



Did You Know?

The Train Order Hoop...part of early railroad history

Allen Miller, speaker for our 2015 Community Meeting, brought along a mystery item...the train order hoop. Allen is shown at right with the hoop, with a "message" clipped to it.



Following a disastrous collision in 2008, Congress decreed that US railroads must have a system of Positive Train Control, with the goal of insuring that no two trains attempt to occupy the same spot on planet earth at the same time! For many years, trains ran under the iron-fisted direction of the Train Dispatcher, the regulated clock, pocket watch, employee timetable and the flimsy train order. Any and all information that would impact the scheduled travel of trains was reported as promptly as possible to the Dispatcher, who then telegraphed it to the relevant train station personnel, who recorded it on "flimsies" (thin sheets used with carbon paper to make several copies) and then were tasked with handing off a copy to a passing train... preferably without requiring the train to come to a full stop, which was very costly in time and fuel. A copy needed to go to the engineer at the front of the train, and another copy to the conductor in the final car.

As a longtime member of the Association of Train Order Collectors, Allen could share with us some examples for the Fall City area. On the next page are two orders, shown in reduced size.

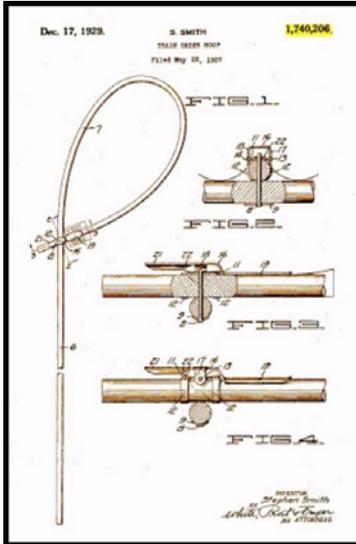
FALL CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Q-3-46-75M
 FORM 19 CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE, ST. PAUL AND PACIFIC RAILROAD COMPANY FORM 19
 TRAIN ORDER No. 426 Dec 7 1946
 To Westward Trains At Pedar Falls
to 5th sub
 X _____ Opr. _____ M.
 Falls City telephone wires which cross our track at highway crossing at Grange Spur near Grange Store just East of Carnation Station low and will not clear man on top of car. Keep sharp lookout when passing under these wires.
 LW
 EACH EMPLOYEE ADDRESSED MUST HAVE A COPY OF THIS ORDER.
 Made Com Time 10:11 a.m. Super Opr.

Train orders from Fall City area

Form 1324-3/4 1-67
 Northern Pacific Railway Co. TRAIN ORDER
 No. 855 At WOODINVILLE MARCH 28 1972
 To C AND E EASTWARD 8TH SUB DIVN TRAINS
 To _____
 To _____
 To _____
 BETWEEN SNOQUALMIE FALLS AND FALL CITY STOP AND CHECK BRIDGE 31 AND DO NOT EXCEED 5 MPH OVER BRIDGE ACCOUNT SLIDE CONDITIONS UNDER BRIDGE
 C G S
 Time Completed 9:22 A M SAWETCH Opr.
 Your Tomorrow depends on Today - Be Careful



As shown in this 1929 Patent Application, a design for the train order hoop had been standardized. It was used for the vital task of passing train orders up to the engineer (at the front) and conductor (at the end) of trains as they slowed, but often did not fully stop at stations. It required the station operator to stand perilously close to the moving train, holding up the hoop so that the engineer, and then the conductor, could catch it on an arm, remove the order clipped in place, and toss the hoop beside the tracks to be retrieved later. As you might imagine, all parts of this exchange were difficult, especially at night or in bad weather.

A later version, shown at right, was Y-shaped. It had two small battery-operated lamps at the upper corners to improve visibility, and the message came away with the string, leaving the hoop in place. These hoops could be held in place on a raised post, sparing the station operator the need to approach the moving train but were still difficult in conditions of poor visibility.

Our thanks again to Allen Miller for this small lesson in the trials and tribulations of early railroading.

