identification of Knik Arm and Turnagain Arm (named because of the need to turn around again), near where Anchorage was later founded.

Len recommended seeing two educational movies shown in Anchorage, about the Klondike Gold Rush (the best of several movies Len and Nancy saw on this subject), and about the 1964 Alaska Earthquake (the most powerful in North American recorded history and the second most powerful in Earth recorded history, being of magnitude 9.2, and generating tsunamis of up to 220 feet high locally). Len showed us the M/V Ptarmigan, a tour boat that he and Nancy rode on for a tour of Portage Lake, affording us views of Porter's Glacier, waterfalls fed by other glaciers, and small icebergs in Portage Lake. The tour made a stop at the Alaska Wildlife Conservation Center on the way back to Anchorage; views here included elk, brown bears, and musk oxen. Back in Anchorage, Len showed us a very large mural depicting the history of Anchorage on the side of a multi-story building. Len and Nancy went on a tour that included the Anchorage Museum. From

the Anchorage Grand Hotel, Len took a photo of the Alaska Railroad Station, and a Glacier Discovery train (of reduced length due to the impending end of the tourist season) that goes to Whittier and Spencer Glacier. (As we saw in another Alaska Railroad train photo, even some of the Alaska Railroad's near-end-of-season trains, including the Denali Star, are still large enough to require two SD70MAC locomotives for traction.) He also showed us a preserved 2-8-0 steam locomotive on display (Alaska Railroad Number 556, built by Baldwin Locomotive Works in 1943, one of twelve sent to Alaska to relieve a motive power shortage during World War II, while many others of the same type were sent to Europe for US Army service). We also got to see a more complete view of the aforementioned Denali Star: it was hauled by two SD70MAC locomotives, followed by a baggage car, two high-level coaches, a diner, a "Wilderness Cafe" car, a dome coach, five Holland America "McKinley Explorer" cars, and three Princess Lines bilevel cars built by Colorado Railcar in 2005, including a bilevel observation car at the rear. As well as getting passenger coaches and locomotives of recent vintage, the Alaska Railroad also has new infrastructure construction -- as an example of this, Len showed us a photo (taken from the train running on the current freight route) of a tunnel that had been bypassed in 2005. The Alaska Railroad also has significant freight. Coal (such as that dispensed by the Usibelli Coal Tipple that Len showed us later in the show) constitutes approximately 20% of this -- Alaska coal being valued for its relatively low sulfur content, and used for the power plants there, of which Len also showed us multiple examples, as well as being exported to other countries such as Korea. Oil products from the Fleet Hills Refinery (see below) account for another approximately 40% of the freight traffic. The Alaska Railroad is owned by the State of Alaska, but is profitable in its own right.

NRHS convention activities began on September 14, 2013, with the first tour being by boat (Discovery III, operated by the Binkley family since 1955). Remote locations in Alaska often requires float planes, such as a modified Piper Cub that Len photographed on this tour; or sled dogs (see above and below), such as those at the Trail Breaker Kennel that Len also photographed on this tour, where musher Susan Butcher raised and trained sled dogs, and with her lead dog "Granite" won the Iditarod Trail dogsled race (see below) from Anchorage to Nome four times, including three years in a row, and in 1988 she and her husband won every race they entered; she led the only party ever to reach the summit of Mount McKinley by dog sled); after she died of leukemia in 2006, her husband continues the tradition of raising and training sled dogs. Continuing this boat tour, Len got photos of a reproduction of a native Alaskan (Athabaskan) village ("Chena Village", built on the site of an actual Athabaskan village in 1900), showing various historical eras, including infrastructure such as a fish processing area, and a trading post. After this, we saw a memorial to Susan Butcher's sled dog "Granite", and then the tour group took a break for lunch. The tour resumed, now by bus, going into Pioneer Park. Here, Len took several photos of a 237 foot sternwheel river steamboat, the S/S Nenana (named after the city where the ship was built for the Alaska Railroad in 1933), which has been restored externally, but retains only part of its internal equipment; it was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1989 and now serves as a permanently berthed museum that includes a diorama of the area (of which Len showed us a photo); it is the largest sternwheel steamboat west of the Mississippi, and the second largest wooden steamboat remaining in the world. Next we saw Pioneer Park's Crooked Creek and Whiskey Island Railroad. This is a narrow (3 foot) gauge park railroad that includes a working original locomotive (Number 1) from the Tanana Valley Railroad (originally the Tanana Mines Railway), which was eventually taken over in part by the Alaska Engineering Commission Railroad (eventually the Alaska Railroad) and converted to standard gauge via a dual gauge intermediate phase lasting from 1917 to 1930. This locomotive was the first steam locomotive to operate in Alaska, an 0-4-0ST built by Porter in 1899 originally for a coal mining railway in the Yukon Territory, transported by steamboat in 1905 to the Tanana Mines Railway (as it was known at the time), which was a gold mining railroad serving Chatanika (in Fairbanks North Star Borough) and the area north of (and eventually extended into) Fairbanks, which had been founded as a trading post only a few years previously (in 1901), when the planning of today's Alaska Railroad and the founding of Anchorage (two causally linked events, as noted above) were still several years in the future. Note: This locomotive is not to be confused with Alaska Railroad Number 1 mentioned above. In 1923, when the Alaska Railroad took over, it was deemed too small and taken out of service; after what had become a narrow

gauge branch line was abandoned, this locomotive was taken to Fairbanks and put on display at the station there until 1965, and then restored cosmetically in the Alaska Railroad's shops and donated to Alaskaland (which as noted above, later became Pioneer Park); this locomotive underwent a full restoration from 1991 to 1999, and is now used to pull open cars of tourists on a narrow gauge loop in the Tenana Valley Railroad Museum part of Pioneer Park (the museum also has a replica of a locomotive of similar vintage and size but somewhat different appearance, as well as a replica of a Tanana Valley Railroad station). We also got to see some historic downtown Fairbanks buildings that had been moved to Pioneer Park, and a steam shovel of similar vintage to Tenana Valley Railroad Number 1 that had been used for Panama Canal railroad construction and then for Tenana Valley Railroad construction, along with an American Railway Express delivery truck of unknown authenticity.

Next stop on the NRHS special train ride was North Pole, Alaska, within Fairbanks North Star Borough (southeast of Fairbanks), and a photo of the first publicly accessible passenger train to journey there; the line is being extended further eastward to Delta Junction, and extension of passenger service on the same line has also been proposed. This town is incorporated separately from Fairbanks (Alaska's boroughs being approximately equivalent to counties), and was named North Pole when incorporated in 1953, in a failed attempt to attract toy manufacturers there (however, it does have a Santa Claus House with a large statue of Santa Claus, unfortunately not visible from the rail line); North Pole also has street light poles in the shape and livery of candy canes; the train provided a stationary photo stop at the "Spirit of North Pole" sign. East of Fairbanks is the Fleet Hills Refinery, which accounts for 45% of the freight traffic on the Alaska Railroad; however, the rails are too light for the Alaska Railroad passenger cars and locomotives, so instead of the refinery, we saw a run-by photo (part of a double run-by) of the NRHS special train at the rail switch and siding at Chapados (which is close enough to the refinery to see some of it). The consist of this train was GP40-2 Number 3003 built for the Alaska Railroad in 1975, GP40-2 Number 3013 built in 1978, high level coach 654 from Colorado Railcar in 2007, café car 301 and coach 205, both built by Daewoo in 1989, dome coach 521 built by Budd for the Spokane, Portland and Seattle in 1954, coach 204 built by Pullman Standard for the Union Pacific in 1950, Budd-built dome coach 522 originally Northern Pacific and dome coach 501 built by ACF in 1955 for the Union Pacific, and finally ex-Amtrak F40PH Number 32, used as a cab control car and to supply head-end power. (Note that even though the Fleet Hills Refinery is east of Fairbanks and Anchorage is south of Fairbanks, rail travel between the Fleet Hills Refinery and Anchorage on existing tracks requires going through Fairbanks; no rail shortcut connection is available between Fleet Hills Refinery and Anchorage.) Next, we saw Fairbanks station, featuring another similar train put together to make a pair of short trips south along the Alaska Railroad to Saulich, and a short Princess Lines train (just two coaches and a diner pulled behind a SD70MAC).

Departing on the NRHS special train, we next saw the Nenana Ice Classic tower, which has a clock set to stop when the ice moves on the Tanana River, thereby moving a tripod on the ice (300 feet from the shore) that is connected to the tower; people make bets on when the ice will move in the spring, a practice which started with Alaska Railroad construction workers in 1917, with a betting pool totaling \$801. Steamboat service owned by the Alaska Railroad and by the British Yukon Navigation Company (subsidiary of the White Pass and Yukon Railway) from Nenana provided service west, east, and north along the rivers in the area (mainly along the Yukon and Tanana rivers) until rail connections to Anchorage could be completed. Before this, travel between interior Alaska to the Pacific Ocean did not proceed along rivers flowing south to the vicinity of Anchorage or Seward (no direct river route being available, since the Yukon River Watershed runs approximately east to west), but instead along the Yukon River via Dawson (Yukon Territory, Canada) to Whitehorse (also in the Yukon Territory), where a connection was available to the White Pass and Yukon Railway; these are areas which we saw in part 1 of this show (in March 2015). Sporadic steamboat operation was also available from the mouth of the Yukon River in western Alaska. We got to see various views of the Nenana River canyon, including a photo stop in which the train discharged passengers at Nenana Station, and backed onto the Mears Bridge for a runby; this bridge is 704 feet long, and named for Colonel Frederick

Mears of the Alaska Engineering Commission; it was opened on February 22, 1923; it was the final bit of the Alaska Railroad main line to be completed; it saw the first visit of a US president to Alaska, that of Warren G Harding in July 15, 1923 to drive the ceremonial golden spike (a bit later, we got to see a photo of the tablet commemorating this). Nearby in Nenana, we saw some derelict coaches, possibly intended for preservation by an unknown organization. Nenana Station is one of very few Alaska's Railroad original stations still standing; it was built in 1922 when the Alaska Railroad was completed from Seward through Nenana; it now houses the Alaska Railroad Museum and a gift shop, and is on the National Register of Historic Places. The summertime Denali Star normally does not stop at this station, but the winter (September through May) AuRoRa train regularly stops there. Back in 1922, the north side of the river had a rail connection to points further north on the Tanana Valley Railroad (already acquired by the Alaska Railway), but no connection to Nenana or the Alaska Railway line on the south side of the river, so passengers and freight, went over the river by ferry in the summer, while in the winter tracks were laid on the ice to enable trains from Fairbanks to reach Nenana.

We got to hear of the Diphtheria Epidemic of the winter of 1925 in Nome, Alaska, for which treatment serum had to be transported by dogsled, since air transport in the winter was judged to be too risky. The dogsled teams made the 674 mile journey in 127.5 hours (9:00 PM on January 27 to 5:30 AM on February 2) in subzero weather (-25 °F = -32 °C); normally dogsled teams carrying the mail would make the journey in 25 days (600 hours). This race to save lives succeeded in keeping the official death toll down to 5 or 7 (depending upon the historical source), although probably many deaths of Alaska natives in surrounding villages went unreported. This race to save lives also later inspired the Iditarod Trail sled dog race, which was first held in 1973. After this, we got to see the aforementioned tablet commemorating the visit of president Warren G. Harding, and then a coal train loading at the aforementioned Usibelli Coal Tipple (although the loading spot itself was not visible in that photo), hauled by SD70MAC Number 3003, which had been one of two hauling the NRHS special train the day before. After a photo of an unused engine house, we got to see Usibelli Coal Tipple itself and the coal-fired power plant at Healy (again, advertised as "clean coal"). As part of more Nenana River canyon scenery, Len showed us the Moody Bridge on the Parks Highway, completed in 1971, which provided direct highway access from Anchorage to Fairbanks for the first time, and which provides highway access to Denali National Park; the train stopped here for four runbys, and after arriving at Denali Park Station, backed up and "arrived" a second time for photography purposes. Immediately after this, the train moved onwards to pose on Riley's Creek Bridge, which is 900 feet long and has twelve spans, and is the second highest on the railroad; it was built in Pennsylvania and shipped through the Panama Canal on 24 rail cars; it arrived at its final destination in January 1922, and was assembled in less than a month in the dead of winter, and the first train passed over it on February 5, 1922. MassDOT could use a lesson from this construction feat, and the long walk down from the train to the photography vantage point and the even more strenuous walk back up was well worth it, and gave time for other passengers to get out of Denali Park Station, thus enabling a clear photo of it (in contrast to when a Denali Star train discharges cruise ship passengers, which makes the station seem like a Green Line subway station during rush hour).

Upon resuming travel towards Anchorage the next day, Len took some photographs of terrain within Denali National Park from the train, including Hurricane Gulch Station, which is the northern terminus of the Hurricane Turn flag stop train that travels the same route as the tour train and provides the only service to the tiny villages and camps between Hurricane and Talkeetna for four days each week in the summer months; we also saw a meet with a Holland America train (due to the impending end of the tourist season, shrunk to only four high level coaches). At the Sherman siding at mile 257, we got to see an isolated blue house of the Lovel family, inhabited year-round since the 1960s and accessible only by way of the aforementioned Hurricane Turn flag stop train; the house has a sign that labels it as "Sherman City Hall". We saw a ghost town (Curry), which originally had the Curry Hotel (built in 1923) as a railroad stopover point; the hotel fell on hard times after trains got faster and no longer stopped there, and then burned down in 1957. Despite becoming a ghost town after the hotel burned down, Curry has acquired a turnaround loop to serve the stone quarry that the Alaska Railroad has built there; the tour train

backed into the loop for mileage collection (and presumably photography) purposes. We saw a rotary snowplow, work car, and caboose on display there. After this was Talkeetna (current population 900, and established in 1916 as a railroad construction base), which has an Alaska Railroad yard office, and which has station stops for both the Denali Star and AuRoRa trains (the Denali Star stop, built in 2006 to handle large numbers of cruise ship passengers going to resorts in the area, is about half a mile south of the AuRoRa stop; related to this, we got to see a photo of the Fairview Inn, opened in 1923, which is a staging point for excursions to Denali/Mount McKinley and for fishing trips). Talkeetna is the southern terminus of the Hurricane Turn flag stop train.

Next stop was back in Anchorage for the convention itself, for which we got to see photos of the hotel itself and then the freight rail yard there, and then the Alaska Railroad Operations and Training Center. Then we got to see another train ride again including Colorado Railcar bilevel tour cars built in 2001 - 2002), this time to Seward, which began as a Russian fur trading post in 1793, and got the beginning of railroad construction in 1903; this line was originally built between 1903 and 1909 by the Alaska Central Railroad, but not completed beyond 51 miles until the Alaska Railroad took it over. Seward still has freight exchange between the Alaska Railroad and ocean freight ships, including the export of Alaskan coal, and is the 9th largest fishing town in the USA. At this point and others in the show, the Alaska Railroad train made frequent backing moves to allow runby photos and mileage collection branch runs -- not only is the Alaska Railroad state-run yet profitable, it also provides good customer service. The line to Seward originally had several tunnels, and then had a loop added to allow trains to gain altitude while bypassing glaciers, and then (after subsequent glacier recession, especially of Bartlett Glacier) had a straighter surface line installed (cutting off 1.1 miles and some tunnels, and providing easier grades). We also saw Spencer Glacier, near which a Spencer Glacier Whistle Stop has been constructed (even including wheelchair accessibility) for tourists to hike, picnic, and even camp near the glacier, which is in an otherwise inaccessible part of Chugach National Forest -- the Chugach Mountain Range rises very steeply from the shore, leaving little room for rails or roads. Part of this Alaska Railroad line runs along the shore of Turnagain Arm, where one can get a good view of tidal flats that look deceptively peaceful but can have properties similar to quicksand, potentially trapping people when the tide rises and generates a tidal bore ranging from six to ten feet high and moves at ten mph to fifteen miles per hour, powered by the fourth largest tidal range in the world and second largest in North America (27 feet to 40 feet depending upon the phase of the Moon). Some sections of the line were located further inland after the 1964 Alaska Earthquake, because ground movement in the earthquake put some parts of the line under eight feet of water. We saw a special train of Wilderness Express cars, owned by Royal Celebrity Tours, operator of Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines; these cars were built by Colorado Railcar in 2001 - 2002, and seat 88 passengers on the top level and 36 on the bottom level, which has a dining area. Next trip was on another rail branch to Sutton -- originally thence to Palmer, for which the branch is named, and further to Chickaloon -- for coal traffic until the mines were closed due conversion from coal to oil by the US Navy (in 1920) and other nearby military installations (in 1968), and thereafter for gravel traffic. Although regular train service no longer goes all the way to Palmer, the track is still usable, and for a couple of weeks each year during the Alaska State Fair, passenger trains go from Anchorage to the Fairgrounds in Palmer, and a station was built there in 2004, even though the original downtown Palmer station is still intact and used as a community center. This branch went through the Matanuska-Susitna Valley, which was promoted in Great Depression years as a refuge for farmers fleeing the midwestern Dust Bowl, a subset of whom actually achieved significant success using the long summer days to grow bumper crops or vegetables. After returning to the main line, we saw the remaining one of the five RDCs acquired by the Alaska Railroad in 1986 - 1987 from New Haven RR/SEPTA/New York Central/Amtrak. At least some of these were used until 2009 on the aforementioned Hurricane Turn flag stop train -- the unit in the photo was used for a few years afterwards as a work car, but is now out of service in dead storage at Birchwood Yard. Then we saw a very modern station built at the airport for transfer of cruise ship passengers (which, however, has had disappointingly low ridership), accessed by elevated track.

Next stop was Chugach State Park, which is mostly within the municipality of Anchorage. The headquarters of the Chugach State Park is a preserved 1920s vintage Alaska Railroad worker camp building named Potter Section House. Nearby, we got to see a preserved rotary snowplow; the Alaska Railroad still has at least one of these in serviceable condition (stored elsewhere) for clearing very heavy snow. We saw the Eisenhower Alaska Statehood Monument, commemorating the Alaska Statehood Act of 1958 (signed by president Eisenhower on July 7, 1958), which took effect on January 3, 1959. (This memorial stands at the foot of C street at the top of the bluff above the Anchorage railroad station; it is not to be confused with the Dwight D. Eisenhower Memorial planned for construction in Washington, DC in the near future.) Before the next train trip from Anchorage, we got to see the AuRoRa (which makes one trip in each direction between Anchorage and Fairbanks each weekend during the winter months) getting ready to depart, and then the special Blues Train, another off-season passenger train. The next train trip out of Anchorage included a view of a tunnel nearly a mile long, and then another tunnel over 2.5 miles long (the Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel, also known as the Whittier Tunnel) constructed for trains to go between Whittier and Portage, which opened for rail traffic on June 1, 1943 and was converted into a combined rail and road tunnel from September 1998 through June 2000. This mixed use requires complex signaling to control both types of traffic in both directions, because it has only one track and road lane in line with each other (however, this was deemed to be an improvement over the automobile shuttle train that operated through the tunnel before this conversion). This tunnel also has considerable powered ventilation and two backup generators to keep the signals and ventilation operating in case of grid power failure. We saw the container terminal at Whittier (which is unattractive, but appears to have a healthy container interchange business), where the Alaska Railroad has three rail ferry barges, and got to see the tour train posed in front of a cruise ship. Len showed us the Buckner Building in Whittier, which was built for the US military in 1953 and was formerly the largest building in Alaska, it once contained thousands of apartments and medical, recreational, and administrative provisions for residents, earning it the name "city under one roof", but was damaged enough by the 1964 Alaska Earthquake that it was abandoned in 1966 after being turned over to the General Services Administration. The nearby Begich Building is similarly large and well-provisioned, and is now the main living quarters in Whittier. The 1964 Alaska Earthquake also produced a 43 foot Tsunami in Whittier, and reduced Portage essentially to a ghost town (among other things, the town dropped by six feet, and much of it flooded), with the only active remnants being a road and rail junction and a tourist information booth.

Next stop was back in Anchorage again, where we saw another Princess Cruise Lines train of just two coaches (again, this being very near the end of the tourist season). Then, Len took us to Wasilla (in Matanuska-Susitna Borough), where we saw the building where restoration is in progress on Alaska Railroad steam locomotive Number 557 (2-8-0, of the same type as the aforementioned Number 556). This was the last steam locomotive to operate in Alaska, remaining operable until at least 1962 (diesels took over in 1954, but afterwards this locomotive was sometimes pressed into service to operate over flooded track at Nenana), and then put on display in Washington state; it is now being restored by volunteers back in Alaska with the aid of numerous donations. This is expected to be complete in 2016, but Len and Nancy could not take photos of it inside the building where restoration is taking place; however, they did find that the Alaska Railroad has provided donations (including land and the aforementioned building) to help with the restoration work, and is committed to allowing the locomotive to run on its tracks after restoration is complete. Next we saw the Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry (MATI). This started with the air museum part, which seemed more like a junkyard for World War II vintage planes -- the collection is left outside at the mercy of the weather, and is not maintained. In another part of MATI, we saw a preserved station (of the same type as Potter Section House, now used as a park office) and some out of service equipment, including a steam-powered wrecking crane formerly used by the Alaska Railroad and some old buses (including a GM Old Look bus, including the well-preserved interior), a small Hi-Rail bus (the Chitina Road-Railer, from operation in the 1940s on the abandoned Copper River and Northwestern Railroad between Chitina and McCarthy) that has been restored (in 1985) and is used to give tours around the museum, and some historic diesel locomotives (including an F7A, Alaska Railroad Number 1500)

and coaches.

Len and Nancy returned to the Lower 48 States by way of Seattle, and we got to see the Sound Transit Central Link Light Rail line to Seattle-Tacoma Airport (in the Seattle suburb named SeaTac), starting with a photo of the new station at the airport (this light rail station opened in 2009). This system uses Kinki-Sharyo light rail vehicles (68 of these, built from 2008 to 2011), and has major expansions under construction and planned for the future. Len also showed us one of the articulated hybrid Sound Transit buses, followed by the King Street Station, which is used by Sounder commuter rail trains and Amtrak trains. Union Station is across the street from this, and was used by the Milwaukee Road and Union Pacific; it was not used for 30 years after Amtrak took over the passenger service in 1971, but has been restored, and serves as a headquarters for Sound Transit, offering passenger information that is sorely lacking elsewhere in the Seattle area. Len showed us an articulated electric trolleybus that was originally built as a dual mode bus to run through the Seattle Transit Tunnel. He wound up the show with 1960s to early 1980s vintage photos of electric trolleybuses built in the 1940s, with the Seattle Monorail in the background in some of the photos. The show ended with a photo of Seattle-Tacoma Airport featuring an Alaska Airlines plane similar to the one that Len and Nancy flew in on from Anchorage.

SHORT FORM (for Annual Report) Entertainment Report for October 3, 2015

October 3, 2015. The Bachelder's NRHS Convention Adventure Part 2. Leonard and Nancy Bachelder attended the 2013 NRHS convention in Alaska, making a 6-week trip through Canada and Alaska, of which we saw part 1 in March. Part 2 picked up with passage from the Yukon Territory into Alaska, and included several days of travelling on the Alaska Railroad, including the NRHS Convention, closing with a few shots from Seattle..

--

Lucius Chiaraviglio | lucius1@verizon.net (main)
| lchiarav@gmail.com (photos & BSRA)
| lchiarav@yahoo.com (alternative)
| lucius1@post.harvard.edu (fwd only)