



# Cannon Ball *runs*

Named after a folk song  
in 1950, Wabash's modest  
Detroit–St. Louis dayliner  
was your “train next door”

By J. David Ingles  
Photos from the author's collection



**W**as the *Wabash Cannon Ball* truly “America’s train?” Could be. It was a train without parallel. Literally. Wabash had no direct rail competition for its 489-mile run linking what at mid-century were America’s fifth- and tenth-largest cities, Detroit (1.6 million) and St. Louis (750,000).

Service was basic, and mail and express were as important as passengers. The route hosted two trains in each direction, one daytime, one overnight, and this held until shortly before Amtrak started. They served the Heartland before that became a catch-phrase for Midwestern, small-town America . . . although the railroad came to employ a heart-shaped map emblem with the slogan, “Serving the Heart of America.” Later, Wabash touted its “Cannon Ball Freight Service.”

Among the train’s 15 stops between the Motor City and metro St. Louis were a half-dozen 15,000-ish county-seat towns, spaced among four regional commercial centers: Fort Wayne and Lafayette, Ind., and Danville and Decatur, Ill.

*Listen to the jingle, the rumble and the roar . . .*

Many folk songs in America, having their origin in human wanderlust, cite trains or railroads, some real and some imaginary: “Orange Blossom Special,” “Midnight Special,” “City of New Orleans,” “Rock Island Line,” “Wreck of the Old 97.” In fact, some say the folk song “Wabash Cannonball” first appeared on sheet music in 1882, credited to J. A. Roff with the title “The Great Rock Island Route.”

*. . . as she glides along the woodland, over hills and by the shore.*

As with a lot of songs, specific origins in a younger America can be hazy. What is known is that the Carter Family made one of the first recordings of the song with “Wabash Cannonball” lyrics in 1929, though it was not released until 1932. Another popular version was recorded by Country Music Hall of Famer Roy Acuff in 1936. Specific words in many verses vary from performer to performer.

*Although she’s tall and handsome, and known quite well by all . . .*

During the Great Depression, when “hobo-ing” on freight trains became a popular, and sometimes economically necessary, way of travel, the song gained popularity, and became an American staple. In April 1950, St. Louis–headquartered Wabash Railroad, whose name stems from the river valley its line follows across north central Indiana, brought back the name “Wabash Cannon Ball” (usually three words) and bestowed it on its Detroit–St. Louis daytime service. According to William Day of Ohio’s *Toledo Blade*, who wrote of the train in April 1959, the road considered two versions of the train name’s origin credible, both in the 1880s. One was a St. Louis–Omaha train in 1888, the other a Chicago–Kansas City train in 1884.

*. . . she’s a reg’lar ‘commodation, the Wabash Cannonball.*

Prior to 1950, Wabash’s four Detroit–St. Louis trains, in the road’s fashion on



**On the cusp of the St. Louis area, at Edwardsville, Ill. (main photo), two E7’s glide to a stop with the westbound *Wabash Cannon Ball* in July 1959. At Montpelier, Ohio, on April 12, 1959 (left), *Cannon Ball* conductor “Pat” Patterson readies for the coupling up of cars of Michigan Railroad Club’s special from South Bend, Ind., to No. 4’s parlor *City of Decatur*.**

Two photos, J. David Ingles



George Krambles; Krambles-Peterson Archive

This may be, in fact, the northbound *Banner Blue* leaving Decatur, Ill., on June 1, 1952, but in this period, it and the *Cannon Ball* were lookalikes.

all its routes, carried the simplest of names: *St. Louis Special* and *St. Louis Limited* for the westbound daytime and nighttime runs, trains 1 and 3, respectively, with “Detroit” substituted on the eastbounds, Nos. 4 and 2. (Wabash did have a plain *The Midnight* between Chicago and St. Louis until fall 1960, and until earlier that year a *Midnight Limited* between Kansas City and St. Louis, but no *Midnight Special*—that was the name of rival Alton Route’s premier Chicago–St. Louis overnighter.)

The *Wabash Cannon Ball* was not a fast train, usually carded for 9 to 10 hours, an average of about 50 mph on a route that was two-thirds single-track (double track at each end). The *Cannon Ball* was all-American in makeup, as unpretentious as its territory. With no competition, Wabash in 1950 did not feel the need to streamline it—the famous folk song name was an inexpensive alternative. (Wabash had debuted its ACF streamliner *City of Kansas City* against Missouri Pacific’s *Missouri River Eagle* in 1947, and introduced its \$1.5 million St. Louis–Chicago Budd dome-liner *Blue Bird* against Illinois Central and GM&O on February 26, 1950.)

Ironically, the *Wabash Cannon Ball* might never have been steam-powered. Handsome trim Pacifics, a few painted blue, handled the Detroit–St. Louis day trains until Wabash’s E8’s began arriving in 1949. The road’s four PAs came at

the same time for the night trains, while its four E7’s, which migrated into systemwide use, originally were for St. Louis–Kansas City trains and the *Blue Bird*. By the late 1950s, 20 steam-generator-equipped Geeps joined the cast.

The early *Cannon Ball*’s consists were entirely “standard,” or heavy-weight, usually a baggage and/or storage mail car or two, a daily-except-Sunday RPO, two or three coaches, a meal car, and a first-class car on the rear, operated by Pullman.

According to *Official Guides*, the rear car was a “café-parlor” until the *Cannon Ball* name change, when more glamorous vehicles were assigned: “Observation parlor car, Drawing Room (P-1 and P-4), Dining-Lounge (radio), and Chair Cars [Wabash’s, and others’, terms for day coaches],” to quote the *Guide*. “Reclining seats” came later. On my rides, I don’t ever recall anyone playing, or listening to, a radio.

And what vehicles those regulars were: Pullman’s *Helena Modjeska* and *Embassy*—each with a drawing room up front, then two dozen individual swivel seats, and yes, an open rear observation platform. As backup or busy-season supplements, two sister Pullman parlors were available: *Queen Anne* and *Diplomat*, which had enclosed rear ends with large solarium windows. I would come to know the foursome by their new, Wabash-oriented names: *City*

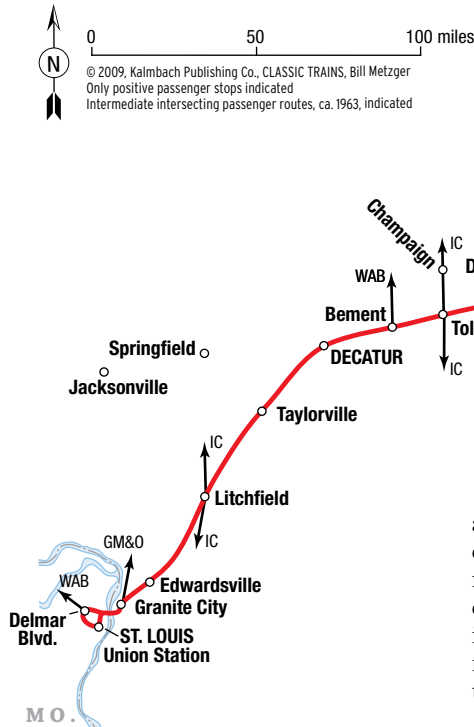
*of Lafayette* and *City of Wabash*, applied in 1954, and *City of Peru* and *City of Danville*, renamed in late 1956.

### Up close and personal

Although the *Wabash Cannon Ball* cut a swath 125 miles away and perpendicular to my Chicago origins, it flooded into my train-ride logbook during the late 1950s and early ’60s. Our family moved in 1956 from Homewood, a Chicago suburb, to Dearborn, Mich., next to Detroit, and by 1962 I was attending college in central Illinois. From school, if I could get 60 miles east to Decatur, Wabash’s operating hub, the *Cannon Ball* provided a straight shot home—faster than via Chicago and avoiding a change of trains.

I first rode the train in 1957. A Chicago cousin and his family had relocated to Decatur, and my mother, sister, and I, a young high-schooler, made a round trip to see them. No photos of this jaunt exist, but I recall the consist to be typical of the pre-1960 era: one or two E units and six or seven blue heavy-weight cars. As we boarded at Fort Street Union Depot, I noted that the rear car had an open platform. We were going coach, but down in Indiana after we finished lunch in the diner, I gathered my courage and went back to the parlor, asking the attendant if I could go stand on the back platform for a few minutes. He readily agreed, with the

# Following the flag through the heartland



warning to remain back by the windows, not out by the railing. Unfortunately, my sister, then 11 or 12, insisted in tagging along, and after only about 10 minutes out there, she'd had enough, so I glumly led her back to our seats.

Although without camera, I retain mental images from that ride, permanent impressions that helped entrench the warm spot in my soul occupied by this unremarked, all-American small-town route across five states. Wabash's Fort Wayne station was across from the main line of the mighty Pennsylvania, just west of the diamonds at "Wabash" Tower (later "Mike"); a quarry near Peru, Ind., had left two or three unused saddle-tank steam engines alongside parallel U.S. 24; one of the few sharp curves on the route, at Attica, Ind., enabled one to see clearly the train's power from your seat; an electric utility barn in Danville, Ill., still had an old box-cab electric motor parked alongside; and next to the double track from Bement to Decatur, the parallel Illinois Terminal line from Champaign still had intact lineside poles and carrier wire from interurban times. As we sailed

above Lake Decatur on Wabash's high, concrete-arch bridge, there below to the north was the ITC bridge, its track and catenary support arches intact. I looked in vain for any ITC action, even diesel, for it was obvious that electric operation here had quit (in 1955, turns out).

My second *Cannon Ball* ride was "hitch-hiking" on Michigan Railroad Club's "Spring Rail Fan Trip" diesel excursion, on the sunny Sunday of April 12, 1959. Club officers said it was a break-even outing to thank MRC regulars who worked hard on the frequent Grand Trunk Western steam trips. Today we'd call it a "rare mileage trip." Three coaches, a cafe-lounge, and open-platform parlor *City of Wabash*, all heavyweights, were attached to No. 1 out of Fort Street, and uncoupled at the

first division point, Montpelier, Ohio, 97 miles out, where passenger GP9's 485 and 486 awaited. We then ran "special," with several photo stops, west on the "Punkin' Vine" to Pine, Ind., and north to South Bend on Wabash subsidiary New Jersey, Indiana & Illinois. This 11.4-mile pike never had Garden State aspirations—it was said to be named for the states in which builder Singer (sewing machines) had plants.

At Pine, the Geeps ran around the train and towed us "backwards" to end-of-track, north of the GTW main line in South Bend, to NJI&I's office on Western Avenue. (If you know where to look, you can still see that building from Amtrak trains.) The Geeps again ran around and we headed back to Pine and Montpelier, where Baldwin switcher 301 tacked our cars behind No. 4's parlor car. This outing would set the table for me to enjoy excursions in the post-steam era, which was almost upon us.

## Connections for the west

My next two *Cannon Ball* runs came quickly that summer. For our family's annual June vacation to Colorado ["Overnight to Denver," Spring 2004 CLASSIC TRAINS], we'd always taken the



Harry L. Juday

With E7 1017 in the lead, No. 1 clears the Ambassador Bridge as it leaves Detroit in early 1965.



Three photos, J. David Ingles

Burlington from Chicago, but now living near Detroit, Dad saw an opportunity for something different: Wabash-UP via St. Louis and Kansas City.

Out of Detroit our *Cannon Ball* had a typical consist, behind those same GP9's, 485 and 486: a baggage car, an RPO, a rebuilt heavyweight coach, two streamlined coaches, a heavyweight café-lounge, and parlor *City of Danville*. At Montpelier, a different Baldwin, 201, added two deadhead heavyweights behind the parlor: rebuilt coach 1411 and full dining car 33, and at Fort Wayne, Chairman Arthur K. Atkinson's fluted-side business car 400 was tacked on the rear. Atkinson, a passenger-friendly executive, served as Wabash President from 1947 (his 25th year with the company) until July 1959, when he was named Chairman and succeeded by Herman H. Pevler, an executive with PRR, which had a stake in the Wabash.

A big surprise for me came at Decatur. Dad, through his connections with Wabash folks as Chief Mechanical Engineer for the Detroit, Toledo & Ironton, which fed a lot of Ford Motor interchange traffic to Wabash, had arranged for us to ride the locomotive cab to St. Louis. Even better, for me, was that when the usual westbound power change-out occurred at Decatur, our Geeps were exchanged for Alco PA 1021 and an E8. With the engineer, a road foreman, and Dad in the cab, I reveled in the 108 glorious miles to Wabash's outlying Delmar Boulevard station in St. Louis, where we disembarked to make the guaranteed 30-minute connection with the *City of St. Louis* for Kansas City and, via UP, Denver. On another trip to St. Louis, later in the summer, my *Cannon Ball* had twin E7A's, the 1001-1001A duo bought for the *City of St. Louis*, which in early days ran through to Denver. Adjusting the *Cannon Ball's* westbound schedule for western connections, especially the *City* at Delmar but also with MoPac, Frisco, and Katy at Union Station, was a priority in Wabash's passenger department.

"Cannon Ball run" No. 5 was a year later. When business drew Dad to Oklahoma City in December 1960 ["One Day at . . . Sapulpa, Okla.," Spring 2008], I went along, and we skipped a considered GTW-Santa Fe routing via Chicago in favor of Wabash-Frisco via St. Louis. I left a day ahead of Dad, riding to Decatur to meet with my friend Dick Wallin, a student at Millikin University there. We shot train pictures around town during the afternoon and the following morning, until Dad arrived on the next *Cannon Ball*, behind GP9's 493 and 486. The train's parlors had come off with

The author's father, John Ingles, a Detroit, Toledo & Ironton official, arranged for himself and his son to ride the cab of No. 1 from Decatur to St. Louis in July '59. At Decatur (top), the engine change is complete as John (in gray jacket) chats with a Wabash official. In the cab of PA 1021 south of Decatur (center), the engineer, a cigar clamped in his mouth (the road foreman is at right), strikes a classic pose. Near Mount Olive, No. 1 meets the *Banner Blue*, with two PA's.



Hank Goerke; Dick Wallin collection

**Lafayette, June 25, 1961: Author Dave Ingles' friend, the late Hank Goerke, in composing his photo of No. 4 arriving, managed to include Dave (far right) in his frame. They have just walked over from the Monon depot. The PA is newly renumbered; E8 1006 wears an experimental livery.**

the October 1960 timetable change, so I wouldn't get to ride in an open-platform parlor on the Wabash until the late '60s, when the *City of Lafayette* was in use on what by then were Norfolk & Western's Chicago trains.

Out of Decatur with Dad, our No. 1 had two PA's. At St. Louis Union Station, we had a comfortable 90-minute connection to Frisco's overnight *Meteor* for Oklahoma. We returned east on the *Meteor*, too, but after a day taking pictures with Wallin around his home St. Louis area, Dad and I rode home on the B&O, on the *Metropolitan* overnight to Cincinnati, connecting with the *Cincinnati*—which still boasted its original 1947 equipment, including an observation car. "Rare mileage" wasn't in the lexicon yet, but we were always interested in riding new routes and trains.

The next summer, a bit of *Official Guide* scheming put me on the *Cannon Ball* for home . . . from Chicago! My Detroit railfan buddy, the late Hank Goerke, and I drove to the Windy City with photographer Emery Gulash and a couple of others to ride a Burlington "mixed train" fantrip from Chicago to Oregon, Ill., behind 4-8-4 No. 5632, on Saturday, June 24, 1961.

Emery and the others were going to stay around Chicago, but Hank and I had to get home on Sunday. How to go? The direct New York Central and GTW routes were old-hat, so we devised an L-shaped itinerary: Monon's *Thoroughbred* to Lafayette and the *Wabash Cannon Ball* home. In those days, an



J. David Ingles

**Cafe-lounge 1568, trailing No. 1 as it departs Fort Wayne on August 10, 1963, was one of two regulars on the *Cannon Ball*, rebuilt from 1927 Pullmans when the train received its new name.**

85-minute connection was reliable, and Monon didn't let us down; we had plenty of time to walk a few blocks to the Wabash depot. Newly renumbered Alco PA 1050 (ex-1020) and E8 1006, in an experimental dark blue with an orange stripe, did the honors on train 4.

### **Post-merger rainbows**

I enrolled at MacMurray College in Jacksonville, Ill., in 1962, and over the next three and a half years, rode the GM&O between Chicago and Springfield more than I rode the Wabash. Decatur, though, was sufficiently handy, by bus or in friends' cars, that I logged more than a half dozen *Wabash Cannon Ball* round trips. I learned to enjoy Wabash's chicken pot pie and other delights, often in the usual café-lounges,

1568 and 1569, rebuilt in 1950 in Decatur Shops from 1927 Pullmans.

When lightweight coaches were in the train, there was no problem in opening a vestibule Dutch door to snap photos. I tried to be alert when it was time for the *Cannon Balls* to meet, east of Bement (where double track ended as the Chicago and Detroit lines split). Usually this was at one of the passing sidings between Tolono (the stop for nearby Champaign, home of the University of Illinois) and Tilton (an old Wabash division point just west of Danville).

Most trips were routine, but one on No. 4 was not. It was April 6, 1963, and I was heading home for a week's spring break; we had a pair of E8's and a seven-car train. As we pulled into Peru, where the conductors changed out, I

On a four-day "railfan crawl" from Springfield, Ill., to South Bend, Ind., after Dick Wallin's wedding, the author and friend Louis Marre were welcomed into Clymers tower southwest of Logansport to photograph No. 1, behind E8's 1011 and 1000, hitting the Pennsy diamond on September 4, 1963.



heard commotion, then sirens . . . and here came the local fire department! Turns out something, possibly the air-conditioning unit, under the center of the third (of three) coaches, ex-*City of K.C.* car 1426, was on fire. Our delay was not long.

In October 1964, Wabash's flag fell with its lease to Norfolk & Western in the merger with Nickel Plate and two small freight-only Class 1's. Sure enough, in the next timetable, the *Cannon Ball* lost its prefix *Wabash*. Justice quickly prevailed, though. The loss was brief, for in the next timecard, April 1965, the full name was restored.

Before and after the merger, two factors allowed the train to continue assuming a more modern look. First, more equipment was available to replace older cars. Wabash had bought lightweights from Boston & Maine in 1957-58 (12 coaches, 2 café-lounges, 2 baggage-coaches), and issued a release about adding streamlined cars to the *Banner Blue* and *Wabash Cannon Ball*, along with a "Silver Dollar Dinner" in the diners, but neglected to mention the cars weren't new! Then N&W moved



Two photos, J. David Ingles

Great (*Cannon*) balls of fire: A slight delay is incurred by No. 4 at Peru, Ind., on April 6, 1963.



Ex-NKP RS36's approach the Lake Decatur bridge at Sangamon, Ill., with No. 301 in fall '67.

## Cannon Ball locomotives

Road numbers	Model	Quantity	Year(s) built	Notes
<b>Wabash</b>				
450-483	GP7	34	1950-53	453 built by GMD in Canada; 11 had steam generators (454-458, 464, 474, 479-482)
484-489	GP9	6	1954	All built with steam generators
490-495	GP9	6	1956	493-495 built with steam generators and dual controls
1000 (1st)	E7A	1	1946	Bought, lettered for <i>City of K.C.</i> ; to 1002A in '51, 1017 in '61
1000 (2nd)	E8A	1	1951	Bought for <i>Blue Bird</i> ; to N&W 3800
1001-1001A	E7A	2	1947	Bought for <i>City of St. Louis</i> ; 1001A to 1016 in 1961
1002	E7A	1	1949	E8 grilles added to sides when repainted solid blue
1003-1008	E8A	6	1949	1003 was EMD's first E8A; 1006, 1008 to N&W 3806, 3808
1009-1013	E8A	5	1951	1009 designated by EMD as its 10,000th unit; preserved at Virginia Museum of Transportation; 1012 to N&W 3812
1014-1015	E8A	2	1953	1013, 1014 destroyed in fiery grade-crossing collision at Taylor, Mich., on <i>Detroit Limited</i> in 1961; 1015 to N&W 3815
1020&A-1021&A	PA1	4	1949	Bought for <i>Detroit, St. Louis Limiteds</i> ; to 1050-1053 in 1961
<b>Norfolk &amp; Western</b>				
500-521	GP9	22	1957-58	Dual controls; at least 12 different units assigned, at times, to Decatur after 1964 merger
522-565	GP30	44	1962	Occasional use; no steam generators; geared for 71 mph
2477-2485 series	GP9	5	1955-56	Ex-Nickel Plate 477-485; 5 verified reassigned to Decatur
2874-2875	RS36	2	1962	Ex-Nickel Plate 874-875
3450-3483 series	GP7	Quantity unknown	1952-53	Ex-Wabash 450-483; only a few verified as working in N&W passenger service
3484-3495	GP9	12	1954-56	Ex-Wabash 484-495; not all repainted to N&W before 1971
3800-3815 series	E8A	5	1949-53	Only 5 repainted N&W and renumbered, ex-Wabash 1000, 1006, 1008, 1012, 1015, keeping same last two digits





J. David Ingles

South of Decatur after the *Cannon Ball* and *Banner Blue* were combined, the former's passengers could enjoy a dome, although on November 20, 1966, N&W has placed a storage mail car behind the ex-*Blue Bird* parlor observation! Power is ex-Wabash E8 3815 and "Pocahontas" GP9 511.



John Stubblefield

"Cannonball Freight Service" hoppers on a westbound freight pass No. 304, behind former NKP GP9 2478 and an unrepainted Wabash GP9, west of the Decatur station in February '67.

## Domes for the Cannon Ball?

**Believe it or not**, the *Wabash Cannon Ball* might've gotten dome cars, had an idea of President Arthur K. Atkinson ever gotten traction. In a letter to Union Pacific President A. E. Stoddard on April 27, 1954, concerning mostly the *Wabash's* efforts to improve timekeeping of its St. Louis–Kansas City end of the *City of St. Louis*, and the scheduling of the *Cannon Ball* to reliably connect with it at Delmar station, Atkinson mused, "You advised that the equipment that was taken out of the consist of trains 9 and 10 [the *City*] for use in service out of Chicago will be returned after you receive your new passenger cars . . . At that time I indicated that *Wabash* would be prepared to participate in new equipment for the *City of St. Louis* [which it did—see DREAM TRAINS-2 2009]."

Atkinson noted UP's order for dome cars and wondered if any would be for the *City*, citing Missouri Pacific's competing and dome-equipped St. Louis–Denver *Colorado Eagle*. Wrote Atkinson: "I am seriously contemplating providing dome cars for our *Wabash Cannon Ball* between Detroit and St. Louis, now making a connection with No. 9, and may even follow your lead in going to a dome diner." Atkinson went on to allude to working out an arrangement with St. Louis-based carbuilder ACF, if the plan for more equipment proceeded. Union Pacific did put domes on the *City*, but the reality of shrinking passenger ridership as the 1950s advanced kept Atkinson's "dome dream" for the *Cannon Ball* just that.—J.D.I.

some of its own, and former Nickel Plate, cars to the St. Louis pool (the last NKP train came off a year after the merger).

Moreover, *Wabash* back in October 1959 had made an operating change, combining the *Cannon Ball* with the *Blue Bird* from St. Louis to Decatur and with the *Banner Blue* from Decatur southward. This saved two crews and terminal charges at St. Louis Union Station, and freed up a few cars. As the *Cannon Ball* and *City of Kansas City* lost their parlor cars, the three lightweights (flat-top, round-end 1600 from the K.C. train, plus dome observation 1601 and mid-train dome 1602 from the *Bird*) were reassigned. This allowed sideling or retiring the open-platform heavyweights (only the *City of Lafayette* was kept, as a standby substitute). The *Blue Bird's* single consist, by now not turned in Chicago to save time and money, usually had 1602, while the *Banner*, with two consists, was upgraded with the 1600 on one and the 1601 on the other.

### Transitions up front

Motive power, of course, also changed. By late '65, N&W had retired *Wabash's* four PA's and four E7's, and some of the E8's, bringing over to Decatur and St. Louis a dozen GP9's from its "Pocahontas" lines, plus, from the Nickel Plate fleet, five passenger GP9's and the two passenger Alco RS36's (bought when NKP's PA's were retired). The 500-series "Pocahontas" GP9's, delivered in red but by now all blue, had dual controls (only the last three *Wabash* GP9's, 493-495, did, mainly for the Chicago commuter train), and toward the end, after the RPO's were yanked in 1967, the train sometimes got down to a lone 500 and just three cars: baggage, coach, and café. A locomotive oddity we'd see on the *Cannon Ball* after N&W took over

was a 522-series freight-service (no steam generator) GP30.

Permit a word here about Wabash's passenger GP9's. They seemed to show up on many of my *Cannon Ball* runs, but of all my dozens of trackside photos, the E units ruled. We saw the Geeps in Detroit a lot, though, because a pair normally was kept there as protection power. The two trains from St. Louis were due into Detroit only about an hour before the westbounds were due out, and the normal pair of E's or PA's flipped right back. As backup, two Geeps held down the daytime Detroit-Toledo freight, a turn, so they'd be handy if needed. During the holiday mail rush, Wabash/N&W abandoned the quick power turnaround, and we'd see E units parked during the day at Wabash's Oakwood yard diesel house in suburban Melvindale.

The net result of the diesel and car changes was that the *Cannon Ball* and kin became "rainbow trains." The Geeps, RS36's, and remaining E8's were blue or black, lettered N&W or Wabash (five E8's were relettered N&W). The cars wore blue, Tuscan red, Pullman green (the odd NKP head-end car), or yellow (from the Wabash-UP pool), or had full or half fluted exteriors, with letterboards of blue or red (as N&W painted a few NKP cars before switching from red to blue for passenger equipment). The trains became a modeler's dream.

The second spoon stirring the mix was the increasing general passenger-train malaise, which resulted in several Wabash trains being discontinued. The overnight St. Louis-Chicago and -K.C. trains had come off in 1960, but after the merger came more change.

In October 1966, N&W renumbered the Detroit-St. Louis trains from 1-4 to 301-304 (the night trains were the "2's" and "3's"). In 1968, the *City of Kansas City* and N&W's portion of the *City of St. Louis* came off, leaving only MoPac to handle the cross-Missouri trade. The overnight *St. Louis/Detroit Limiteds*, 302 and 303, also were dropped, although they carried a 14-4 sleeper to the end.

Amid all this, the *Cannon Ball* soldiered on, although N&W in April 1968 replaced its diner-lounges with "buffet coach" cars and did try, beginning in late '67, to drop the train. Twice the ICC rebuffed the effort (again in '69), although N&W did get the *Banner Blue* off [sidebar, page 32]. As with many U.S. train-off attempts of the era, the loss of lucrative postal contracts played a part.

### **Another exotic routing**

Ever a student of the *Official Guide*, I devised another unusual routing involv-



Top, Dick Wallin; above, J. David Ingles

Little Tolono, being close to Champaign-Urbana, home of the University of Illinois, was an important stop for the *Cannon Ball*. On June 3, 1967 (top), the connecting Champaign bus meets No. 304, with one of the occasional N&W freight GP30's up front. In December 1960 (above), No. 1 clears the Illinois Central mainline diamonds; IC passenger trains did not stop at Tolono.

# Cannon Ball *cousins*



Terry Cook drove as he and photographer Dick Wallin paced the last southbound *Banner Blue* on Route 66 north of Litchfield (above). At Detroit's Fort Street Union Depot bumping post in 1960, DT&I's only business car, 1907, carried the markers of the *St. Louis Limited*.

The *Chicago–St. Louis Banner Blue*, a train I'd had scant chance to ride, was similar to the *Wabash Cannon Ball*. Except for the occasional ex-B&M lightweight, the *Banner* had been a train of blue heavyweights until 1960, when it began using some cars off the *City of K.C.* and the *Blue Bird*.

Unlike the *Cannon Ball*, though, the *Banner* kept its parlor cars right to the end, which occurred September 9, 1967. The *City of Lafayette*, relettered Norfolk & Western, had been resuscitated and was carrying the markers on one *Banner* trainset, so I joined the mourners and made a last-run round trip, from Decatur to Litchfield. I went first-class, riding south in the *City of Lafayette* and north in the former *City of K.C.* round-end observation 1600.

I also made several trips on the Detroit overnight trains, and the most memorable one involved meal cars. This was in 1959 on our family's return from Denver on the *City of St. Louis*. Unbeknownst to us, Wabash had just removed the dining cars from trains 2 and 3, which we didn't learn until we boarded the *Detroit Limited* for its 6:30 p.m. departure and headed for our bedrooms. The second Pullman was a Pennsylvania bedroom-lounge car, which did serve snacks, so that became our "dinner in the diner."—*J.D.I.*



J. David Ingles

ing the *Cannon Ball* on November 11, 1967. I had gone from Springfield, now my home, to visit my parents in Michigan, by train via Chicago. Going back, I came up with a way to avoid both Chicago and a bus ride or imposing on friends from Decatur. I had a normal run on N&W 301, out of Fort Street on-time at 7:15 a.m. with GP9 506, baggage 1389, two 1700-series coaches, and ex-B&M cafe-lounge 1571. For the first time in ages, I didn't detrain at Decatur, where we left 22 minutes late at 2:12 p.m. This had meaning, for I was destined for Litchfield, Ill., where I disembarked an hour later, still 20 minutes behind schedule. After walking two blocks east, I still had a no-stress connection to IC's northbound *Green Diamond* at 3:53 for Springfield, where I arrived in time to go to work at 5:30 p.m. The IC train came off south of the state capital in 1968.

Then, on my last *Cannon Ball* run before its finale, I rode from Decatur to

Granite City, joining friends from the Michigan Railroad Club on their "Golden Triangle," a charter of two coaches and the *City of Lafayette* on an April 20-21, 1968, weekend trip to St. Louis. Friend Dennis Smolinski, now a career GTW/CN railroader, was a passenger; he recalls that he "skipped my high school senior class trip" for the excursion, "a wise choice."

"We took turns riding the parlor car," he said, "rotating in three groups at Fort Wayne and Decatur on the *Cannon Ball* on Saturday, and at Decatur and Gibson City on Sunday on the *Blue Bird*, which picked up a full diner at Decatur for our group. Saturday, we got off at Delmar to go to the National Museum of Transport."

On Saturday, I rode to Decatur in Dick Wallin's Pontiac Tempest, joined the MRC gang, and disembarked at Granite City to catch GM&O's *Limited* back to Springfield in time for work Saturday evening. Early next morning,

I drove to St. Louis, and after visiting with the MRC folks at Union Station, I drove ahead of them over to Granite City for a farewell photo sequence. The *City of Lafayette* sported a *Cannon Ball* drumhead from Detroit Fred Bauer, whose collection now is displayed in the National Railroad Museum in Green Bay, Wis. The group returned to Detroit from Chicago on Sunday by making the 40-minute Dearborn Station connection to GTW's *Mohawk*.

## Last shot

The *Cannon Ball* was one of 11 daily trains (in each direction) serving St. Louis Union Station when Amtrak took over on May 1, 1971. I was still living in Springfield, and I made sure to include the *Cannon Ball* in my itinerary of last runs. I'd taken IC 22, named *Governor's Special* since its truncation, to Chicago on April 27, and two days later ridden IC's *Hawkeye* out to Manchester, Iowa, and back, in preparation for the final



John Stubblefield

**On the wane:** On April 25, 1971, a “Pocahontas” GP9 leads No. 301 across Lake Decatur; note the ITC bridge piers between the arches.

day (on most roads) of private intercity passenger trains.

I rode three last runs, first the *Governor's Special* out of Central Station at 8:15 behind IC's last two E6's, 4001 and 4003, with baggage combine 1850, diner-lounge 3341, and five coaches. We arrived in Springfield about noon, 15 minutes late, and I drove my '68 Ford Galaxie to Decatur to board the last *Wabash Cannon Ball*. It ambled in, over an hour late, with an all-N&W consist: blue GP9's 511 and 521, a baggage car, diner-lounge 1050 (ex-50, the *City of K.C.* car) and coaches 1832 (ex-1425, also *City of K.C.*) and 1709 (ex-NKP 109).

Like all good, heavily patronized last runs do, the *Cannon Ball's* left Decatur late: 1 hour 17 minutes at 2:57 p.m. We tied up at St. Louis Union Station at 5:17, just 55 minutes late. My day wasn't done, as I photographed two MoPac last runs before riding my third, GM&O No. 6, the *Midnight Special*, to Chicago. A lonely consist of two E7's, five head-end cars, and a solitary coach pulled out at 10:32, 2 minutes late, and we were about an hour down at the three (of 10) stops I was awake for. We arrived Chicago Union Station 22 minutes late, at 5:52, ending my pre-Amtrak train travels, and I photographed many other last arrivals over the next two days.

Amtrak would keep, and improve, service on the GM&O route, but if you wanted to ride the *Wabash Cannon Ball's* line, you'd have to wait for over a decade and the occasional Norfolk Southern steam excursion. The “rumble and the roar” of “America's train” along the Wabash River valley “shore” had been silenced. ■



Dick Wallin

High-schooler Dennis Smolinski (far right) and Michigan Railroad Club trip chair Fred Dewey (in back, next to him) are on the rear platform at Decatur April 21, 1968, on the “Golden Triangle.”



J. David Ingles

Two decades of the Detroit–St. Louis train being named *Wabash Cannon Ball* come to an end as the last westbound run swings onto the “High Line” on the St. Louis riverfront April 30, 1971.