

Steam engine treks to Argos

by Eula Romayne Smith

Natives of Europe identify American tourists as the people with all the cameras. Tourists were so plentiful at Argos when the Nickel Plate train stopped on Saturday, July 12, that a person wasn't really in style without a multi-colored ribbon around his neck or a camera case over his shoulder.

Speaking of styles, an elderly train buff from Detroit wore a jacket that was a real conversation piece. He had started with a typical rail-roader's coat of hickory striped denim and added colorful patches from the different rail lines he had ridden. These almost covered the front, back and sleeves.

Another train buff came from North Liberty. "Did you ever know Russell Arnsberger?" we asked. (Russell Arnsberger was a cousin of Ralph and Lee Arnsberger and lived south of Mentone before he moved to North Liberty to work in the telegraph office.)

"Sure," the man replied. "Russell was one who had time for young people. Some train men didn't, so we knew when he worked and would go down to see him."

The young train attendants, both male and female, wore bright gold

T-shirts which presented quite a contrast to the somber dark suits worn by conductors of the past.

Although the working crews in their dark blue T-shirts looked like 1980, they faced some of the problems of earlier train men. When the temperature is above 90 degrees in the shade, standing on top of a train car in the sun, scooping coal, must be hard work.

The fire that provided the steam gave off smoke and cinders, so one crewman's face was covered with smoke and grease except under his goggles. A few wore handkerchiefs around their necks and leather gloves protected their hands when they oiled some of the moving parts.

When steam engines were used regularly, they took on water from the lake near Claypool or the river at Tippecanoe, but the Argos Fire Department provided water for this run. It holds 22,000 gallons of water and 22 tons of coal.

A few hot coals dropped to the ground under the engine and reminded us of the potential fire hazard of the steam engines. The grate area was 90.3 square feet, and boiler pressure was 245.

It is no wonder the ground shook when the steam powered locomotive rolled through Mentone and

the surrounding area. Engine No. 765 including the tender (tender is water and coal section of the train) weighed 440,800 pounds. That is just the engine, not the 15 cars that it pulled. No. 765 was built in 1944 in Lima, Ohio. Its cylinders were 25 inches across and moved 34 inches. It was Type 2-8-4 which means on each rail there is a small wheel followed by four driver wheels and then more small wheels. The driver wheels on this engine were about as tall as a man (69 inches), and the weight of them was 264,300 pounds. It had Timken roller bearing journals and driving and engine truck axles.

Even when the 765 was built to help with wartime transportation, train men were thinking about Diesel powered locomotives, so the Nickel Plate bought their last steam locomotive in 1949 and retired most of them ten or twelve years later. About twenty or twenty five years ago people hurried out to see a Diesel, but now the sound of the whistle and the smoke rising round the bend brings back memories to some and is a new experience to the younger generation.