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May 2026 Gateway Railletter

1 message

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THE GATEWAY RAILLETTER

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Milwaukee Road GP20s 965 and 970 lead two SDL39 locomotives eastbound at Hector, Minnesota on Saturday, July 9, 1983. The 965 was rebuilt from GP9 240 in June of 1972, while 970 was rebuilt from GP9 257 in September of 1972. The Milwaukee Road rebuilt 54 well worn 1,750 horsepower GP9s into 2,000 horsepower "GP20s" in three groups from June of 1969 to October 1973. The rebuilt locomotives were renumbered downward with the first one numbered 999 and the 54th numbered 946. Hector is about 90 miles west of St. Paul on the former Milwaukee Road Chicago - Seattle mainline

Photo by Rick Sprung

UPCOMING CHAPTER MEETING

Wednesday, May 6, 2026 7:00 pm

The National Museum of Transportation

Lindburg Automobile Center, 2nd Floor

President's Message

The St. Louis Chapter Endowment has awarded The National Museum of Transportation (TNMOT) a Grant for the restoration of the Monsanto Tank Car. This is a unique rail car, which is important to St. Louis history, and is popular with visitors to TNMOT since they can walk through it (and make noise in it). In May, Amanda Ryman, the Grant Writer for TNMOT will give a presentation on the restoration projects recently funded by the Chapter's Endowment Fund.

Upcoming St. Louis Chapter Tour

The Chapter has set up a walking tour of the National Building Arts Center in Sauget, Illinois on Saturday, May 2 at 10:00 am. The emphasis of this tour will be railroad and street car related items in their collection. The cost for this tour is \$10 per person, collected at the site.

An announcement has been sent out via e-mail. You will need to sign up for it by replying to the e-mail or sending a note to trip.director@stlouisnrhs.org. Include your name and phone number.

The tour is open only to St. Louis Chapter NRHS members. Spouses or significant other may attend. Include their name in your reply.

THE HISTORY OF THE CRUNDEN-MARTIN COMPANY

That Huge Set of Warehouses by the TRRA's Riverfront Wye

By William Schaberg

As part of the crew on the Polar Express Train Ride (PEX) on November 28, 2025, I was most dismayed to see the spectacular fire at the Crunden-Martin Co. buildings located just south of our route and the Poplar Street bridge. Our train was just coming past the fire, around the curve of the TRRA "High Line" that leads to the tunnels under the Arch.

I worked at Crunden-Martin in 1971 for a summer job during college, so watching the buildings go up in flames was sad. As an architect I admired the exteriors of the oldest of these buildings. They were well designed compared to most industrial buildings of their time.

The Fire

The fire started early that Friday morning around 3 a.m. A number of homeless people were evacuated when the firefighters arrived. Abandoned since 1990, the buildings were unoccupied by any business at the time of the fire. It took fire crews several days before the last embers were finally extinguished. According to reports at the time, it was a five alarm fire, requiring almost 200 firefighters. Thankfully no injuries were reported. At one point a collapse of the masonry at the northeast corner endangered the line curving south to Lesperance St. yard. No trains were allowed to pass there for a period of time.



Fire on Nov 28, 2025

The Buildings in 1971



Typical Wood Structure

Even when I worked at C-M it seemed that the heavy timber construction of the building frame made for a fire hazard. The single freight elevator had an 1880 patent on the control box, no updating had ever been done. Carts used to move materials around the warehouse were likely original to the building and quite ancient. I think the wheels were cast iron.

Working at a location so close to the riverfront was a life lesson for a suburban college kid. I have lots of stories about my summer at Crunden-Martin which some of

you have likely heard, but those are for another time and place. I was a member of the United Steelworkers union due to working with the steel trash cans.

History of Crunden-Martin

Crunden-Martin was one of the more important woodenware, willow ware \ and metal-goods industries of St. Louis between 1891 and 1990. The woodenware trade included an extensive variety of articles including buckets, casks, tubs, ladles, bread bowls and other household utensils. Along with those products came cordage, rope, brooms, wrapping paper, paper bags,

stove polish and axle grease. Later C-M extended their production to become a diverse manufacturer and jobber of toys, furniture specialties, baby carriages, go karts and refrigerators; the company also became the sole manufacturer of "Diamond" paper bags. In a Spring 1899 catalogue C-M listed croquet, hammocks, lawn swings, ladders, window screens, doors, wire, lawn chairs & mowers, fishing tackle, loaded shells, shot & powder, curtain stretchers, wash machines, wringers, fruit jars, fruit cans, jelly glasses, fly paper, roach & fly traps, tinware and granite ware.

Frank Payne Crunden was a St. Louis native. Charles Landen Martin was born in Maquoketa, Iowa in 1858 and moved to St. Louis with his family shortly thereafter. In 1891 Crunden and Martin merged their separate woodenware businesses as the Crunden-Martin Woodenware Company. The company soon outgrew their three small riverfront buildings, all later demolished for the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial site.

In 1904 the company hired the St. Louis architectural firm of Mauran, Russell & Garden to design what would become a seven building complex of five to six story warehouse and factory buildings. The design was in an elegant late 19th century Revival style quite different from most of the other industrial buildings in the area.

On the east side, the complex had a railroad spur into the building connecting it to the St. Louis & Iron Mountain Railroad, later Missouri Pacific.

1940s

During the 1940s, Crunden-Martin employed 500 people in a 500,000 square foot plant. At this time the company discontinued their woodenware and willow ware manufacturing in favor of fabricating metal and galvanized goods such as trash cans and glazed enamel kitchenware in addition to fiber, cotton and rubber products.¹



Helmets for WW2



Rail line at Northeast corner

During WWII, Crunden-Martin manufactured helmets, stoves, buckets and five-gallon gasoline "jerry cans" for the U. S. military; the company was one of two St. Louis companies to make helmets and the only one to manufacture "jerry cans."

Jerry Cans

Early in WWII, the Allies used round metal gas cans to move fuel. These cans were prone to bursting at the seams in hot weather because there was no room for expansion at their flat tops. The handles were small and difficult to use. The cans the German did not have this problem, because they used a rectangular gas can with an expansion area at the top. These stacked more easily. A three-bar design on top made for easier movement by the soldiers. C-M was the only local manufacturer of these cans.

[source: " St. Louis at War: The Story of a City, 1941-45 by Betty Burnett." Noted in National Register document]

1950s

In the 1950s, C-M shifted from production of wooden utensils to metal items. It also grew into one of the country's largest producers of paper kites, selling them under the Top Flite brand name. In 1977, it was still billing itself as the largest kite maker in the world.²

In the 1970s when I worked at C-M the only products they manufactured were galvanized trash cans and notebook paper. The major portion of the warehouse was used to store 1-ton rolls of paper used to make the notebook paper. They warehoused paper grocery bags, a few garden hoses and of course, the kites. Occasionally we loaded the finished trash cans in trucks or boxcars. You don't realize how big a boxcar is until you have to load one. It took most of a day to fill it with the 20 gallon trash cans C-M made. The railroad siding serving the building was still in place at the time.

Crunden-Martin filed a voluntary Chapter 11 bankruptcy petition in June 1990 just before celebrating its 100th birthday.

The Future

Several attempts have been made in the recent past to preserve and reuse these buildings and a developer has been working on the concept. So far nothing solid has taken place and now since the fire, their plans will likely have to change.

Sources

- (1) "National Register of Historic Places Registration Form 2004" Summary I OMS No. 102~18 Crunden-Martin Manufacturing Company 51. Louis [Independent City], Missouri, accessed 2/28/2026]
- (2) "The Silicon Underground" blog accessed 2/28/2026



Jerry Can

St. Louis Union Station Midway Historic Photos

Courtesy of the Missouri Pacific Historical Society Archives Collection







St. Louis Area History Showcase

The St. Louis Chapter NRHS will have a table at the HISTORY SHOWCASE at Jefferson Barracks Park on Saturday, June 6 (details below).

If you would like to help, contact David Huelsing - dhuelsing@stlouisnrhs.org

THE ST. LOUIS REGIONAL HISTORY ORGANIZATIONS
AND ST. LOUIS COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION PRESENT

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Parting Shots...



A westbound BNSF stack train is shown coming and going from the road bridge west of Winslow, Arizona on March 13, 2019. To the west is the San Francisco Peaks with Interstate 40 paralleling the tracks.
Photos by Rick Sprung

Minutes for the St Louis Chapter NRHS April Meeting

Date: April 4, 2026

The president called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM at the National Museum of Transport.

New members and guests: Robert Bretch

Need to approve the February Minutes. Motion to approve the March meeting minutes was made by and seconded by. The motion was approved. Correction was made to the Al Weber Tribute Fund. Motion was made to approve amended minutes. The minutes were declared approved.

OFFICER REPORTS:

VP Program Director-Andy Sisk: Tonight's program will feature a brief program by Bill Schaberg on his book about the National Museum of Transport in the early years. If time allow we will have a Union Pacific video.

VP Trip Director – Rick Sprung: On April 24 there will be Union Station tour. He is still working on a lunch. We may have to pay to park. He is working on free parking. On May 2 we will be going to the National Building Arts Center in Sauget. It has many relics from old buildings. The emphasis will be on railroad and street car related items. Cost is ten dollars per person. Both are at 10:00 AM. Both activities are members only, but spouses / significant others are welcome.

VP Membership Eileen Weber: Officially ended renewal period. She will be sending out roster. Still accept new members

Treasurer – Steve Siegerist: We have money. See the treasurer's report. No investment committee meeting. No investment report

Secretary – Bill Heger:Received a correspondence from Tom Clarke concerning a station on the Southeastern Railway named after his great uncle John Bodkin O'Neil.

National Advisory Committee Representative Cliff Kierstead: Talked about upcoming NRHS quarterly executive meeting in Salt Lake City.

Railletter Editor: Bill Schaberg sent in article.

Internet Media Administrator – Steve Binning:Not present. No report.

Librarian Taylor: See the back table for current library offerings.

Parliamentarian Ron Zimmer: No report

President-David Huelsing: Updates have been made to Chapter website. It now lists grants the chapter has made. New links to items on the site.

Old Business: Bill Heger brought up the motion to create the Al Weber Tribute fund. Fred Blank was present. A motion was made to take the motion to take the motion off the table by Jim. Motion was taken off table. It was seconded by Eileen Weber. Discussion followed. Motion made by Ron Zimmer to table Cliff Kierstead seconded. We held discussion. Vote on table & turn to committee. Motion tabled. Ron Zimmer. Fred Blank. Steve Siegerist. Cliff Kierstead will be on the committee.

New Business: None.

News Items:

Al Weber: Streetcar group needs help. A group is interested in rebuilding and putting 1522 back out on road. No further details.

Dave Huelsing: Please don't arrive at the museum for the meeting before 6:15 PM. Another group meets before us and they need time to set up for us.

Rick Sprung: There are only 7 private car trips submitted to Amtrak so far this year.

Ron Zimmer: Museum is developing podcasts on items in museum. Aiddn Door does a program on big boy.

Andy Sisk: April 19 Chicago Railroad memorabilia show at the Chicago Marriott at O'Hare.

Held 50/50

Adjourned: 7:45 PM

Submitted by: Bill Heger, Secretary, St. Louis Chapter, National Railway Historical Society

We Are (Still) Looking For An Editor

Want to be an editor of a periodical publication? Always wanted to put a newsletter together? Here's your chance...

The Chapter's *Gateway Railletter* Editor position is currently vacant. The job requires a few hours a month of putting articles, news and photos into the MailChimp format.

Without an editor the Gateway Railletter does not get published. We can't depend on temporary editors forever.

If you are interested in becoming the editor, please contact David Huelsing or any chapter officer. Until we find a new editor David and Rick Sprung will be filling the position. If you have anything that you would like to submit please e-mail it to newsletter.exchange@stlouisnrhs.org. Photos must have captions or an overall description included. Image and text file requirements can be found below.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN CONTRIBUTING TO **THE GATEWAY RAILLETTER**, THE DEADLINE FOR SUBMITTING CONTENT IS THE 20TH OF THE MONTH TO BE INCLUDED IN THE FOLLOWING MONTH'S ISSUE. **THE GATEWAY RAILLETTER** IS PUBLISHED MONTHLY ON OR BEFORE THE 25TH OF THE MONTH. SEND YOUR ARTICLE OR PHOTOS TO

NEWSLETTER.EXCHANGE@STLOUISNRHS.ORG

PHOTOS MUST HAVE A CAPTION OR GENERAL DESCRIPTION. IMAGE FILES SHOULD BE jpg, gif, png, bmp or tif FORMAT. DOCUMENT FILES CAN BE doc, docx, or pdf.

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