

TRAINS

by Gerald Reid

I grew up in the community of Lithia Springs, Georgia. Our neighbor across the street was a railroad. I had a lot of time to study the trains.

At the lone traffic light at the main railroad crossing in Lithia Springs was a small shelter. I suppose you could call it a depot, although I don't recall seeing them use it for anything. There was also a pole for the mail. The local postmaster would take a canvas bag of the day's outgoing mail and hang it on the pole. The train would come by and, not even slowing down, a man would grab the bag and toss out a bag of the incoming mail. I don't think that would work today.

I liked to throw rocks at the boxcars for entertainment. Occasionally, I would take a penny and lay it on the track and let the train smash it. It looked funny after the train did it's job. I've tried to repeat that feat for my children and a grandchild, but I don't seem to be as successful at finding the penny.

They used to say if you stood too close to a train that it would suck you under. I never tried that and still don't test that theory today.

Many people probably don't realize that the train has different whistle patterns. A train approaching a crossing will meet a sign (see graphic), and the train will whistle according to the sign. This sign may look like Morse code to some, but it indicates to the engineer to sound the whistle two long sounds, one short sound, and one long sound, in that order. Some of the sounds are mournful.

When a train strikes a vehicle or some other object at a crossing, it whistles several long sounds. I hope I've heard that sound for the last time.

Trains are popular in country music. There was Jimmie Rogers, the "singing brakeman". Who could forget the late Boxcar Willie? Hank Williams sang about that "...midnight train..." in "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry". There was the Wabash Cannonball that Roy Acuff recorded. Oh, if I could just hear Dizzy Dean sing that one more time. The Wreck of the Old '97 was another one. I'm sure you could add to the list.

I saw a hobo in a boxcar at least once. That's something you don't see anymore.

I've never ridden a train in this continent before. I've only ridden them in Europe. But, one of these days, I'm going to take that train ride across the U. S.