

The Ralph E. Yoder Railroad Slide Collection

Former Blue Ridge Chapter member Ralph Yoder passed away in September 2009. He left a collection of some 3600 color slides of mid Atlantic and mid Western railroads taken from about 1960 through the early 1990's. Most are on Ektachrome film, but have been carefully stored and retain good color. These slides can be made available to BRC NRHS members as described below.

For those who may not have known Ralph, he was born in 1936 in Mishawaka, Indiana, just east of South Bend along the New York Central main line. He developed a life-long interest in the NYC and in the Chicago, South Shore and South Bend electric interurban. He graduated from Mishawaka High School in 1954 and enlisted in the Air Force. He served for four years as an electronics technician with the Airways and Air Communications Service 1994th AACS unit based in France. He probably acquired his Leica M-3 camera with 35, 50, 90 and 135mm lenses while in Europe, and used this system for most of his railroad photography through the 1980's.

After discharge for the USAF, Ralph attended Tri-State College (now Trine University) in Angola, IN using his VA benefits, graduating in 1961 with a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering degree. He found employment with the Naval Research Laboratory in Arlington, VA and lived in Woodbridge, VA. During this period, he became involved with the National Model Railroad Association, attended many NMRA conventions, and served for several years as the editor of their national publication, "The NMRA Bulletin". When the DC sprawl made his commute too difficult, Ralph transferred to the Naval Surface Warfare Center in Dahlgren, VA and moved to King George County near Fredericksburg, VA.

He retired in 1988 and moved to Big Island, VA, and he worked part time in Lynchburg, VA at the Trains Unlimited store for Jim Revell and later Bill Cox. He was a member of the Blue Ridge Chapter, NRHS for many years, and wrote the Old Train Master column in the chapter's newsletter. There is a gap in his photos beginning in the late 1970's when his Leica may have become damaged, until 1990 when he acquired a Nikon N6006 system with 50, 35-70, 70-210, and 75-300 mm lenses. His Nikon apparently suffered the broken back latch problem that plagued this series camera around 1993, when another gap in his photos begins.

Ralph was extremely knowledgeable about railroading (and several other fields), leaving a collection of 1500 railroad books, 400 employee and public timetables, 5000 history, geography and natural sciences books, and 500 USGS topographic maps. He was very meticulous, typing out two 3x5 file cards for every one of the 3600 slides he made, then filing one card chronologically and one by subject matter. He transcribed this information onto special computer-printed gummed labels that are affixed to each slide. He made a digital thumbnail image of every slide and stored these on 5 CDs together with a typed index. There is a small mystery about these images: the only digital imaging device found in Ralph's home was an HP Photosmart 850 four mega pixel camera first sold in 2002, yet all of the thumbnail images indicate they were created in the summer of 1998.

It is these indices that are posted here on the BRC NRHS web site. They list the approximate date, location, and railroad(s) shown on the slides. The indices do not list whether the slides show locomotives or cabooses or stations or scenery, nor do they list equipment numbers. This information is on the file cards, and on some future cold winter days I hope to add this data to the indices. I will be happy to make slides available to Lynchburg area Blue Ridge Chapter members. I do require that the film not be removed from Ralph's labeled cardboard mounts, that any copies are used for personal and not commercial purposes, and that some form of bond is left to assure the slides are returned. Please contact Gary Quale at (434) 384-6308 or gquale@comcast.net if you are interested.