

FRISCO

# All Aboard

FRISCO

JANUARY-FEBRUARY

1993

## *Flagging On The*



# FRISCO **All Aboard** FRISCO

VOLUME 8

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NUMBER 1

## FEATURES

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Michael Finger provides a detailed account of the construction and history of the Frisco Bridge at Memphis, TN, complete with rare construction photos.

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## ABOUT THE COVER

**QUESTION:** What do two Frisco Folks do in the middle of a 12" Midwest snow storm?

**ANSWER:** They go railfanning, of course!

Our cover this issue features the award winning photography of Frisco Folk Aubrey McBride, as museum president Alan Schmitt recreates the once common practice of **Flagging On The Frisco!**

THE  
**FRISCO**  
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*The Great Frisco Bridge, standing on the Memphis side of the Mississippi River, May 27, 1992.*  
*Wayne Porter photo*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

*Michael Finger is Senior Editor for Memphis Magazine, and first published the following article in the Elks Magazine, February, 1992, issue. It is reprinted with permission of the author who graciously provided the rare 1891 construction photos included in the article.*

The eighteen heavy locomotives, coupled end to end, began to roll slowly across the high bridge. Far below, a crowd of more than 50,000 men and women, boys and girls silently watched the slow procession, and each of them wondered: Would the new structure carry the tremendous weight, or would it collapse, as some had predicted, into the deep, muddy waters of the Mississippi River below? After all, no one in America had ever built a bridge like this before.

When the massive engines reached the middle of the span, an alarmed inspector discovered that the roadway was sagging four inches. But that was within the expected limits, so the engines continued to creep forward. Finally, tense minutes later, the entire train crossed the river into Arkansas, and relieved spectators burst into wild cheers, shouts and applause.

The place and time? The Great Bridge Celebration at Memphis, Tennessee, on the afternoon of May 12, 1892, when workers finally spanned the Mississippi River with the longest bridge in all of North America, and the third longest in the world.

Before the days of the railroads, Old Man River was one of this country's most vital transportation arteries. But by the late 1800's, the steamboating days were over, and America now began to head west on gleaming rails of steel. The trouble was, many of those rails stopped short at the Mississippi River, since the southern-most bridge was at St. Louis.

There was a good reason for that. Below Missouri, the river was as much as a mile wide in some places, and though the eastern bluffs usually stood high and dry above the water, the western banks were often low, marshy and prone to flooding. A railroad bridge on that part of the Mississippi would not only have to span the broad river itself but also extend a great distance over the western shore. It would have to be greater and longer than any bridge ever built in this country.

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# THE GREAT FRISCO BRIDGE

*by Michael Finger*

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The river stayed a formidable barrier for decades. Finally, in 1885, the fledging Kansas City, Fort Scott and Memphis Railroad met the challenge and found an engineer who could design and build such a structure. He was George S. Morrison of Chicago. Morrison had already designed six steel bridges along the Missouri River, as well as the great bridge across the Ohio at Cairo, Illinois. The new bridge, however, would be his greatest work.

Morrison and his crew came to Memphis in 1885 to find the best location. After examining and rejecting several sites, they eventually chose the high bluffs on the southern edge of the city as the most stable foundation for the eastern end of the bridge. Two years later, the U.S. Congress authorized its construction and officially chartered the Kansas City and Memphis Railroad Bridge Company.

Construction began November 7, 1888. The design of the bridge involved "a unique scheme of such intricacy as to baffle description," according to a Memphis newspaper. Since the river was far too wide to bridge with a single span, Morrison decided to employ a cantilever-type structure:

a row of five stone piers would extend high across the water, with the huge weight of the bridge partially supported by these piers and

partially carried by the upper steel framework.

The piers were a special problem. Because of the soft, muddy bottom of the Mississippi, they couldn't simply be dropped into the water at selected locations, but somehow had to be sunk down through the mud until they reached a firm foundation. To do this, Morrison designed hollow stone piers without bottoms. These were first assembled on land, then floated out into the river on barges, tilted upright, and carefully lowered to the bottom. Once in place, air was

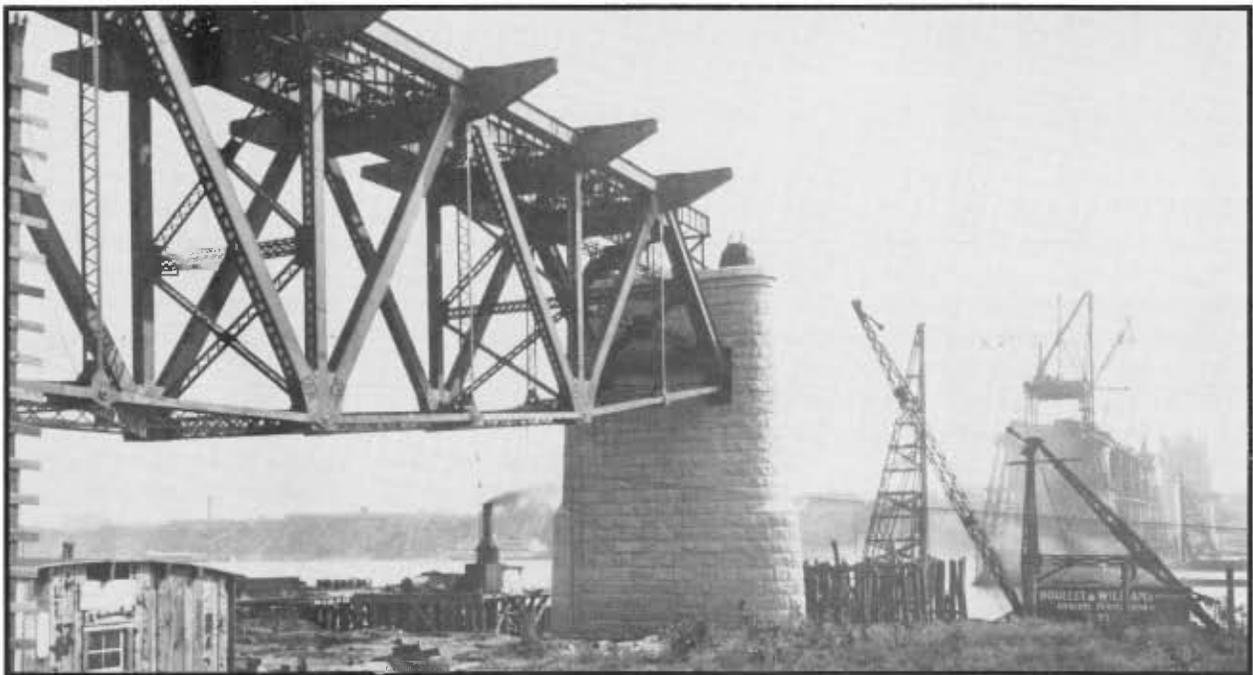
only toil for 45 minutes at a time if they wanted to avoid the dreaded "bends," which claimed four workers before the bridge was finished.

The last pier was set in place on June 6, 1891. After that, masonry teams attached sturdy facings of granite and limestone quarried from Georgia and Indiana.

Steel workers then scrambled high over the water to lace the huge bridge together, eventually using more than 9,500 tons of Pennsylvania steel and 100,000 rivets. One pin alone, linking two of the largest trusses, weighed 2,200

tending over the muddy lowlands of the Arkansas shore. In fact, in the whole world only the Firth of Forth Bridge in Scotland and the Lansdowne Bridge in India were longer.

The Great Bridge Celebration, described in newspaper headlines as a "**World's Wonder**," kicked off the morning of May 12, 1892, with a fancy parade through downtown Memphis that featured the police force, six marching bands, military companies from throughout the region, and a host of elaborate



*Frisco Bridge construction, 1891, facing east with Memphis across the river.*

*Michael Finger collection*

pumped into the piers to form an air bubble inside, enabling workers to climb down in them and actually stand on the river bottom, protected from the water rushing around them only by the air pressure within their bubble. They would then dig through the mud and sand on the bottom, and as they shoveled, the pier reached a solid foundation.

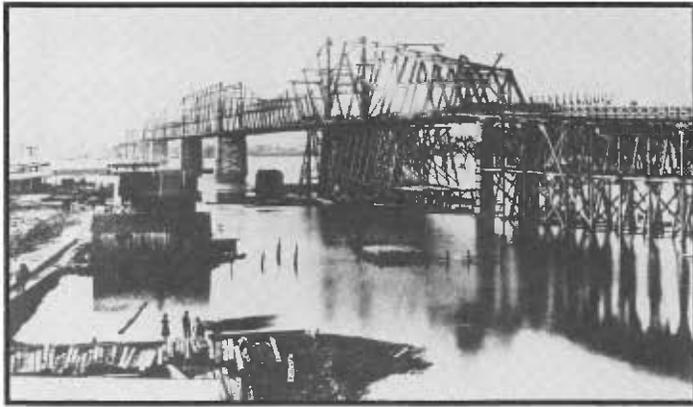
It was incredibly dangerous work. The diggers in the first piers were working as far as 130 feet below water level, and the slightest break in air pressure would send the water rushing into them. What's more, working at such depths demanded a pressure of 47 pounds per square inch, and workers could

pounds. Because of the great length of the spans, special allowances had to be made for expansion during temperature extremes. Instead of being bolted tightly together, some portions of the bridge were fitted into grooves to allow movement, and the bridge actually glided on rollers atop pier two.

All the sections were finally linked into a single span over the river on April 6, 1892. And what a tremendous bridge it was: the longest in American, five graceful spans 2,597 feet across the mighty Mississippi. That didn't even include the 2,500-foot viaduct ex-

floats. By noon, tens of thousands of people were jamming the river front to see the official testing of the new bridge. Each of the eighteen railroads which would use the bridge provided a gleaming locomotive adorned with colorful banners and streamers, and special train crews had been hand-picked for the event. One of the crewman recalled his special role years later:

*"I was a machinist with the old Memphis and Charleston Railroad at the time," said Charlie Lawson. "One of the engineers who was to drive one of the first engines over the bridge got cold feet, so the master mechanic told me to take it across"*



*Frisco Bridge construction, 1891, facing west.  
Michael Finger collection*

The young engineer wasn't the only one who was nervous. Plenty of others in the crowd that day doubted such a long, spindly bridge could carry the weight of three million pounds of locomotives.

Just before noon, the procession of steam engines began to move toward the river. An eyewitness reported, "*From the sea of 50,000 faces lining the shore arose a great cheer as weeping women kissed their husbands and sweethearts good-bye, all positive the bridge would collapse with their loved ones who had volunteered for the test.*"

The powerful engines built up steam and slowly chugged across. Lawson remembered, "*Then we got our orders to come back at top speed. We opened the throttles and those eighteen engines all hooked together made a pretty sight. We were doing about 65 miles per hour when we crossed, with the flags on the fronts of the engines standing straight out. The Concord (a federal gunboat visiting Memphis) fired 21 cannons, and everyone in the boats and along the riverbanks either shot off a gun or a firecracker. It was the most deafening and the most glorious din I have ever heard.*"

The hero recalled it was certainly worth the risk: "Back on this side, the girls swarmed all over me. Twelve of them kissed me, because I was somewhat of a ladies' man in those days, and they were afraid I would be killed.

That was just the beginning of the celebration. After the eighteen

locomotives cleared the bridge, two engines from either side of the river each pulled a gaily-decorated flat-car to the middle. One carried Governor Buchanan of Tennessee. When they met in the center of the bridge, the two officials exchanged formal greetings and pledged their states' eternal friendship.

The ceremonies that afternoon also included a lengthy oration by Indiana Senator Daniel Voorhies (called "The Tall Sycamore of the Wabash"), advertised as "foremost among American orators of the present generation." The newspapers the next day carried portions of his hour-long speech, and reported that Voorhies "expressed in language of the choicest selection the feelings that found most hearty response in the minds of all who heard."

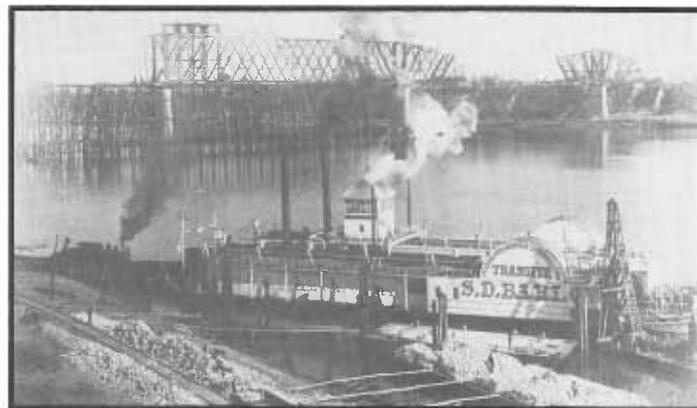
The Great Bridge Celebration ended that evening with a tremendous fireworks display over the

river put on by the Pain Company of New York, one of the nation's top pyrotechnic experts. The fireworks show began with "nests of hissing serpents" and something called "the aerial acre of variegated gems." Next came a wild assortment that included such oddities as "twin fiery dragons, which fly from place to place," the "Grove of Jeweled Palms," and "the Grand Cascade of Fire, or Falls of Niagara, 200 feet in length and falling from a great height." The show concluded with "an exact facsimile of the new bridge, accurately and artistically depicted in jets of covered fire, covering a space of 1,500 feet."

After that, the Great Bridge Celebration was over; no one had ever seen anything quite like it.

The new structure at first was simply called the Memphis Bridge. When the Frisco Railway bought it a few years later, it became known as the Frisco Bridge, the name it still carries today.

Over the years, the old bridge has had its shares of accidents, fires, suicides and other events. One of the strangest occurrences took place on the night of February 7, 1912. Bandits lurking on the bridge leapt aboard a Rock Island train heading west out of Memphis when it slowed to cross the river. As soon as the train reached the Arkansas side, they made their way to the engineer, stopped the train, and attempted to blow open the mail car safe.



*Frisco Bridge construction, 1891, facing east with Memphis across the river. Note the railroad ferry, S.S. Barlow, in the foreground. It was operated by the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, & Southern Railway Co.*

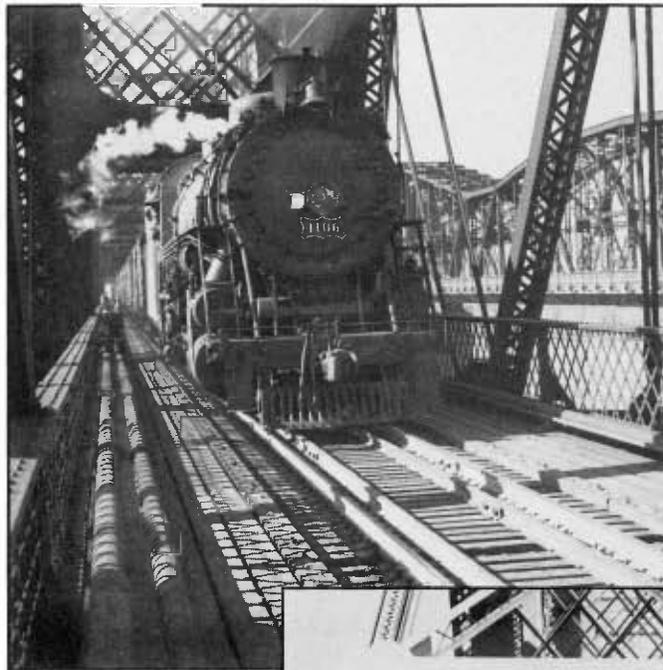
*Michael Finger collection*

Using a dozen pieces of dynamite only wrecked part of the mail car, so the robbers piled more than twenty sticks on top of the safe and set them off. The resulting **BOOM** shook windows all the way across the river. The blast not only blew the car into a thousand pieces and set it afire, it destroyed the safe and everything in it. Police at the scene the next day reported that scraps of dollar bills "had been blown into the treetops and hung on the limbs like snowflakes." The bandits, no doubt red-faced, got away empty-handed.

The Frisco Bridge was a landmark for twenty-four years. But almost as soon as it opened, people complained that it wasn't sufficient. The single-track railroad bridge still didn't enable folks in buggies or on horseback to cross the river. At one time, planks were laid down between the rails, and for a while cars and carriages could creep across the bridge, as long as no trains were headed their way. But that was rather nerve-wracking, and besides, the approach on the Arkansas side was so steep that many horses couldn't pull a wagon up the incline.

So, by the turn of the century everyone was clamoring for a second bridge across the river. As a result, the Harahan Bridge was constructed a few dozen yards north of the Frisco Bridge in 1916. This was a railroad span, though a wider one, and to meet the demand for the newfangled automobile traffic, rickety wooden roadways were suspended from the outside of the new bridge. Anyone afraid of heights simply didn't cross the river by car until the four-lane Memphis-Arkansas Bridge opened nearby in 1949. A fourth span across the river, the Hernando DeSoto Bridge carrying Interstate 40, opened farther north in 1973.

Though the Harahan Bridge closed some years ago, the Memphis-Arkansas and Hernando DeSoto bridges are still in use. And the granddaddy of them all, the Frisco Bridge, still carries railroad traffic across the river. ☞



## THE GREAT FRISCO BRIDGE

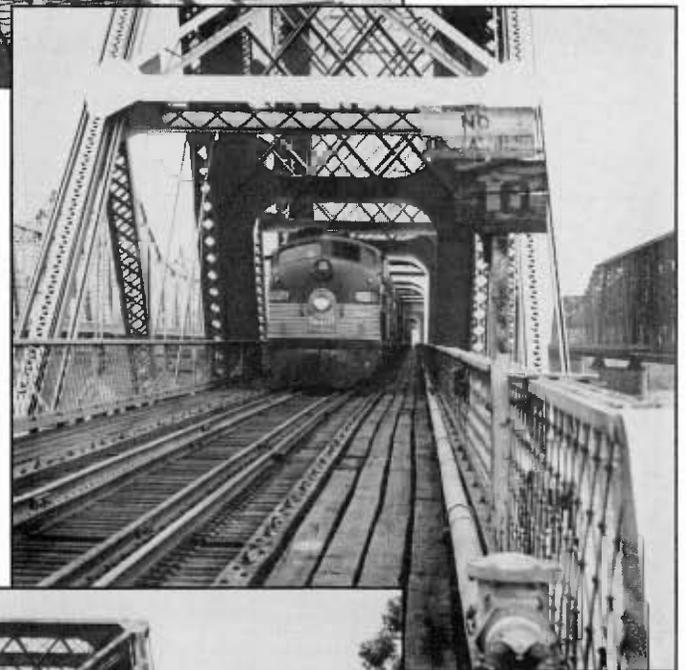
*With Frisco 4106, providing motive power for the Memphis Freight," No. 232, circa. 1942.*

*Frisco photo*

## THE GREAT FRISCO BRIDGE

*With Frisco 2021, providing motive power for the "Kansas City-Florida Special," No. 105, circa. 1952.*

*Frisco photo*



## THE GREAT FRISCO BRIDGE

*In service, May 23, 1992.*

*Wayne Porter photo*

# MAIL CAR



The **MAIL CAR** is a feature of the **ALL ABOARD** in which we attempt to answer some of the many questions that are submitted to our **FRISCO RESEARCH SERVICE**.

If you have a question about the equipment, facilities, or operation of the Frisco, please send them to the **RESEARCH SERVICE**. All requests are answered individually and selected questions will appear in the **MAIL CAR** feature.

**QUESTION:** I recently found an old advertisement for a train called the Dixie Flyer, that ran from Chicago to Florida. At the bottom of the page is a Frisco logo with "Evansville Route" in the middle. Did the Frisco ever go to Chicago? What was the Evansville Route? Where in Florida did the train go? Can you please solve this mystery for me?

**ANSWER:** Yes, we can solve your complicated mystery!

On October 1, 1902, under the leadership of President B.F. Yoakum, the Frisco purchased the controlling interest of the Chicago & Eastern Illinois Railroad. It was during this "Yoakum Era" that the Frisco also acquired the Gulf Coast Lines and the Ft. Worth & Rio Grande Railroad.

On May 1, 1903, the Chicago, Rock Island, & Pacific Railroad took control of the Frisco, including the C & EI, and operated it as a part of its system until December, 1909, when the Rock Island sold its controlling interests back to the Frisco.

In 1911, the C & EI absorbed the Evansville & Terre Haute Railway and thus established an "Evansville Route" through southwest Indiana. During that same year, the *Dixie Flyer* was inaugurated as the first all Pullman train between Chicago and Palm Beach, FL.

CHICAGO, NASHVILLE, ATLANTA AND JACKSONVILLE											
STATIONS						STATIONS					
CHICAGO	INDIANAPOLIS	EVANSVILLE	NASHVILLE	ATLANTA	JACKSONVILLE	CHICAGO	INDIANAPOLIS	EVANSVILLE	NASHVILLE	ATLANTA	JACKSONVILLE
3:10 AM	8:20 AM	11:55 AM	1:55 PM	4:50 PM	7:00 PM	7:00 PM	11:55 AM	8:20 AM	3:10 AM	3:10 AM	8:20 AM

*(Note: The table contains detailed timetables for various routes, including the Dixie Flyer and Evansville routes, with specific departure and arrival times for each station.)*

*Frisco public timetable, listing the Dixie Flyer, November, 1911.*

In 1913, the Frisco System went into receivership, and in the ensuing reorganization of 1915, was divorced from both the C & EI and the Gulf Coast Lines.

The C & EI *Dixie Flyer* and companion train, *Dixie Express*, continued Chicago to Florida service well into the 1930's.

Did the Frisco ever go to Chicago? Yes, as the C & EI subsidiary line. What was the Evansville Route? The Frisco/C & EI line through southwest Indiana. Where in Florida did the trains go? Palm Beach, St. Petersburg, and Sarasota.

## Mail Bag Trivia

What is a "Glad Hand," "Rip Track," and a "Shoo-Fly."?

Be the first to tell us what these terms mean and receive a 10% discount on your next Frisco Folks membership renewal.

## In Memoriam

On February 9, 1993, our Frisco Folks family lost a special member and friend with the death of Howard D. Killiam, Sr. Although Howard was a carman for thirty-six years with the Santa Fe Railway, he was an ardent fan of the Frisco and was a life Engineer member of our Frisco Folks. His vast collection of photos, which he freely shared with fellow railfans, will silently serve as a living memorial to Howard's life-long commitment to rail preservation!



*Dixie Flyer Timetable, circa. 1934*



*Frisco Folk Howard Killiam, standing on the platform of Frisco caboose #876, Wichita, KS, May 1, 1988. R.E. Napper photo*



**LOOKING BACKWARD** is a regular feature of the **ALL ABOARD** that takes a look back through our files at the people, equipment, facilities, operations, and events that were a part of the Frisco 25, 50, and 75 years ago.

### 25 YEARS - 1968

On January 17, 1968, bridge No. 92.2, a 450' 3-span I-Beam structure, located approximately five miles south of Cuba, MO, was raised and replaced with a 5-span deck plate girder bridge. The opening of the new Lead Belt Line and the resulting heavier loads crossing the Meramec River made it necessary to replace the aging structure. Built in 1889, the old bridge consisted of three pin-connected truss spans each approximately 150' in length.

### 50 YEARS - 1943

In 1943, Red Devil engine coalers were installed at Pittsburg and Wichita, KS, and at North Springfield, MO.



*Rare construction photo of Meramec River Bridge, circa. 1889.  
John Bradbury collection*



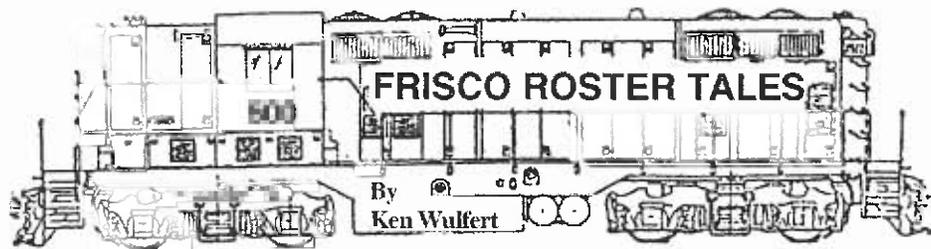
*With new deck plate girder in place, the 1889 Meramec River Bridge slowly comes down, circa. 1968. Frisco photo*

### 75 YEARS - 1918

In accordance with a proclamation issued by the President of the United States on December 26, 1917, and order issued by the Director General of Railroads dated December 29, 1917, 1918 was the first of two years that the Frisco operated under the supervision and control of the U.S. Government, the end result of American involvement and support of the Allied forces fighting in World War I. ☐



*Red Devil engine coaler, in operation at North Springfield, MO yards, circa. 1945. Frisco photo*



## **YARD POWER**

### **PART FOUR**

#### ***The 44-Toners***

In the 1930's, 1940's, and 1950's, railroad management and labor were often very much in an adversarial position, constantly maneuvering to gain advantage of each other. Today, things hopefully are much better, with both groups aware that mutual success can only come through cooperation instead of confrontation. Back in the era of the beginnings of steam to diesel locomotive transition, an unusual provision in the agreements between the railroads and the locomotive engineers was the basis behind the wide use of some unusual locomotives - the 44-ton light diesel switchers. These little locomotives were fairly popular with the railroads in the 1940's and 1950's, and, as usual, the Frisco was involved as well. In fact, these units were among the first diesel switchers to serve on the Frisco. I've always liked them - they are another example of something that was so ugly they were cute!

The unusual provision in the labor agreements between the railroads and the engineer's union was a provision that a locomotive with less than 45 tons of weight on its drivers only required an engineer to operate - no fireman was needed. This created a market for the 44-toners and a number of railroads bought them. Understand that though 44 tons of weight sounds like a lot, this is a very light weight for a diesel switcher locomotive.

A number of locomotive suppliers entered the market - General Electric, Whitcomb, Davenport, and Plymouth being among them. They were remarkably similar in design - in fact, the



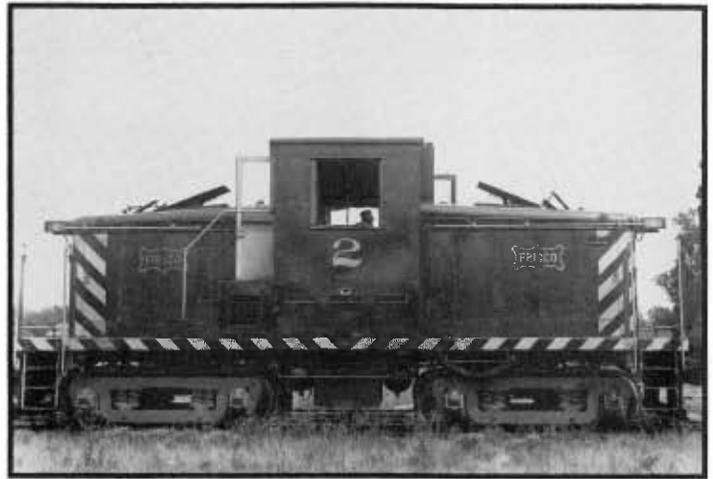
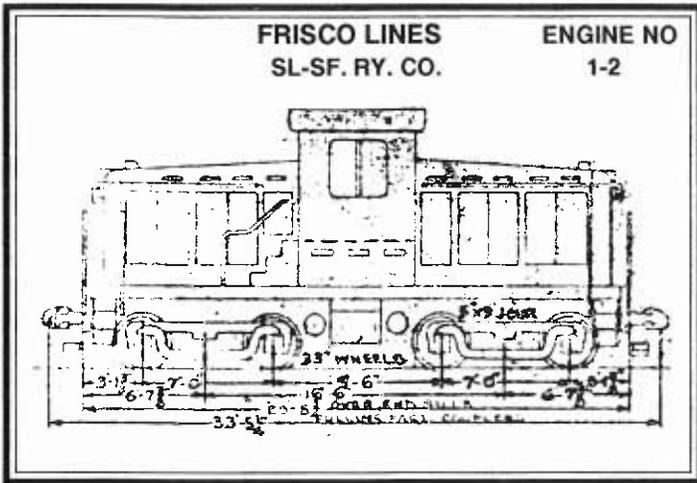
*SLSF #1, Davenport, IA, February, 1942. Davenport builder's photo*



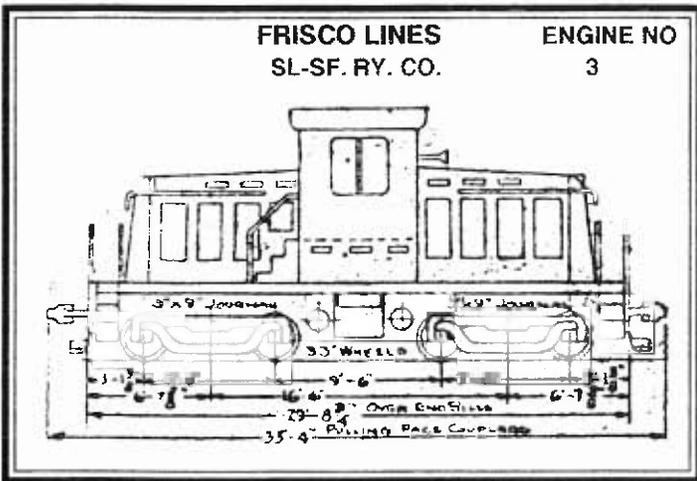
*SLSF #1, Springfield, MO, January 17, 1948. A. Johnson collection*



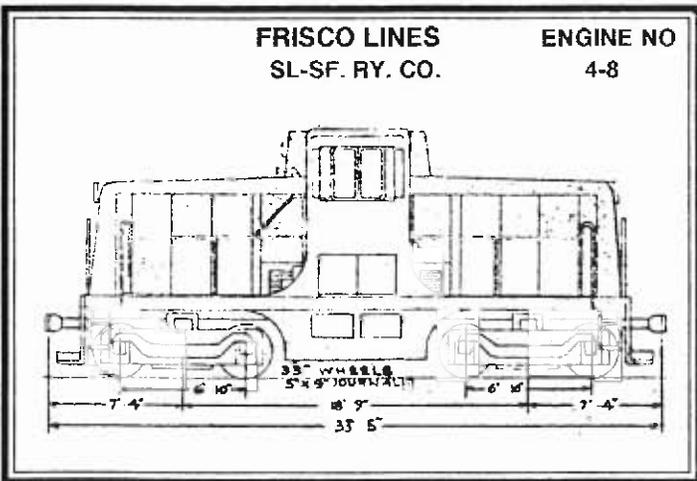
*SLSF #1, Newburg, MO, August 7, 1949. A. Johnson collection*



*Frisco 44-tonner #2, Paris, TX, September 8, 1952.  
A. Johnson collection*



*Frisco 44-tonner #3, Joplin, MO, September 7, 1947  
A. Johnson collection*



*Frisco 44-tonner #7, Tulsa, OK, November, 1971  
E. Stoll collection*

Davenport and whitcomb examples the Frisco bought suggest to me the design might have been developed jointly. They all had a high center cab and rode on light, four wheel trucks. The GE's trucks were fabricated from sheet steel, the others used cast components. They had twin diesel engines housed in short hoods jutting out from each end of the center cab. A radiator was on the front of each hood. Total horsepower developed from the twin diesels was 360 HP to 380 HP. The units were symmetrical, but had controls for forward operation in one direction only. They had no capability for MU operation, at least not on the Frisco examples. Following are the basic descriptions of the Frisco roster of 44-toners:

**No. 1** - Davenport, 360 HP  
Placed in service at Newburg, MO, March, 1942.

**No. 2** - Davenport, 360 HP  
Placed in service at Joplin, MO, April, 1942.

**No. 3** - Whitcomb, 360 HP  
Placed in service at Fayetteville, AR, April, 1943.

**No. 4** - GE, 380 HP  
Placed in service at Arkansas City, KS in July, 1943.

**No. 5** - GE, 380 HP  
Placed in service at Cape Girardeau, MO in July, 1943.

**No. 6** - GE, 380 HP  
Placed in service at Hugo, OK in August, 1943.

**No. 7** - GE, 380 HP  
Placed in service at Fayetteville, AR in February, 1944.

**No. 8** - GE, 380 HP  
Placed in service at Neodesha, KS in March, 1944.

To be complete, we must mention that the Frisco briefly had another 360 HP Davenport 44-toner, the *Okmulgee Northers* No. 8, which came to the Frisco - along with the

ON 7 (SLSF 12) discussed in the last *Roster Tale*, as part of the Frisco acquisition of the ON in 1964. This unit, however, was never added to the Frisco roster, and was sold in 1965.

The paint schemes of the Frisco 44-toners was interesting. The original three units appeared in a royal blue color, with a white stripe about two feet wide running down each side. Ultimately all joined the newer GE's in being painted black with yellow safety stripes, a yellow number on the cab sides, and Frisco coonskin heralds on each end of the two short hoods.

Though this bunch of 44-toners was interesting, they were not considered a success on the Frisco, the same opinion most other railroads also developed. They were too light to do other than industrial switching or very light yard work. They also were slow and could not be MU'ed, greatly limiting their utility out on the main line. The Frisco employed them mainly at small yards, such a Newburg, MO. After many years of sitting around idle more than they were used, the Frisco began unloading them in the 1960's, mainly to those who wanted an industrial switcher, or by trading them in.

I recently observed a GE 44-toner built in 1950 (*not an ex-Frisco unit but similar*) still in use at the ACF shops in Milton, PA, that looked, sounded, and ran just fine. I saw their backup unit from a distance - it looked to be either a Davenport or a Whitcomb!

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

According to records supplied by Frisco Folk Wayne Porter, the 44-toners dispositions were as follows:

**No. 1** was traded to EMD on 3600 HP units (900-913) in 1967.

**No. 2** was sold to the Tulsa-Sapulpa Union Railroad, Sapulpa, OK.

**No. 3** was sold to the Mobile River Sawmill Co., Mobile, AL.

**No. 4** was sold to Precision National Corporation in 1969, who in turn

sold it to the Alton Box Board Co. **No. 5** was sold to Armour Agricultural Chemical Co., Crystal City, MO, who in turn sold it, in 1968, to Fiber Industries, Inc, Salisbury, NC.

**No. 6** was traded to EMD on 3600 HP units (900-913) in 1967.

**No. 7** was traded to EMD, in 1972, on GP 38-2 units (663-699) after a long storage at Tulsa, OK.

**No. 8** was also traded to EMD, in 1972, on GP 38-2 units (663-699) after a long storage at Tulsa, OK.

An excellent dual powered plastic model of the GE units is available from Bachmann. Keystone makes a metal one. ☐

## Passenger Train Consist

**Eastern Division  
Memphis Sub-Division  
August 31, 1963  
Trains 105-106  
Kansas City-Florida  
Special**

105 <u>Southbound</u>	106 <u>Northbound</u>
2006	2011
2016	2002
PA 1907	SAL 788
SLSF 363	REX 7753
SLSF 211	REX 1074
SLSF 387	SLSF 412
SLSF 373	SLSF 211
SLSF 1102	SLSF 387
SLSF 769	SLSF 372
SOU 816	SLSF 376
SLSF 1251	SLSF 761
SLSF 1454	SLSF 1060
SLSF Birmingham	SOU 874
	SOU 811
	SLSF 1456
	SLSF Memphis

These train consists were taken from a recently acquired collection of Dispatcher Train Sheets.