

Portraits of Railroading NIGHT TRAINS

COMPILED BY
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PERHAPS NO ASPECT of railroad operations has a more impactful and enduring legacy than the iconic moan of a train's whistle at night. Those who heard it conjured images of intrigue and adventure, or thought of faraway places and new surroundings. Increasingly rare today, it nonetheless remains a source of remembrance or longing.

We, on the other hand, know those tones, their number, pattern, and length, are the language of trains at work. Their operators use them to alert others of their needs and intentions, to warn unsuspecting strangers of their presence, or to notify people of their pending arrival. That they occur in the middle of darkness, unobstructed by the humdrum of daily activity, adds emphasis on their call.

Sometimes we catch sight of trains speeding through the night carrying freight or passengers. Where did they come from? Where are they headed? The train has already disappeared into the darkness before we can get an answer.

Here, then, are depictions of what the trains behind those "lonesome whistles" might be up to, from 12 of North America's railroad artists. ■



Orders

—Stewart Buck, pastels, 25x31"

The sound of a steam whistle cuts the crisp, wintry air announcing the approach of Extra 1385 West, a Chicago & North Western way freight pulled by a 1907 R-1 Ten-Wheeler. Leaning from the cab, an engineer snags his orders hooped up by the station agent, who then dutifully gives the westbound a roll-by inspection. The caboose rattles past the depot and its glowing red marker lights quickly disappear. A distant whistle fades into the blue dreaminess of night and a bitterly cold chill settles in. It's time to seek warmth by the fiery heat of the depot's steamy cast-iron stove.



Flight of the Speed Witch

—William G. Dulmaine, watercolor, 19x24"

The Speed Witch (NE-1) was the official name given one of New Haven Railroad's premier merchandise trains. Each night the train departed Boston at 5:15PM, picking up cars from connecting freights on its way west. At Bay Ridge, N.Y., the cars were floated across New York Harbor to Pennsylvania Railroad at Greenville, N.J. Shortly after sunrise, the Speed Witch's cars were on the Pennsy, on their way to Newark, Camden, Philadelphia, Wilmington, and points beyond, to be delivered to their terminals.



Crew Change at Brownwood

—Bryan Neumann, acrylic on canvas, 18x24"

A crew change for Santa Fe's westbound California Special unfolds at Brownwood, Texas, circa 1954. The 2:00AM ritual prepares the train for its eight-hour run to Clovis, N.M. A curious possum, separated from the train by a second track, watches the proceedings in hopes a snack falls from a crewman's grip. The artist thanks railroad historian Mary Irving for the inspiration to create this piece.



Two Trains in the Night Yards

—Nadine Charlsen, watercolor on handmade paper, 22x13"

This painting depicts the railyard running through the River Arts District in Asheville, N.C. "It mixes my theatrical career in lighting design and my art career. I like to show the power and drama of the railroad industry in my paintings. These Norfolk Southern engines were parked in the yard, with the lighting making an interesting composition for the painting."

Last Run

—James R. Mann, watercolor, 12x16"

Subtitled "The Reading Railroad's Budd RDC over the East Branch of Perkiomen Creek Viaduct at Sellersville, Pennsylvania," this portrait of the last train north to Bethlehem, Pa., from Philadelphia is shown dashing through the snow as it approaches Sellersville over a seven-arch viaduct built in 1917 to span the East Branch feeder and adjacent floodplain of Perkiomen Creek. Mann rode these commuter trains until passenger service north of Lansdale was terminated in July 1981. "I made some very good friends on this train," he says. "Some that lasted well beyond its demise."





Double Trouble

—Gil Bennett, oil, 18x24"

"Asked for a painting of a Pennsylvania Railroad T-1 at night, in Altoona, Pa., with a mail train, I suggested a doubleheader with T-1s, as a joke. The client liked the idea and came up with the name 'Double Trouble,' a reference to the wheel slip the T-1 was known for among its quirks. The client wanted a watercolor, but at that time, to get the light and the dark right, I had to do it in oil." It is 8:57PM on December 12, 1948. Two T-1 4-4-4-4 locomotives blast out of Altoona with a heavy 18-car mail train, with the temperature at 10 degrees and dropping. Running as the third section of the Pennsylvania Limited, the train heads west going uphill past Slope Tower.



Nelson Yard Office

—Ron Hatch, acrylic on canvas panel, 18x24"

"For this early commissioned piece, the client once worked out of Nelson, Ill., and wanted a depiction of himself in the cab of a Chicago & North Western GP-7. I was given a few photos for reference and left to my own design on the scene. Studying the yard office, I thought the play of light would be interesting, along with reflections from wet surfaces. So here we have the yard switcher 'on spot' on a warm evening in northern Illinois. Behind the scenes, the work must be done 24/7, rain or shine."

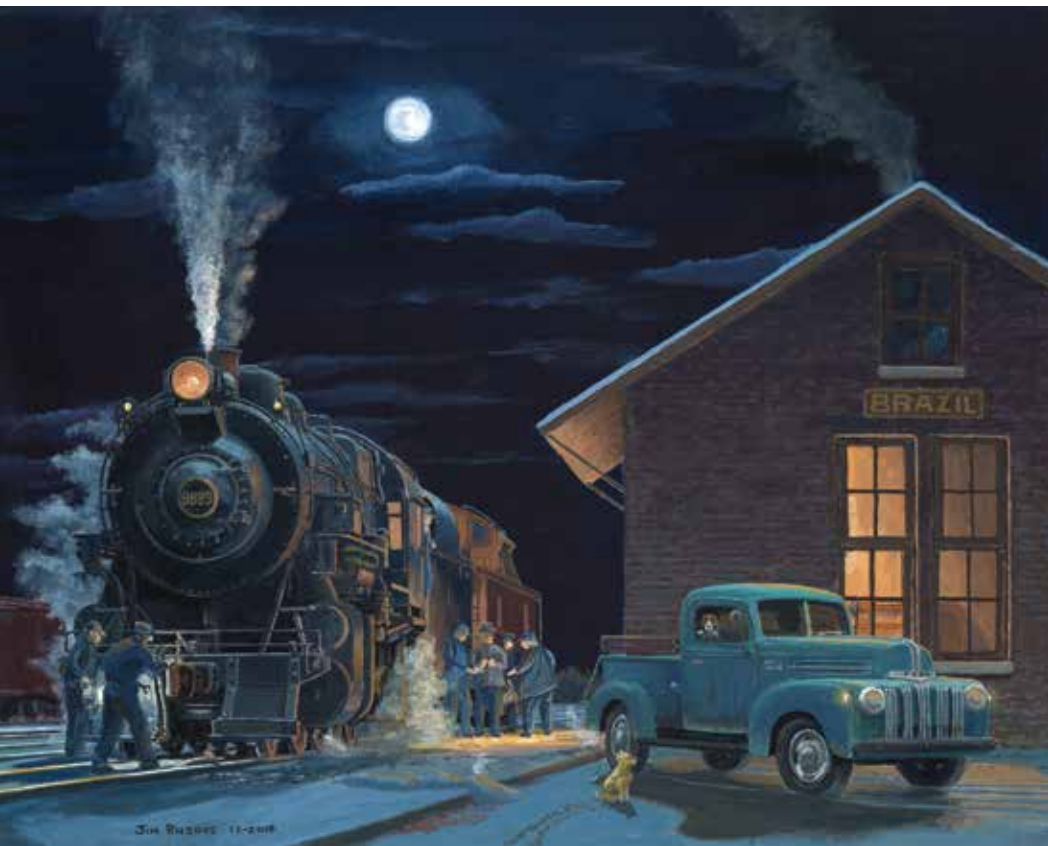
Southern Pride: Age of Steam on the Southern Ry.

—David Tutwiler, oil on linen canvas, 24x36"

"A commission, this image is meant to reflect the owner's love of trains and the pride of the South. I wanted to encompass the mood and feel of rail yard activities a person might experience visiting on a busy winter evening in the 1930s. My primary subject is the Southern Railway Ps-4 Class Pacific-type 4-6-2 locomotive 1401. Here she is seen rushing through the Charlotte Division yard heading up the iconic Crescent Limited, taking orders on the fly from the yard office attendant. In the background, a handsome Atlantic Coast Line Pacific is flying through under an illumination of winter-lit steam and smoke, driving a hole into the night with determination to keep on schedule. The activities of an evening rail yard abound, suspended in a moment in time for the viewer to pause and consider how it might have been."



NIGHT TRAINS

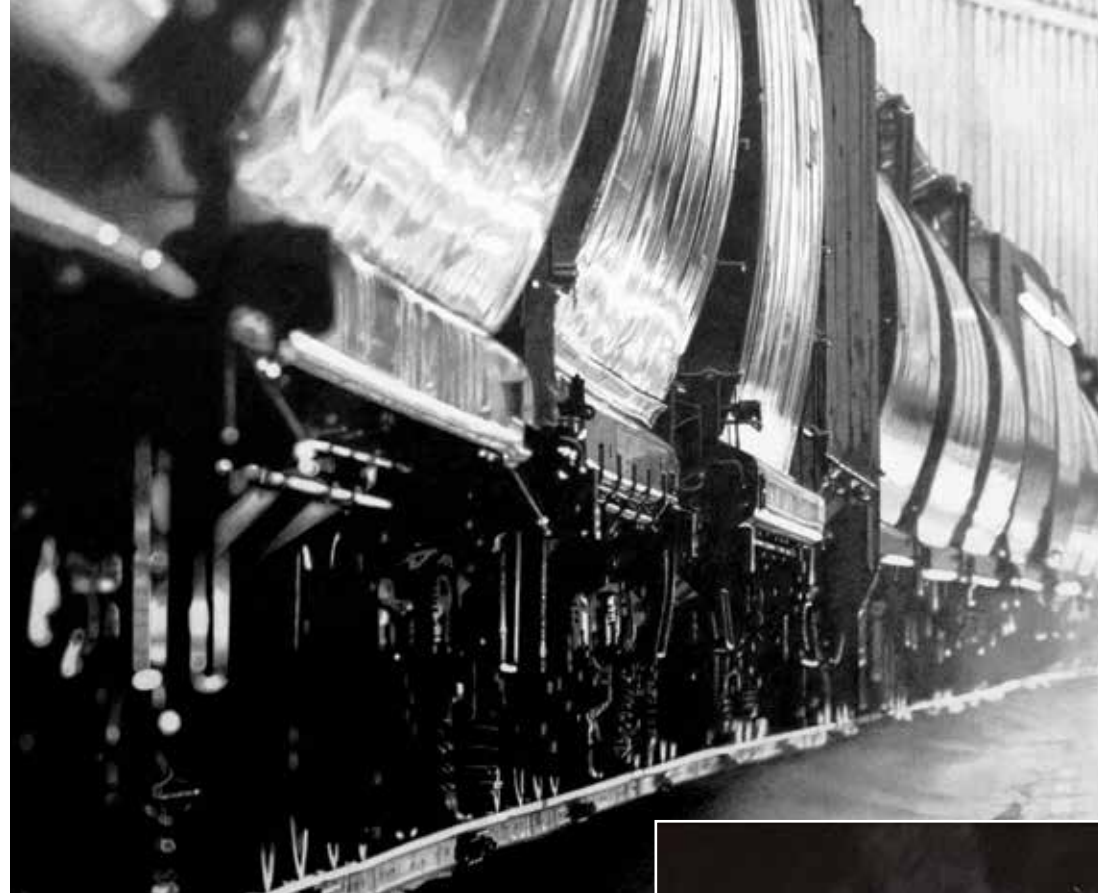


Local Job on the Pennsy

—James Rhodes, acrylic, 11x14"
Just before daybreak on a January 1948 morning, the local Pennsy crew discusses the day's work with the station agent at the depot in Brazil, Ind. Venerable H10 class 2-8-0 9889 and an N6B cabin car are assigned to the job, which will include switching many nearby industries and interchange with Chicago & Eastern Illinois and Baltimore & Ohio northwest of the depot. Meanwhile, a crewmember and worker are about to change out a defective air hose on the front of engine 9889. At this early hour, the mechanical department guy has brought his dog along in his '46 Ford.

Boarding at Omaha

—Shayne Stoakes, oil, 24x30"
"This scene captures the mood of a last-minute boarding on the 8:20PM out of Omaha. As a child, I recall being at a train station, similar to this traveler, and remember vividly how different the atmosphere was at night. Although the platforms were lit, reflections and shadows flowed from the trains, and the escalators moving people between platforms. It is an experience preserved in both a photograph taken by Richard Steinheimer and my artwork."



Sidings

—Roger Watt, graphite on Bristol board, 10x12"
Like all of Watt's drawings, this image came about through sheer happenstance. "I was taking my daughter to a movie one rainy night and passing the Canadian National sidings in North Vancouver, I was mesmerized by the way that the light from passing car headlights was playing against the wet grain cars. I apologized to my daughter about missing her movie but just had to rush home and get my camera, which proved to be well worth it as the resultant drawing is one of my favorites and was sold during my solo show at the O.K. Harris Gallery in New York in 2014."

Final Run

—Grady Caskey, oil on canvas, 30x40"
"The inspiration for this scene occurred on Tuesday, March 31, 1953, and involved Red River & Gulf Railroad and Longleaf Lumber Company sawmill in my native Louisiana. The work portrays the final steam-powered load of lumber delivered to interchange. RR&G fought a raging thunderstorm to meet a midnight deadline when the engines' serviceable time would end after 30 years. Despite the severe weather, trees over rails, and an impossible schedule, the engineer completed the journey on time. It's important that the history of the lesser-known steam-era railroads and the perseverance of the men operating them be preserved."



Night Trains: About the Artists

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER with the art of Roger Watt produced more skepticism than anything. Yes, his work is crisp and recognizable. His topics are both authentic and mysterious. The sum is excellence. But the image itself had to be a black & white photograph. I wrote to confront him on this matter (perhaps that's why I've had 12 major employers over my lifetime). Roger very politely responded with a series of images, one of which is presented here, detailing how his work evolves from a blank sheet of paper to a remarkable likeness, both in its detailing and content; a work of art executed in graphite.

His kind willingness to indulge me further results in one of his works being included in the *Portraits of Railroading* feature elsewhere in this issue (pages 46–51). He also took the time to answer a few questions from his home in Vancouver, B.C.

R&R: How did you become an artist and what is it about railroads that draws you to them as a subject?

Roger: My late father was responsible for my love of drawing and railways. An accomplished artist himself, he was an account director and illustrator in the advertising industry in London in the 1950s and started me off drawing when I was four. I inherited his love of graphite, which has stayed with me to this day, becoming even more intense over the years as I struggle to perfect my technique and challenge myself with increasingly complex and atmospheric imagery.

Two events have been pivotal in my drawing career. The first was when one of my drawings of a steam locomotive was selected for the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in 2003. My first thought was that my dad would have been pleased, and my second was how fortunate I was to have a steam locomotive drawing hanging in the same gallery where my hero J.M.W. Turner's famous "Rain Steam & Speed" had been exhibited.

The second pivotal event was my first solo show in New York at the renowned O.K. Harris Gallery, during which a drawing of a derelict steam engine was purchased by the owner, Ethan Karp; his father Ivan was responsible for discovering Andy Warhol and establishing O.K. Harris as one of the premier galleries in the city.



Artist Roger Watt, whose work in graphite can be seen opposite and on pages 50–51.
PHOTO COURTESY OF ROGER WATT

R&R: Why graphite as a medium?

Roger: There is something intensely satisfying in creating highly finished images from the most basic of materials, i.e., pencil and paper, and this pursuit aspect extends to me not using any burnishing, smoothing, or blending tools. Not that I've got anything against them, but for me, every square inch of my drawings has to be the action of a constantly sharpened point of a hard H-grade pencil which kind of "engraves" the image into the board and provides a consistent overall matte finish, free of the reflective quality which soft B pencils give in the dark areas.

R&R: How does your use of graphite influence what you choose to portray in your works?

Roger: I only draw from my own photographs and very much "in the now," as I want each image to be a moment that I have actually experienced and captured myself. "Each a glimpse and gone forever," to quote the last line of Robert Louis Stevenson's evocative poem "From A Railway Carriage." There needs to be an industrial feel, too (even in my non-railway drawings), and while I have fond memories of childhood train-spotting and I am very interested in all aspects of railway history, recreating the past through my drawing is not something that has ever appealed to me. I've always loved

drawing from life and I was fortunate enough to have an inspirational drawing tutor at art school who, having studied at the Slade School in London, taught us to draw what we see and not what we think we see, using careful measurement and fixing points for obtaining accuracy. This seemed so logical to me that I embraced it totally, along with my tutor's dictum that "there is no point in putting anything down on paper unless it's right," something I've carried with me throughout my creative career as an art director, graphic designer, typographer, photographer, and, probably most crucially, artist.

R&R: I shamelessly acknowledge my gratitude for the knowledge Ethan Karp and the others mentioned here demonstrate in the presence of Roger Watt's work. I now look forward to everything he sends us. His work and contact information can be found at watt-art.com. (Member: American Society of Railway Artists and Guild of Railway Artists)

Here is a look at the other artists included in this month's feature.

Gil Bennett is a graduate of the Art Department at the University of Utah, and has been a professional illustrator since 1984. Mentored by Howard Fogg and Ted Rose, he refers to himself as an "artistator," his term for that blend of artistic expression and technical detail



A work in progress from Roger Watt shows the detail as it is added to one of his graphite works.
ARTWORK COURTESY OF ROGER WATT

found in his work. www.gilbennett.com; (801) 768-3166; gil@gilbennett.com. (ASRA Founding Member)

Stewart Buck has been creating railroad art for more than six decades. His works reside in private and corporate collections around the U.S. Buck's commissions include work for eight railroads, including Chicago & North Western, Union Pacific, Wisconsin Central, and Iowa Interstate. His work has been selected for book covers, calendars, brochures, greeting cards, and magazines. He resides in Ankeny, Iowa, with his wife, Mary. www.stewartbuck.com; sbucko2@aol.com; (515) 494-0946. (ASRA Founding Member)

Grady Caskey was born in northern Louisiana, where logging is still a major industry. Self-taught as an artist before attending college, there he earned degrees in studio art and art education. A friend introduced him to the golden age of lumbering, and that, combined with his passion for steam railroading, earned him numerous commissions. thetrainpainter.com; artist.caskey@gmail.com. (ASRA Founding Member)

Nadine Charlsen is a landscape watercolor artist and instructor based in Asheville, N.C. Her 31-year career as a theatrical lighting designer in New York City allows her to incorporate light, shadow, scale, colors, and textures to produce

artistic drama. Her work is inspired by architecture, cityscapes, and serene countryside settings captured through her camera's lens. Charlsen currently teaches watercolor at 310 Art Gallery in the River Arts District in Asheville. nadinepaints.com; nlcharlsen@gmail.com. (ASRA Member)

Bill G. Dulmaine Jr. says that "seeing steam engines at age three is where it all started." His railroad art work includes a series of water colors illustrating the railroads of Boston while at the Massachusetts College of Art and designing the Providence & Worcester Railroad's logo. "Flight of the *Speed Witch*" (page 46) is one of a series of five New Haven paintings produced as prints. He is president of the New Haven Railroad Historical & Technical Association and former editor of its journal. wdulmaine@gmail.com; P.O. Box 1125, Sterling, MA 01564. (ASRA Founding Member)

Ron Hatch is self-taught as an artist, but is trained in drafting and design. He has held jobs as an illustrator and in commercial technical illustration, residential drafting, and industrial design. He is noted for the precision and technical accuracy in his railroad art. The majority of his works are in acrylic, and he produces few prints, with most work going directly to collectors and clients. www.ronhatchart.com; (309) 335-3755;

knoxsta@comcast.net.

James R. Mann grew up near the south portal of Reading Railroad's Perkasee Tunnel and presents a career in architectural illustration, culminating in a retirement from the Office of the University Architect at the University of Pennsylvania in early 2015, to more obsessively indulge his passions for drawing, painting, and farming. jamesmannartfarm.com; jrm@jamesmannartfarm.com. (ASRA Member)

Bryan Neumann grew up in a large family in Texas and Illinois. His mom started him out at age eight with a set of three Royal Fine Sable brushes in 1990, but he now prefers da Vinci brushes from Germany. Bryan is a career airman and paints planes, trains, and birds. Fueled by his thirst for freedom, exploration, and family fun, Bryan enjoys blending railroad subjects with scenic landscapes to produce pleasing, natural pieces using acrylic paint. (210) 852-1055. (ASRA Founding Member)

James Rhodes' childhood was spent watching trains just yards from his home in Knightsville, Ind., along Pennsylvania Railroad's busy St. Louis line, and listening to stories of his grandfather's 33 years working for the Pennsy. That explains his desire to create drawings of trains. His career in drafting and tool and die design, combined with his use of drafting tools, and skill with color, shading, and composition, enable him to create his works. countryrhodes1965@gmail.com. (ASRA Member)

Shayne Stoakes was born and raised in Pocatello, Idaho, where his love for trains and nature began. He's worked for Union Pacific as a fireman/oiler since 1991, and enjoys model railroading and a variety of outdoor activities. While he's had no formal art education, his many interests, family, occupation, and scenic location provide inspiration and resources for his works. railartbyshayne.com; Shayne@railartbyshayne.com; (208) 232-9237. (ASRA Founding Member)

David Tutwiler began painting when he was 14 years old, having earned a scholarship to the Art Institute of Chicago. He next studied at the American Academy of Art, where he majored in fine art. Today, David is one of the preeminent painters of steam-era railroading in America, regarded by many as a leading authority on railroad art in the U.S. Combining firsthand knowledge with an eye for accuracy and attention to detail, his paintings evoke both warmth and comfortable recognition. tutwilerfineart.com; david@tutwilerfineart.com. (ASRA Founding Member) 📧

PLEASE SEND QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS on railroad dining, art, and other trackside treats to Jim Porterfield at P.O. Box 3041, Elkins, WV 26241, or email onthemenu@railfan.com.