

John George German

A Legend in his Own Time

A Half Century of Railroading

The twentieth century arguably ushered in more technological and social changes than any other single century in history. The railroads were no exception to being affected by these changes. In fact, they were themselves the authors of major economic and social changes. The railroads both benefited from and were forced to redefine themselves as a result of technology, regulations, and competition. John G. German was involved in most of the major changes in railroading during his fifty-two years of service with the Great Northern, Missouri Pacific, International Heavy Haul Association, and his own international railway consulting firm.

It was almost destined that John German would become a railroader. Both of his grandfathers, his father, and at least two uncles worked on the railroad. He grew up around trains and train stories. He was born in 1921 at Devil's Lake, North Dakota. Railroading meant some moves for the family. He attended grade school and junior high school in Great Falls, Montana, and in Devil's Lake, and high school in Glasgow, Montana. His continuous railroad career began with the Great Northern in 1943 after receiving a degree in mechanical engineering from the Case School of Applied Science (now Case-Western Reserve University) at Cleveland, Ohio.

When he finished his college work, he had twenty-six job offers. He accepted the one offered by the Great Northern Railway. He telephoned his father and told him about taking the offer, and his father listened as John talked. When John finished there was silence from his father. Then his father simply said rather reluctantly, "Well okay, son." [In a conversation about landing his first job, John explained the hesitancy that he remembered in his father's voice. His father was concerned that his son might not "go as far with the railroad" as he would with one of the other companies. John acknowledged that his formal training at Case gave him more opportunities for advancement than his father had when working his way up on the railroad.]

Looking Back

The Many Hats of John German



John as a youngster



High School Graduation

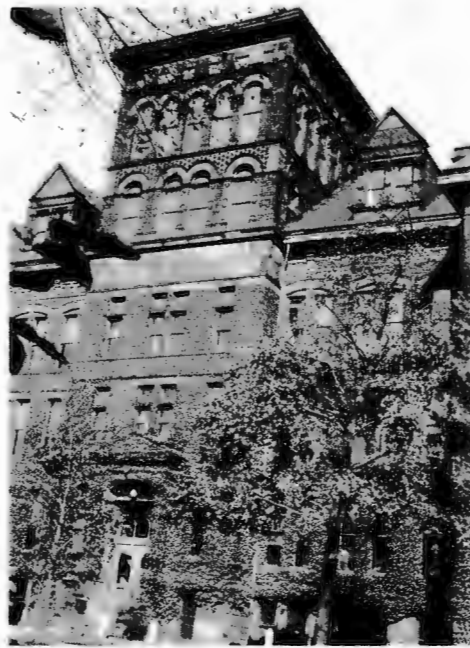
Photos :Author's Collection



Frosh at Case-Western



In band uniform at Case-Western



Building at Case-Western



Aunt Alice German and John

George German and his sister Alice

John lived with Alice German while he attended Case-Western in Cleveland.

John joined the Great Northern in Spokane, Washington, as an assistant to the Master Mechanic. Frequent promotions took him through a variety of positions and to many locations the Great Northern served. He became Traveling Engineer in Grand Forks, North Dakota; Shelby, Montana; and Spokane, Washington. From 1955 to 1958, he served as Master Mechanic in Grand Forks, North Dakota; Great Falls, Montana; and Seattle, Washington, before becoming Assistant to the Chief Mechanical Officer and finally Superintendent of Motive Power until August 1961, in St. Paul, Minnesota.

This period of railroad history was marked by one of the biggest technological changes in railroading – the phasing out of steam and the advent of diesel locomotives. John was deeply involved in this process on the Great Northern.



MW5 at Buelow Montana on 2-15-54 Engineer Pfeiffer, Traveling Engineer John German, Fireman Majeras. This is the last steam engine and last coal burner to operate west of Havre, Montana, on the Great Northern Railroad. (Author's Collection)



G.N. 404 Freight Diesel A-B-B-A 4 units 0-B-B-0 1 unit Dynamic Breaking
193' long 15' high 10'2" wide 460 tons total wt. Built by EMC 1944 Hillyard 7-?-
44 (Author's Collection)

Looking Back over John's Career

John began a distinguished career with Missouri Pacific in St. Louis in 1961 as Chief Mechanical Officer. He was Assistant VP-of Engineering from 1966 until December of 1975 when he was named Vice-President-Engineering. In 1982 he became VP-Staff and retired from MoPac in 1983. As Assistant Vice-President-Engineering, he had charge of Maintenance of Way as well as Maintenance of Equipment.

He introduced many changes for Missouri Pacific which reduced costs and improved efficiency and safety of the fleet. In doing so, he gained national recognition for his abilities. One important accomplishment was to establish discipline in the planning and execution of maintenance and capital expenditure budgets so that they could be more quickly adjusted to meet changing times. He insisted that equipment must be in top condition to operate efficiently, and to do this some well-designed shops would be absolutely essential. John devoted much of his time at MoPac toward this goal. He designed and supervised the construction of the first shop in North America [Jenks Shop located in Little Rock, Arkansas] dedicated solely for diesel-electric locomotive heavy repairs and re-manufacturing. The shops' designs helped to better organize and establish pride among his work forces resulting in greatly reduced costs, road failures, and personal injuries. Such shop improvements meant MoPac was able to refurbish their equipment into the most modern, efficient, reliable, and low maintenance fleet on the continent.

Safety has always been a major railroad issue. John inspired the Mechanical Division of the Association of American Railroads to raise standards of safety and performance. In addition, he organized and led industry committees whose efforts brought about improved safety standards for handling hazardous materials.

Other industry committees with which John was involved tackled changes in ICC (Interstate Commerce Commission) and FRA (Federal Railroad Administration) regulations. Many rules were archaic and did not make sense given the equipment in operation at this time. The committees he led spent many hours testifying before Congress on this issue. The result was more practical rules which led to savings in operating costs for the railroads without detracting from safety itself.

One of the industry areas to which John devoted a large amount of time is that of track/train dynamics. He was chair of the Association of American Railroads track/train dynamics steering committee and co-chairman of the track/train dynamics train handling review committee. His leadership of these committees led to meaningful studies which produced information that could be directly applied to train operations and analysis of derailments.

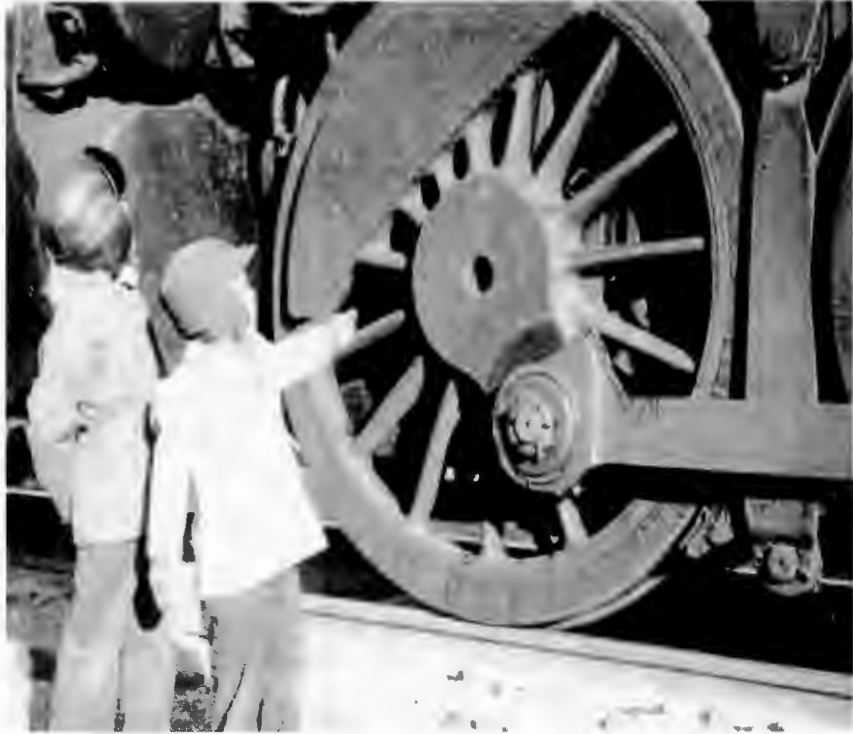
John has been generous in his support of industry organizations. He was a member of ten technical associations and railway clubs in addition to the Association of American Railroads. His service to the rail industry has not been confined solely to the United States. In July of 1983, he became Executive Director of the International Heavy Haul Association (IHHA). Membership is open to any heavy haul railroad from any country. The organization was formed to develop and disseminate knowledge about heavy haul railroad technology and operations. In addition to IHHA involvement, he has participated in conferences on equipment and track in a long list of countries around the world. These include: Austria, Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, France, Finland, Great Britain, Mexico, People's Republic of China, Poland, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, and West Germany. This gave John the opportunity to observe in detail the operation and maintenance of their railways.

John entered the last phase of his railroad career in 1983 when he launched his own international consulting firm, John German Railway Engineering Consultants, Ltd. In this capacity, he did railway consulting in Canada, China, Australia, Austria, and Russia as well as the United States. He operated this firm for twelve years before finally retiring in 1995.

He, following retirement, enjoyed a relaxed life with his wife Mary in Springfield, Missouri, with plenty of time to reflect over his half century plus career in the railroading. Even after retirement, John continued to be involved in model railroading with an HO scale club that met weekly. Trains continued to be a part of his fabric. He always had a fascinating "train story" to relate. Even his car testified to his commitment to the railroad. The special license plate simply said "TRAIN 1." When he and Mary had two cars, the license plate on the second car read "TRAIN II."

John's license plate showcased his fifty years of dedicated service.





John also introduced his sons to trains very early in their lives.

Awards

*~A sampling of honors bestowed on John during his
fifty years of railroad service ~*



**St. Louis Railway Club
Man of the Year 1978**

***MR Modern Railroads Rail Transit* magazine's
Man of the Year 1980**



**Elected to
Heavy Haul of Fame
International Heavy Haul Associations
2003**



**American Railway Engineering
and
Maintenance-of-Way Association**

AREMA

American Railway Engineering and
Maintenance-of-Way Association

Membership Certificate
LIFE MEMBER

This certifies that

John G German

is a member in good standing of AREMA

W. Van Trump

2009-2010 President

[Signature]

Executive Director/CEO

American Society of Mechanical Engineers

THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
MECHANICAL ENGINEERS

Founded 1880

Recognizes the long term membership of

John G. German

who for

Fifty Years

has been and is entitled to all the privileges granted
by the Constitution of the Society, an organization
for promoting the art, science, and practice
of mechanical engineering

1993 - 1994

John H. Fernandez
President



David P. Selden
Executive Director