

# ALL ABOARD!

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## Where'd that Love Come From: DON BARNES

By Zee Homoki

We want to introduce one of our Board Members and one of our most enthusiastic members, Don Barnes. Don was born on a dairy farm in Maryland in a farm house built partially of logs. The farm was close enough to the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad (B&O) mainline, which went through Mt. Airy, so that he could hear the "choo choo" sound of the double-headed steam locomotives climbing the steep grade. His father said he thought the first words Don ever said were "choo choo."

None of his family, relatives or friends ever worked for the railroad. Most were farmers. He doesn't know to this day why he has a love of trains. His father bought him a wind-up train for a Christmas present when he was about two years old. Then he got an "O" scale (1/4 inch to the foot) Marx electric train set for Christmas at 4 years of age. Then at age 9, he received an "O" scale Lionel train set in 1950. Don thought then and still thinks that this was the greatest material gift he has ever received. Don said that he ran those two trains in the living room year round. His mother didn't appreciate having a 4 by 8 foot model railroad in the middle of her living room, so in 1954 at age 13, his father added a room to the



Don Barnes - Board of Directors Member for The Friends of the Aiken Railroad Depot

farmhouse for his trains. That train room was heaven on earth for him.

But watching two trains run around a loop of track became boring to him at an early age. In 1949 he discovered a book by a model railroader in New Orleans by the name of Frank Ellison. The book explained how prototype railroad operation could be adopted to model railroad operation. It inspired him to model not only trains, but also train and railroad worker operation. So, he switched to "HO" scale (1/8 inch to the foot) and began to build a model railroad designed for operation just like the prototype. Don built all the structures from scratch along with the track and turnouts (switches) using imported nickel silver rail and individual wooden ties stained with real Creosote and rails spiked with scale spikes.

While in high school he played school sports and lettered in Studying took his evening time until bedtime... about 11:00 p.m. At 5:30 a.m. he had to rise and milk the cows again until school began at 8:45 a.m. Then it was work in the fields on Saturday. He had only Sunday afternoon to work on his railroad after attending church. While his male classmates were out chasing girls in the evenings, Don just wanted to stay home and play with his railroad.

Don's father wanted him to stay on the farm along with his brother, but because he was the high school class valedictorian, he won a free college scholarship to Western Maryland College. The school was founded and so named after the Western Maryland Railway in 1867. There he majored in

**Friends of the  
Aiken Railroad Depot**  
406 Park Avenue SE  
Aiken, SC 29801  
[www.aikenrailroaddepot.org](http://www.aikenrailroaddepot.org)

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## Don Barnes *(Continued from Page 1)*

physics, chemistry and mathematics in 1963. Don completed all coursework for his Ph.D. in nuclear physics and astronomy at the University of Kentucky (UK) in 1967. However, because he had enrolled and was commissioned as an Army officer in the Reserve Officers Training Corp (ROTC) while at Western Maryland College, he was forced to enter active duty in the Army due the government's cancellation of his educational deferment. Recall that 1967- 1970 were the peak years of the Viet Nam War. But before leaving, UK awarded Don a Master's degree in Nuclear Physics and Astronomy and asked him to return after his Army assignment and complete his Ph.D requirements, but Don never did.

I don't know if you have noticed, but Don has a "twinkle in his eyes" and it got him into a lot of trouble in college as a prankster, such as dropping a water balloon on the Dean of Men from the third story window of his dormitory. He was disciplined many times for his escapades and was forced to eat lunch each day with the Dean of Students, who lectured him on his behavior. He did not like college, but there were two bright spots while there. He was introduced to aviation by his brother and met a fellow student, Linda Fabre, his future wife, who answered

one of his posted campus ads for airplane rides. They were married in 1964 and had two daughters, Cheryl, a medical doctor and Andrea, a physical therapist.

For the next 25 years, his interest in trains gave way to his family and flying. While in the Army he was given a Top Secret Clearance and assigned to an elite nuclear weapons unit which was on call 24 hours a day to go anywhere in the world in case there was a nuclear incident or the Viet Nam War went nuclear. Fortunately neither of these happened. Upon completing his military requirement, the DuPont Company recruited Don to work as a nuclear physicist at the Savannah

River Plant, which brought him and his family to Aiken, SC in April, 1970.

While working at SRP, Don used his GI Bill education benefits to finance the remainder of his flying lessons to acquire his Commercial Pilot's license, Instrument Rating, Multi-engine Rating and many airplane instructor certificates. He purchased a rather rare classic 1958 Bellanca in 1978, which he still owns and flies. Actually, the Smithsonian Institute has asked him to donate it to them when he passes.

A newly employed co-worker at SRP named Mike Nickerson renewed his interest in model railroading. So in 1992 Don began to plan his dream railroad... an HO scale model of the B&O from Baltimore to Cumberland, MD, through his old hometown of Mt. Airy, circa. 1949. He spent the next ten years planning and designing his "masterpiece." He visited the B&O Archives, the B&O Museum, the National Archives, the Library of Congress, numerous museums and every one of the approximately 20 towns along the right-of-way in order to gather all the documents and photos that existed to help him design the railroad.

Don incorporated three objectives in his layout design.

1. To recreate a replica of the exact trackage, structures and scenery along the railroad right-of-way as it existed in 1949.
2. To model the exact locomotives, cars and railroad operating schedule of the Prototype, circa 1949.



*A generous donation to the Friends of the Aiken Railroad Depot moves the dream to rebuild the railroad depot forward.*

3. To create the same knowledge and mindset of the railroad workers in his future operators as they were in Sept. 1949 such that if one of his operators today were suddenly transported back in time to 1949, he could perform his job on the prototype (Conductor, Tower Operator, Yard Operator, Hostler, Dispatcher, etc.) as if it were familiar to him.

Only thing was: he needed a larger house. So, he and a friend, Ron Feller, designed the new house, 5,800 total square feet of heated space. Don says it is perfect for him, his wife and his trains!

One day in 1998, Al Bonadies, one of Don's flight instructors, told Don about a proposed Aiken Railroad Depot Project, and suggested he might want to attend the next planned depot meeting. Don attended the meeting with only about 4 or 5 other men in attendance: Attendees included the late Mac McClaren, Owen Sheetz, Wade Brodie, Steve Hale, Bill Guy and maybe one other person. He expressed his interest in the project and informed them that he had a great interest in railroads and may be of help to them. They welcomed Don's input and he became an essential part of the project.

Don remembers, "After I listened to their discussion for a while, I asked them why they wanted to rebuild the station as there would be no trains stopping there." They told me they had two objectives in rebuilding the depot.

1. To recapture the railroad heritage of Aiken, and
2. To encourage businesses to begin locating in that section of town in order to increase the tax base, real estate values and upgrade the neighborhood.

I said that those were two worthy objectives, but I asked them what they proposed to do with the reconstructed depot. They said they didn't know... maybe make a railroad museum.

## Don Barnes *(Continued from Page 2)*

At the next meeting I told the group that I had thought about the project and suggested how they might best accomplish their objectives. I told them that I thought what was needed was a facility which would attract people and also provide income for the City. I offered 3 suggestions to accomplish this.

1. Locate an interactive and dynamic railroad museum on the second floor of the depot, which had been used just for storage in the original depot. This would attract people to the area.
2. Acquire some old heavyweight passenger cars and a caboose, if possible, rebuild the old passenger cars into an early 20th Century private dining car motif for public rental. Also acquire a caboose to use for a children's playhouse and a party facility. This would bring in rental income.
3. Build a small scale railroad around Giles Park on which kids and adults could ride. A nominal admission would be charged per passenger. This would attract people and bring in income.

I had seen these ideas work before in other towns in the US and I thought they would also work well in Aiken. The group quickly bought into the ideas and after much discussion over the next few months the group gave me the authority to proceed with the museum and the railcar acquisitions. I reminded them that I would need some money... lots of money... to accomplish my suggestions. They asked me how much and I recommended at least 3 million dollars. They told me to proceed with the railcar acquisitions and that they would raise the money somehow.

Their small group decided to try and finance the project with private funds rather than public funds. Several attempts were made to raise funds with little success. Finally the suggestion to possibly borrow it from the Aiken Corporation was recommended and Wade Brodie of the Aiken Corporation was a great help. Then about 2003 Tim Simmons of the Security Federal Bank got interested in the project. He hired a fund raising company called First Community Development out of Atlanta, GA to raise the three

million dollars. It was about that time that the economy took a downturn and donations began to dry up after about 2.2 million dollars was raised. That was only enough to complete the depot with the dioramas and the exterior of the dining cars. Since then, private funds were secured to build the curved passenger platform. The train shed was built with some Aiken City funds.

Don spent 2 ½ years researching and designing the dioramas with help from Henry Krippner. He used the same process that he had used earlier to research his own layout. The technique also worked well for the dioramas. He knew of two companies that were capable of constructing the dioramas... one was in Chicago and the other in Baltimore. He approached Jeff Springer, who owns and operates Custom Model Railroads in Baltimore, with this project. Luckily, Jeff happened to be in a slack work period and was able to begin construction almost immediately. Normally Jeff is booked up to 2 years in advance.

Blackville was the first diorama to be completed and the depot there was the first structure to be built. Jeff and his three employees finished all nine dioramas in 2½ years... 6 months before the depot construction was complete. Don travelled to Baltimore one weekend a month for 2 ½ years to assist in the details of the diorama construction.

At the same time he was researching the dioramas, he was also deep into reworking the two passenger cars. The asbestos and lead removal was done by an environmental firm in Wilmington, NC. The metalwork was done by a 75 year-old metalworker named Jesse with the C. Graham Company in New Ellenton, SC. He and Don would meet mornings three days a week and discuss the work. Jesse was a master metal craftsman. After several months, the metalwork was done. B&B Glass, along with A&W glass installed the windows and Palmetto Painting finished the exterior of the cars.

The grand opening of the depot on September 18, 2010 was a banner day. Nearly 2,000 people came to the event. Our little group finally had something to show the public after enduring

## Don Barnes *(Continued from Page 3)*

enduring much criticism from the general population. Going back to the time when the old rusty railcars were delivered to Aiken by tractor trailer to the long depot construction time, the criticisms were relentless. But on this day, he received nothing but compliments.

Since then, most folks have been impressed by the facility. Annual visitors now exceed 12,000 with over 1/3 being from out of state. The depot project is beginning to realize one of the original objectives of attracting more people to that end of town. Don has been told that the depot project was also a factor in the decision by St. Mary's Catholic Church officials to build their new facility bordering Union Street next to the Depot. The old hotel, also on Union Street, which has been vacant for many years and in disrepair has been purchased and is currently being renovated for use as a public restaurant.

In March of 2012 Don was contacted by a representative of the Kalmbach Publishing Company of Milwaukee, WI, the premier model railroad publishing company in the US. They informed him that the dioramas were selected as one of the top 10 new model railroads in the world. Paul Dolkas, the magazine's photographer, and Don spent two days in April 2012 taking 36

photos of the layout. Twelve will be featured in the next edition of *Great Model Railroads 2014*, which became available October 22 of this year. This exposure should attract many new railroad enthusiasts from around the world.

Also in July of this year, the National Model Railroad Association's Annual convention took place in Atlanta, GA. Attendance topped 1,200 railroad enthusiasts from around the world. Many came to Aiken to visit the Depot. Also a group of 17 went to Don's home layout on July 14 to spend a day operating his layout and visiting the depot museum.

Future depot projects include rebuilding the baggage building into a catering kitchen, completing the interior of the cars and the construction the small railroad in Giles Park to carry passengers.

Don says, "I have spent many long but joyful hours on this project with no financial gain for myself. I have nothing but admiration and thanks for the support of the Aiken City Council, Mayor Cavanaugh, City Managers Roger LeDuc and Richard Pearce, Tim Simmons, Henry Krippner, Wade Brodie, Steve Hale, Dudley Erb, Carla Cloud, Glenn Parker, Elizabeth Harm and a host of others. Special thanks are due to

Owen Sheetz, the late Mac McClaren and the residents of Aiken City and County for their contributions and support of the project.

While during my research and visiting with mayors, city council men and women in the diorama towns, I received nothing but jealous complements from them concerning how lucky Aiken was to have the type of City management and citizens who would support such a project. "It has been my joy."

This is the story of only one of the Aiken Railroad Board of Directors, which has given us insight from the beginning into the planning and organizing of the Aiken Railroad Depot. I don't know about you, but I have only respect and gratitude for Don Barnes, for he is the man that not only shared his knowledge but has worked non-stop to offer our community insight into our past and a place to celebrate. WOW, we the citizens of the City of Aiken and Aiken County are so fortunate!

To answer that question, "Where'd that love come from", I believe from his heart and soul. Perhaps Don Barnes was just born with a love for trains!

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## CHRISTMAS AT THE DEPOT!

**Saturday, December 20th**

Mark your calendars and join us for a favorite tradition at the Aiken Railroad Depot.

Santa & Mrs. Claus will visit from

**10 am to 12:30 pm**

Cookies, milk, crafts and holiday cheer!

1 pm — Raffle for *Polar Express* model

**ALL ABOARD!**



## Part 2: What Happened to the Railway Express Agency?

by *Dudley Erb*, a Friend of the Aiken Railroad Depot

**Readers Note:** *The author told in Part 1 (Volume 1, Issue 1: All Aboard!) about his early career as a special agent with the Agency and with his transfer to the operating department.*

At about the time I transferred to operations, I started attending night classes at the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School. The two semesters were individual classes on ICC law and how it affected shippers and carriers. They were given by Drs. White and English, the very two men who helped write the laws. I mention this only because my stodgy old employer, the Railway Express Agency offered to pay the tuition and for the books that the famed professors wrote. I do not think I ever encountered anyone in the company that ever attended college other than a few of my contemporaries.

As if my own experiences with the unions were not enough, I soon became a SCAB. Server of our special agent group were sent on a one-week mission to Cincinnati to act as strike-breakers. As most of the group were former union members, their hearts were not really into it. On the first day, we made a show of sorting packages, but I doubt if we handled 5% of the work that normally would have been done over a normal three day period. As Scabs, we thought we would have to eat and sleep at the terminal, but we were allowed to pass through the gate to our hotel without incident. Going back home after the walkout was quite a relief.

In 1960, my first year with the company, Railway had virtually no competition as a small package transported. United Parcel

Service was able to deliver to Pennsylvania counties around Philadelphia for department stores such as Lit Brothers, Strawbridge and Clothier and John Wanamaker. They were extremely restricted on the package size and weight. The news few years saw them delivering to New Jersey counties just across the Delaware River. The department stores advertised "The package you take home gets there first." As UPS grew, so did its ICC approval to serve expanded areas. Their non-union drivers had to run from trucks to the customers doors, while I could find many Railway Expressmen asleep in their trucks or taking breaks in diners and restaurants.



Having now lived in Aiken for 40 years, I can say I never ran into anyone who bragged about being a clansman. But sure enough, among the Philadelphia drivers and loaders, two Klu Klux Klan members tried to get me to join their ranks. Long after the incident at the money room, I discovered another infraction of the "rules". There were at least two big railcars headed to New York that were loaded on the mid-night shift. Two regulars had the job of loading these cars each weeknight. One

night I noticed the two of them taking a swig out of quart sized liquor bottles. This time, being cautious about my experience in them money room, I mentioned it first to my boss. "It's okay, they each drink a bottle every night. All they have in their lunch pails is that bottle, but they load those New York cars themselves without a hitch."

During World War I, many of the loading/driving jobs were held by women. We had a holdover from that period twenty years later. I was concerned that older lady was on the job one night when I knew a lot of heavy packages were headed her way. I asked one of the "floaters" to give her a hand. She told him to go on. She could handle it herself. When she got in line to clock out, she said, "Mr. Erb busted my nuts with heavy stuff tonight."

Railway Express kept trying to modernize its operations. In the early 1960's, they introduced one of the first containers since the railroads had tried it in the pre-war years. Rather than a closed outdoor type, this one was about two feet by five by four and a half feet high with a heavy fence mesh and large gate. While it was heavy, it had its own swivel wheels so that it could be pushed by hand on the level. The unit was priced to hold small items or packages going to one destination or for break-bulk to multiple deliveries. We had a couple of dozen of these in the Philadelphia terminal, but I doubt if the public uses them enough to have paid for their construction.

The operations center in Philadelphia was at 30th and Walnut Streets, whereas the agency department was at 30th and Market Streets, directly across from the Evening Bulletin offices. To its right was the

## Step into History at the Aiken Railroad Depot

Since opening its doors September 18, 2010, the Aiken Railroad Depot has become a special point of interest for tourists and residents alike. The Depot houses both *The City of Aiken Visitor's Center* and the *Aiken Railroad Depot Train Museum* providing multiple reasons to come in and explore.

The Aiken Railroad Depot was the welcoming point for most visitors coming to Aiken to escape the bitter cold of Northern winters. Today visitors are transported back in time as they step inside the Aiken Railroad Depot and explore the Depot's many offerings. With the City of Aiken's Visitor Center our Depot is a great place to learn more about our city. It's easy to imagine what it might have been like to be a passenger arriving in Aiken ready to begin the winter season. Head upstairs to the train museum and view 9 incredible dioramas depicting the towns along the original South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company right of way. The detail and accuracy is remarkable and recently highlighted in *Great Model Railroads 2014* as one of the top 10 model railroads in the world.

Another fantastic way to experience historic Aiken is to board the City of Aiken Trolley for an entertaining and informative tour of the City. Whether you're new to Aiken, a lifelong resident, or



visiting for the first time, experiencing the history and charm of Aiken never gets old.

Tours depart every Saturday as weather permits. Private week-day tours are available for groups. Be sure to contact the Aiken Visitors Center office for more information.

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### TOUR INFORMATION

**Saturdays 10 am-Noon**

*\*weather permitting*

**Tickets \$15**

*Reservations recommended  
Private Groups tours available*

**Call 803-643-2119**

## Railway Express Agency *(continued from Page 4)*

30th Street station of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Our small staff in 1960 met in an office that would hold more than 100 people. The second floor in 1959 had many dozens of ladies who handled the thousands of tickets generated by other dozens of clerks every day at the terminal. Billing to large companies included a copy of each ticket, sometimes amounting to many boxes to go along with the monthly invoices. By late 1960, that whole second floor was employ because IBM had sold the express company a large main-frame computer system using punch cards to identify each shipment. The company offered me an opportunity to go into that department.

I made a very large mistake by listening to a friend who said that whole trial would fail, that they would have to revert back to paper tickets and manual billing. It seemed like that may happen when IBM in Philadelphia was one of the first customers to reject the idea of not having paper tickets included in their monthly invoices. Looking back, I could have been in on the ground floor of the computer industry, as this was a full twenty years before personal computers changed our world.

After five years with the company, I saw greener pastures in transporting liquid carbon dioxide and cryogenics. By the early

1970's I moved on to nuclear transportation, and it was during that occupation that I learned that Railway Express had closed as a result of a decision by its railroad owners to bow to the competition by UPS and others.

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**Friends of the Aiken Railroad Depot**  
406 Park Avenue SE  
Aiken, South Carolina 29801

803-293-7846  
803-641-3002  
888-Aiken SC {245-3672}  
[www.aikenrailroaddepot.org](http://www.aikenrailroaddepot.org)



## THE AIKEN RAILROAD DEPOT

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The beautifully restored Aiken Railroad Depot is home to the City of Aiken's Visitor Center & Railroad Museum. Capturing an important part of Aiken's history, The Railroad Depot building looks much like it did between 1899 and 1954. During the early part of the last century, this freight station was bustling, with as many as 1,000 horses per year arriving in the Fall and returning the end of Spring to New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and the New England area.

Members of *The Friends of the Aiken Railroad Depot* play an important part in preserving this important piece of Aiken's history. To learn more about ways you can support the *Aiken Railroad Depot* or become a member of *The Friends of the Aiken Railroad Depot*, please visit [www.aikenrailroaddepot.org](http://www.aikenrailroaddepot.org).

**THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING THE AIKEN RAILROAD DEPOT !**

**ALL ABOARD!**