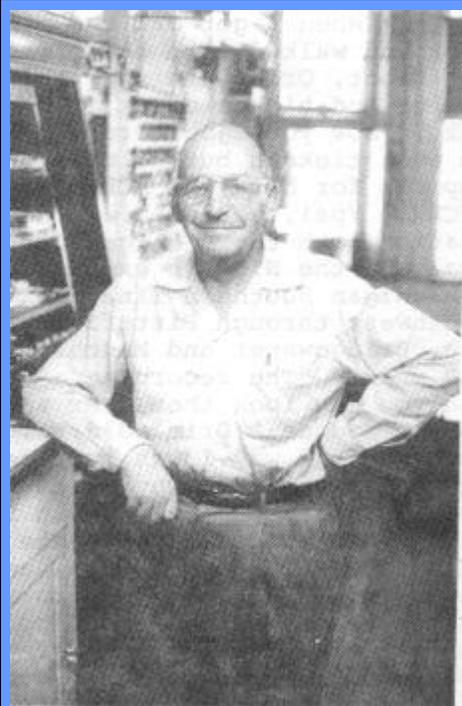


Although I have worked off and on for several railroads in my lifetime, railroading was really never my profession. It was my avocation - for my convenience and not the railroad's. My father was the agent at Vermontville on the Michigan Central. I practically grew up in that old depot and the fascination for telegraphy was more than I could resist. Consequently, I could telegraph before I was out of grammar school. When the MCRR installed the manual block signal system on all its branch lines about 1903, all the boomers and bums in the country flocked here for jobs. As I listened to all the stories they told of their experiences as boomer operators, I made up my mind that someday I, too, would be an operator on the railroad.

While I was waiting to be of age to hire out as an operator, Charlie Sayles, the MC's chief dispatcher at Jackson, sent me to Ypsilanti the summer of 1915 to work the night ticket clerk's job. This job was from 7:00 p.m. till 7:00 a.m., seven days a week, with no time off. It paid \$50 a



Ray Anderson, the author, in 1956

month. When I got off the train at Ypsi and walked into the office in the depot, Orie Cummings, the day operator and ticket clerk (\$75/month!) said, "Now your job here is not only to sell tickets but to make out the reports for both the MCRR and the NYCRR. Ypsi, you see, was a union station both the Michigan Central and the NYCRR's ex-Lake Shore & Michigan Southern line from Ypsi southwest through Pittsfield, Saline, Bridgewater and Manchester to the west. "The records are up there and you can look them over and learn how it's done," Orie told me, and that was the way I was supposed to learn the job. Anyway, 1915 was the year of the Pan-American Exposition in San Francisco, and the Pan Pacific fair in San Diego, and it was up to me to learn how to sell interline tickets to those points, which I did with the help of Orie. 1915 was also the summer I acquired a good knowledge of the ticket business which stood me in good stead the rest of my railroad days.

Just west of the Ypsilanti depot stood a greenhouse where the MCRR raised all the cut flowers that were used in the dining cars on the whole MC system and the depots in Detroit. The new Michigan Central station [in Detroit] had just been opened, and its dining rooms and restaurants were the height of elegance at the time. The grounds around the Ypsi depot were beautifully landscaped with YPSILANTI outlined in flowers in one huge, lovely flower bed.

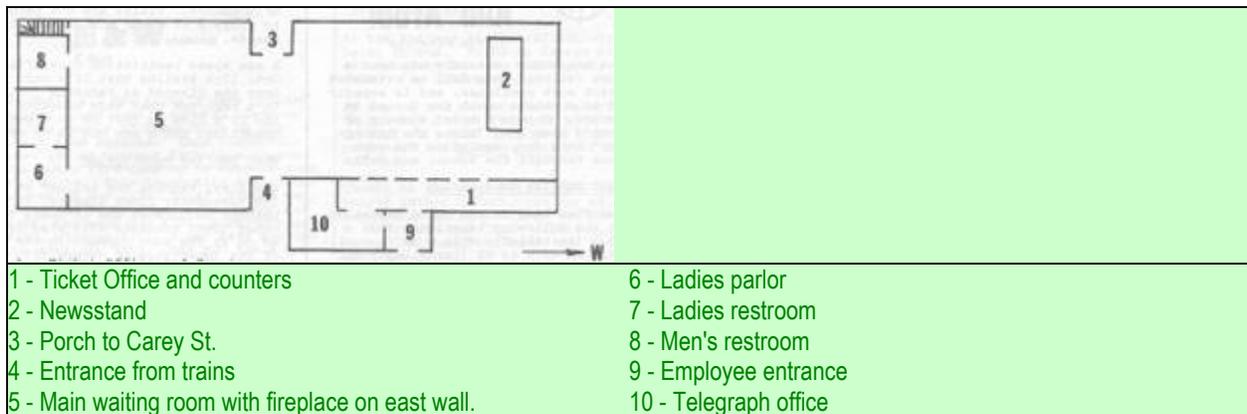
In the fall of 1915, Mr. Sayles called me in for an operator's examination and put me to work on the telegrapher's extra list. After a few jobs on the Air Line (from Jackson southwest through Three Rivers to Niles) he sent me to Dexter to relieve Mr. Bostwick, the day operator, who earned \$62.50 a month. At Dexter, Frank Sharpey was 2nd trick (\$60), Ira Ott was 3rd trick (\$60), and a Mr. Clark was the agent at \$67.50. Allie and John Reasoner had the Overland auto agency in that village and one evening they asked me to ride to Ann Arbor. It was winter and the Reasoners had a touring car. I nearly froze up! That was the night I had my first and only drink in a saloon, a silver gin fizz, and it was enough for me! Little did I think that I would eventually spend four of the happiest years of my life in Ann Arbor that evening.

In the spring of 1916, the call of the West got the best of me, and I resigned from the MC and worked twice for the CB&Q, and for the D&RGW (one of my favorite roads), the Oregon Short Line, and three times on the Milwaukee Road. In 1917 when the U.S. entered the World War, I returned to Vermontville and went to Grand Rapids and enlisted in the 416th Railroad Telegraph Battalion, U.S. Army Signal Corps. I was sent to France and was a telegrapher on the Paris-Orleans Railroad at St. Aignan Noyers. I returned to the U.S.A. in June of 1919, and in the fall of 1920 I entered the University of Michigan and hired out to the MCRR as an extra operator in the Ann Arbor depot. Did anyone ever have four happier years than I did, what with the University and the railroad combined in my life?

The 3rd trick at Ann Arbor in 1920 was held by George Hanlon, but he was in Detroit every night as Night Chief Dispatcher, so his job was open for years for an extra operator. Carl Aldrich worked it most of the time, but when he didn't, I did. At various times I also worked one of the clerk's jobs in Ann Arbor. The MCRR also used me as their extra towerman at Wayne Junction where John Sievert was the day operator and towerman there for \$72.50 a month. I was even sent down to Alexis Tower at Toledo and to the tower at Rochester Junction where the MC's line to Saginaw and Bay City crossed an interurban line.

The personnel at Ann Arbor consisted of Mr. Kepler and a lot of clerks in the freight house. A. J. Wiselogel was depot ticket agent. There was also a ticket clerk with the first name of Lester, plus two baggage men day and night. Frank Leslie was the day operator and ticket clerk, Lizzie Maroney 2nd trick operator and ticket clerk. Miss Maroney was a first-class telegrapher and ticket seller. She lived in Chelsea and commuted to Ann Arbor on the train, arriving about 11 a.m. starting work at 3:00 p.m., and leaving Ann Arbor for Chelsea about 11:00 p.m. We used to just about drive her crazy because we wouldn't show up to relieve her until the very last minute. Of course, she wouldn't dare leave the depot until she was sure someone was there to cover the job. But everyone just loved Lizzie. She put in long hours, waiting from 11:00 a.m. till 3:00 p.m. to go on duty, and then once a week, usually Sunday, she'd close up the office and sit in the waiting room for two hours because there was a state law prohibiting women working more than 54 hours a week. You should know that EVERYONE in

those days worked SEVEN days a week. The only way to get time off was to be relieved by an extra man - if they could find one. People simply didn't take time off; the days of leisure time hadn't yet arrived.



I can remember pretty well the arrangement of the interior of the depot, and elsewhere in this issue, there's a sketch of what I recall. The job at Ann Arbor was fascinating! I can't remember how many passenger trains we had daily, but there were a good many. When the University let out for the holidays and summer vacation, we were swamped, and special trains were added to handle the crowds.

We also arranged all the transportation for the athletic teams from the University, and the football specials. I was on one of those specials to Columbus in 1922 when Michigan played OSU in the first game in the new Ohio Stadium, - and M beat 'em 19-0! I also got passes and went on the train to a Minnesota game. In the summer of 1923 I rode a pass to Florida. The result of that trip is that my wife and I have spent 35 winters in Florida. We sold our Vermontville home two years ago and now live in Boynton Beach.

One of the most thrilling sights at the depot was a passenger train, with a big steam locomotive pulling it, approaching for the station stop. Steam hissing, driving rods slapping against the drivers, and sparks flying from the wheels and brake shoes. The platform was full of people waiting to board the cars, and the crowd quickly increased as they were joined by those getting off. In the 1920's the U.S. Mail went by rail, so the mail handlers rushed to load and unload. And all the express was put on floats - a cart something like a baggage cart. The express room in those days was the small building now the Amtrak depot. The baggage room was the small building at the east of the depot. Baggage trucks, the express floats, the waving and GoodBye-ing, the conductor's final call --- and soon all was quiet until the next train.

Things were quiet until the next group of passengers arrived --- by car, by cab and on the city's trolley car. Then the activity began again as they crowded up to the ticket window to buy tickets and make reservations. Next, off to the baggage room to check the cases. At this time the newsstand came to life at the west end of the waiting room. The ticket office was in the northwest corner of the depot, and the telegraph office occupied the northeast corner of the ticket office. The telegraph instruments and railroad phones were in space in the bay window, which projected out on the platform so the operator could see either way up and down the track. Sometimes business was so brisk that the telegraph operator had to sell tickets - besides

going outside to "hoop up" orders to the trains, a job that always fascinated this audience out there. I tell you, what with the instruments clattering away, and the dispatcher's and message phone ringing - plus what we called the "city" phone - it was bedlam at times!

Sometimes passenger representatives would come out from Detroit to help with the football specials. They'd ride the train to its destination and return as helpers for the conductors. The athletic teams always were accompanied by traveling passenger agents, from the MC and from the connecting lines. They seemed able to settle any confusion with a pocket full of good cigars which they'd freely pass out to the appropriate persons.

The Michigan Central also ran a freight called the "Ann Arbor turn-around". Its conductor was named Riley and he had only one arm. The train did the switching at Ann Arbor, at Ypsilanti, and at the Geddes gravel pits between the Dixboro Road and Superior Road crossings. Those pits were a big operation. The sand and gravel were sent to Detroit every day for use in construction projects. The "turn around" went into the pit area daily to switch cars in the proper order so the through freight could pick them up for Detroit. These pits are no longer used now, but in the 1920's they meant a lot of dollars to the MCRR.

One night while I was working Ann Arbor, an eastbound "Red Ball" fruit and vegetable extra had a blazing hotbox going through town. I saw it and immediately notified the dispatcher and he put the board on them at Wiard, an "OS" and water pan where the locomotives scooped up water on the run a couple of miles east of Ypsilanti. Wouldn't you know that when the train stopped, the blazing car was right on the cross-over between the eastbound and westbound tracks? The fire was so intense that the car couldn't be moved, and the mainline was blocked for hours. Did the Big Boys raise hell about that!

One of the good eating spots near the depot was Gus' Restaurant which was just up the hill behind the depot where Broadway meets High, Division and the other streets. All the railroad men ate at Gus's. The trolley line ended right in front of the restaurant.

After graduation, I left Ann Arbor, but not the memories of it. I worked for railroads in other parts of the U.S. and came back to Michigan to relieve the ticket sellers at the Grand Trunk depot in Battle creek during the summers of 1958, 1959 and 1960.

Railroad life has been a rewarding experience for me, full of happy remembrances and fine people. Would I do it over again if I had the chance? You bet I would.

About the Author: Ray Anderson worked at the MC depot all during his years at the University, following which he sold real estate and managed a farm in Michigan. Now retired, he lives in Boynton Beach, Florida. Ray and his wife return for visits to Ann Arbor, especially during the football season.

RRHX Editor's Note: This article was printed in the November-December, 1974 edition of the Inside Track magazine. Mr. Anderson would be about 100 years old this year (2003).