

# Fresh from the Hills . . . . . By Marge of

[Copyright: 1946: By The Chicago Tribune]

YOU won't find many engineers who will promise to hold a train for you when you phone the night before your trip that you may be a bit late getting to the depot. But then few engineers run the only train on their railroad, as Bert Anderson does. It simplifies matters in many ways. For instance, when Bert had to get out and help his fireman and the student brakeman mend the track there was none of this fussy business of racing up and down to flag oncoming trains. They just stopped old 345 on the track, got down and rummaged thru a tool box, bringing out picks and mauls, and walked leisurely to the broken rail. There they mended it with a couple of brackets quicker than one of these high-flying modern engines can whistle at a crossing.

You see, the one-train railway on which Mr. Anderson pilots an engine is the Cassville and Exeter, probably the shortest full gauge railroad in existence. It runs just four and eight-tenths miles on the Ozark plateau. Did I say runs? That was a slight exaggeration, since it took exactly one hour and twenty minutes to make the less-than-five-mile trip from Cassville to Exeter, one way!

We didn't have to hold Mr. Anderson to his promise to wait for the Jedge and me. We were up before dawn, getting a real railroad man's breakfast under our overall belts before setting out. The Jedge used to be a brakeman on the Green Bay and Western Railway and the thought

of getting back on a freight train was like the smell of powder to an old war horse. He kept talking about the good old days when he walked on the tops of box cars with a Wisconsin north wind whistling about his ears. He seemed a little regretful when the Arkansas sun came up bright and warm. He had been hoping for a blizzard, I'm sure.

We found the engine steaming away in the switch yard—or rather I found it there. The great railroader had to stop at a convenient restaurant for a final cup of coffee before going on the job. At close range the engine looked sort of pony-size. Instinctively, I wanted to pat its nose. It had had a long life. The thick wooden planks that made up the cab were scarred and splintered, and smoke had turned them a rich, deep black, like old Chinese tables.

Mr. Anderson, who looked as stout and hearty as an engineer should look, introduced me to the crew, Cecil Hodge, the fireman and brakeman, and Jack Bundy, 17, the student brakeman. Since the train had neither coach nor caboose, I climbed into the engine and sat on the fireman's seat at the left. It was made for a long-legged fireman, but I could clutch the window ledge. Mr. Anderson let me pull the cord that rang the bell, and I felt very superior to the motorists who had to stop and let us clang across the highway. I leaned out of the window and looked back at the coal car and two empty oil tanks as though their safety depended upon my efforts.

At the little depot beyond the highway we picked up the Jedge, who rode on an outside corner of the coal car, and other preparations for the trip were made. A lever was pulled to fill the water tank and Cece fired up. He would scoop up a shovelful of coal, put his foot on a lever that promptly split the firebox door down the middle, disclosing a truly fiery furnace, and then he would swing the coal inside. It made a nice rhythm. Scoop! Stomp! Swing! Scoop! Stomp! Swing! A jigger with numbers indicated the rise of the steam pressure. The crew kept eying it until old 345 puffed and wheezed, dripping moisture here and there like a fat girl at a square dance. When the pressure climbed above 100, Jack swung aboard, the Jedge clutched a handy corner, and we were off!

We wound thru the outskirts of town, so close to little houses that we could see the breakfast dishes standing on kitchen tables. A flock of white chickens fluttered across the railroad under the nose of old 345, squawking at this intrusion on their private runway. I rang the bell vigorously at the final street crossing and then we were out of town, moving slowly up a narrow valley. As we neared a low trestle, Bert gave a sigh and stopped the train.

"Here's that broken rail," he said. The entire crew dismounted and went to work. The Jedge gave me the technical name of the repair job, and I listened with interest until I realized that we two were alone on a snorting, puffing engine.

"What if this thing begins to back up?" I asked. "Do you know enough about railroading to stop it?" Loftily the Jedge explained that he would just grab the throttle and do this or that, but I got down off my high seat. I was prepared to jump if the engine budged.

At last the rail was properly bracketed, and old 345 seemed to tiptoe across it. Everybody breathed easier and we settled down for the



trip. It was wonderful to move so slowly. When a covey of quail whirred across the track only to settle down and watch us pass, I could see their bright eyes and the beauty of their feathers. I could see, too, the fluffiness of the tail of a rabbit that scurried off the track and crouched beneath a bush a few feet from the rails. When a flock of birds drinking at a small pond arose

# Nation's Shortest Railroad Casually Closes Up Shop

## Makes Last 4½-Mile Run Today If Engineer Gets Around to It

CASSVILLE, Mo.—(P)—The nation's shortest commercial railroad goes out of business Wednesday—if they finish unloading a car of sacked feed in time.

The feed was the last payload of the once-thriving Cassville & Exeter railroad, a 4½-mile line connecting this town of 2,500 with Exeter, Mo.

Engineer Jim Ashley was scheduled to make the last run Tuesday, pulling an empty boxcar with his old diesel locomotive. But they didn't get the feed unloaded, so the trip had to be postponed.

The C. & E. has been operating on the same casual basis in recent years. F. P. Sizer of Monett, Mo., president, said it operated only when needed. "We ran as many cars as necessary," he said.

\* \* \*

THE C. & E. was founded 60

years ago because the main line of the Frisco railroad missed Cassville, a county seat.

The railroad did a thriving business hauling lumber, cement, oil, feed and other freight.

But business gradually diminished as highways and trucks improved and lack of income is forcing it to shut down.

\* \* \*

**ON THE** last run, when he gets around to it, engineer Ashley will drop the empty boxcar in Exeter, where it will be put on the Frisco's main line.

*From a Chicago Paper given to me by Mrs.*

and ... aid in ...  
June 20th, and Cassville had a  
railroad. "Many other towns  
have railroads, owned by some-  
one else," according to the Re-  
publican published under that  
date, "but Cassville has one of  
her own" as the Cassville and  
Western road became a reality.

The Cassville and Western was  
incorporated in 1896 on March 14,  
with the following stockholders:  
J. M. Bayless, who was president  
and general manager and perso-  
nally superintended the construc-  
tion: Mrs. M. A. Bayless, Dr. D.  
L. Mitchell, all of Cassville; T. A.  
Miller, Aurora, J. R. Tincker,  
Bowling Green, Mo.; and W. C.  
Clark, Topeka, Kansas. Capital  
stock was \$50,000.00. Rolling stock  
consisted of two engines, a box  
car, passenger coach and com-  
bination baggage and passenger  
coach. At the same time a de-  
pot was erected in Cassville which  
was later to also house the tele-  
phone company.

The first train steamed into  
Cassville on July 4, 1896, with  
Engineer Kent Kilkerson in the  
cab and Dr. D. L. Mitchell as  
honorary conductor, during one  
of the biggest celebrations ever  
known here. The combination  
celebration, centered around the  
coming of the first train into  
Cassville, was also the 4th of  
July celebration, Sunday School  
Convocation and Old Settlers Re-  
union.

The triumphant debut of the  
chugging iron horse that day was  
the result of efforts of the Cass-  
ville merchants and farmers and  
gave them the "connecting link"  
they so badly needed. For sev-  
eral years the railroad was the  
only entry into Cassville other  
than roads that were impassable  
during bad weather. Both pas-  
sengers and shippers depended  
upon it for transportation from  
the Frisco line at Exeter into  
Cassville.

After several years of doing a  
thriving business, in 1919 the lit-  
tle railroad saw a bad time fi-  
nancially and went into receiver-  
ship, from which it emerged to  
gain its greatest eminence when  
Dave Dingler and James C. Ault,  
Cassville businessmen, bought the  
bankrupt short line.

Dingler was the railroad's pres-  
ident and was also the full-fled-  
ged, full-time locomotive engin-  
eer. Mrs. Dingler was vice-presi-  
dent and during that time the line  
was the pride of Southwest Mis-  
souri and became very prosper-  
ous. Dingler rebuilt the tracks,  
laid new rails, installed air brake  
equipment, purchased a new pas-  
senger coach with electric lights  
and a second hand steam locomot-  
ive which he himself brought  
from St. Louis over the Frisco  
tracks to Exeter, and then on in  
to town on his own line.

Along with giving service to  
the people of the area, the rail-  
road was also an added attrac-  
tion to visitors in Cassville due  
to the fact that it was the short-  
est standard gage railroad in the  
United States; that it was uphill  
all along the way to Exeter; that  
the trains went to Exeter and

## WOMAN TO RAIL HELM

MRS. IDA DINGLER IS TO HEAD  
4.8-MILE LINE.

Directors of the Cassville & Exeter Select Widow of Former President to Direct the Road.

Cassville, Mo.—Mrs. Ida Gardner Dingler, widow of the late Dave Dingler, was elected to succeed him to the presidency of the Cassville & Exeter railway at a meeting of the board of directors here last week.

Mrs. Dingler, who is 65, becomes one of the few women railway executives in the United States and has the distinction of directing one of the most colorful and picturesque lines in American railway history. The Cassville & Exeter road is only 4.8 miles long, meandering through a valley from Cassville to Exeter, where it connects with the main line of the Frisco.

Mr. Dingler, who died November 16, 1939, at the age of 74, had guided the business affairs of the road for more than twenty years, acting as engineer, president and general manager. For many years he was a frequent visitor to railway conventions and often remarked as he tendered passes to big line officials: "My road may not be as long as yours, but it's just as wide." It is rated as the shortest standard gauge steam line in America.

The road was acquired by Mr. Dingler and his business partner, J. Clinton Ault, in 1919. Mr. Ault was killed in an automobile accident near Verona, January 17, 1939.

The Cassville & Exeter railway was one of the few roads that escaped bankruptcy during the depression, and the advent of modern highways and continued to operate at a profit when many others in the county were going into receivership. The rolling stock of the road consists



MRS. IDA GARDNER DINGLER, WHO HAS BEEN ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THE CASSVILLE & EXETER RAILROAD.

of a locomotive and an old-style day coach.

The line continues in the Dingler and Ault families. At the directors' meeting the other officers elected besides Mrs. Dingler were: Ray Dingler, a son, vice-president; Mrs. Bertha Ault, secretary; Mrs. Clarence Burton (Mrs. Ault's daughter), treasurer; J. F. Black, auditor, and H. M. Allen, general agent.

# HISTORIC C & E NOW PART OF BARRY COUNTY HISTORY

After sixty years of service, operation of the Cassville and Exeter Railroad was suspended on Wednesday, September 12 with a final run being made on the 4.5 mile line, thus marking the end of another era in Barry County History.

Fielding P. Sizer, president of the railroad said that the board of directors deeply regretted the acton, but due to insufficient revenue it was felt that operations should be stopped. Members of the board, a group of Cassville businessmen who purchased the road in 1949, are Sizer of Monett, Norman LeCompte, B. D. Wilks and Alvin Blalack of Cassville, and A. P. Wheelock of Des Moines, Iowa.

The demise of the C & E was a sharp contrast to the initial trip over the road made on July 4, 1896.

While the 4-5 mile rail line is passing out of the picture, a victim of modern highway transportation, it was desperately needed by the Cassville community as a link to the outside commercial world in 1896. Cassville had, as other communities in this area, suffered the ravages of the Civil War and was feeling sharp competition from Washburn in the 1870's. The coming of the railroad through Washburn in 1881 intensified the rivalry between the two towns and for the next fifteen years Cassville suffered because of lack of rail facilities.

At the time of the coming of the Frisco several Cassville businessmen decided it was not necessary to raise the amount of funds which the Frisco was asking in order to bring the line through Cassville. They felt it imperative that the Frisco route their line through Cassville in order to take on water, but this problem was solved by the Frisco in a different manner and hence Cassville was by-passed.

At the realization that the town might possibly never have a railroad, Cassville businessmen in 1895, under leadership of J. M. Bayless, began soliciting subscriptions to build the city's own road and in a short time the necessary funds were contributed, the surveys made, right-of-ways secured

rolled back to Cassville; and that it was the only railroad in the world where the president of the company could be found running the engine and would gladly take visitors for a short ride. Every summer tourists visited the C & E in large numbers.

Dingler died in 1939 and his son, Ray, operated the road; however, during the war when repair materials were most impossible to secure, the line became run down and Dingler pulled it through that crisis by purchasing a rebuilt locomotive, and repairing the track and equipment after his return from service with the armed forces.

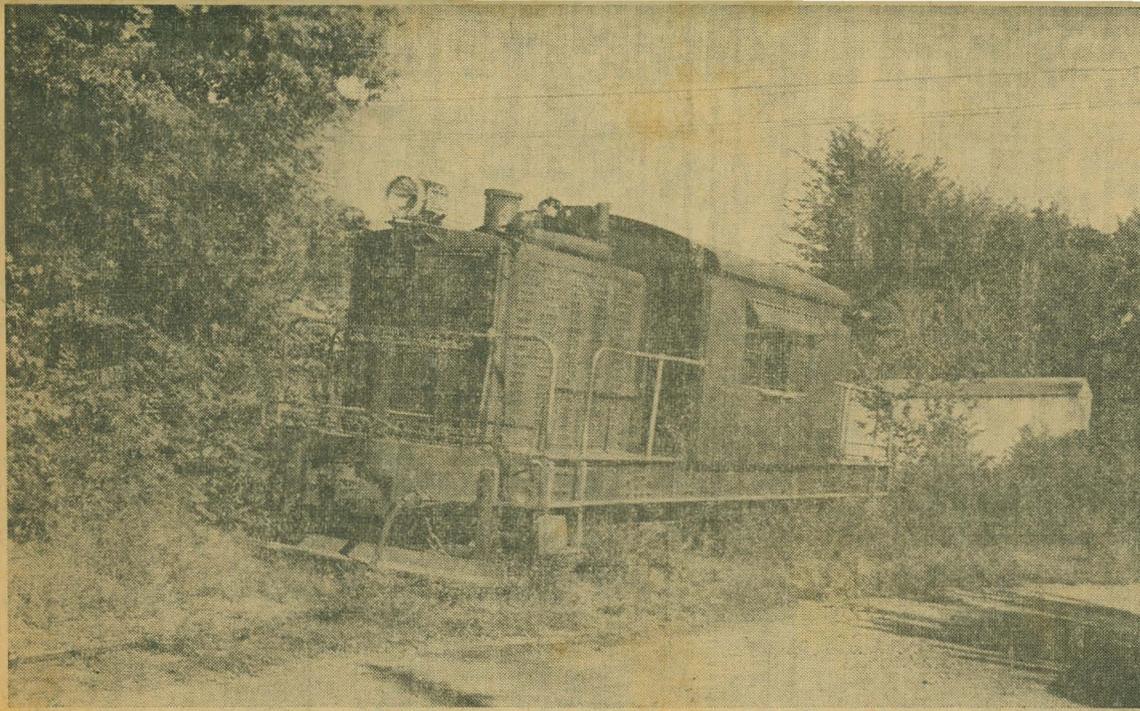
The recovery was only for a short time, however, as with the increase in automotive and truck transportation after the war, residents became to depend less on the C & E and in 1949 Dingler sold the line to a group of businessmen who had formed to keep the road running.

Arthur P. Wheelock of Des Moines, Iowa, who read of the plight of the C & E and being a railroader at heart, came to Cassville and interested the businessmen in forming the corporation to put the C & E back into operation. Wheelock acted as president, which position he resigned in 1951 to become president of the Fort Dodge, Des Moines and Southern Railway Company of Boone, Iowa.

Under the ownership of the group of businessmen, the C & E continued to operate during the years on a very casual basis, just as it was needed, and business declined steadily until the board of directors decided to abandon operations due to insufficient revenue.

Jim Ashley has been the only employee of the road since 1952 and has carried on the jobs of general manager, engineer, switchman and track maintainer. He has been assisted throughout the time by Mrs. Ashley, who operated the 50-ton gas electric locomotive a great deal of the time.

The Ashley's son, Jim, Jr. has also worked with his father in operation of the road.

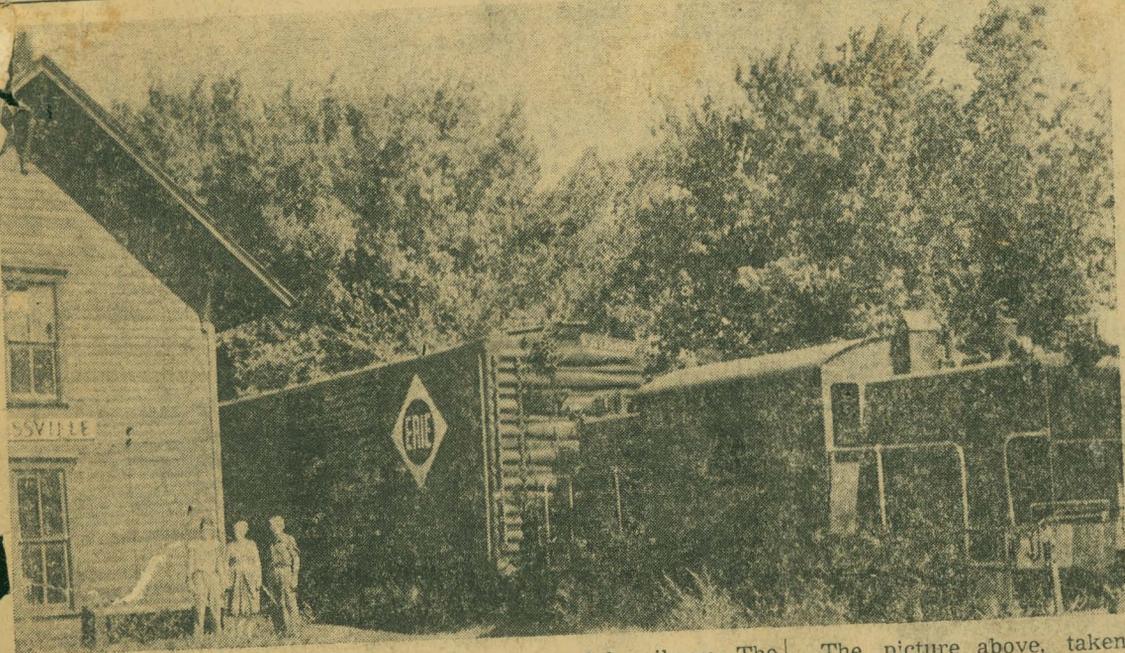


The 50-ton gas electric locomotive bought in 1952 stands idle after the final run made on Wednesday of last week, and the 60-year-old C & E railway unceremoniously ended operations.



The two story depot on Main Street is now badly faded and dilapidated and will be torn down in the near future.—Fields Photos.

## Cassville & Exeter Railroad Makes Last Commercial Trip Along 4 Mile Route



The picture above shows preparations being made by Mr. and Mrs. James Ashley and Jim, Jr., to make the final return of a railroad car to Exeter after it was unloaded here on the Cassville and Exeter Railroad. This was the last trip of its kind on the nation's shortest standard

gauge commercial railway. The road is going out of business.

Work started this week taking up switch lines and salvaging other material along the road. The main line will remain intact until final approval for disbanding is received by the Interstate Commerce Commission.

The picture above, taken by the Democrat for the Associated Press Wire Photo Service, appeared in newspapers over the nation. Beauford Wilks, a railroad official, said the group has received requests from collectors over the nation, wanting a souvenir of the road.

Democrat Photo

REPUBLICAN WILL RUN HISTORICAL STORY NEXT WEEK

# C & E Railroad Ceases Operations As Final Car Pulled Out Last Week

The C & E Railroad ceased operation last week when the small diesel engine pulled the final car uphill the 4.5 mile distance to Exeter.

A story on the road was prepared by the Republican staff for publication this week but due to lack of space it will be held over until next week.

The road has a colorful history

from the date the first run was made on July 4, 1896 up to the present. Officials of the rail line gave free passes on that date for a ride to Exeter and return. They were distributed to the county's oldest citizens, many of whom were among the first settlers in the 1840s. Old files of the Republican contain the names of most of them.

**CALIFORNIA PAPER  
NOTES DEMISE OF  
C & E RAILROAD**

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The Republican received the following clipping from former Barry County Clerk George England who spends the winters at his home in Porterville, California taken from the editorial column of the Potrerville Record in its December 26 edition:

**It's A Sad Day For Cassville**

(St. Louis Post Dispatch)

It's a sad day at Cassville. After 62 years the Cassville and Exeter railroad, shortest standard-gauge, independently owned final run-meandering uphill through its valley to Exeter, 4.8 miles away, to return an empty box-car to the Frisco railway main line, and, having no turntable, coasting back home in reverse, as it has done all those years.

To some people the C & E may have been only a little old dinky railroad. To the people of the Missouri Ozarks some 50-odd miles southwest of Springfield whom it served, it was a tradition full of sentiment. Bert Anderson, whose father helped build it in 1894 and worked on it till he retired in the '20's became its engineer and lived to see the engine named after him, with his name painted on the cab. Harry Truman, when he was a newly-elected United States Senator, rode to Cassville in a private car with Engineer Anderson, who took pride in making that run in 12 minutes.

Cassville's school children were taken for a round-trip ride every spring as soon as school was out, when David Dingler was president, the only railroad president in the country who was also the full-time locomotive engineer, as Robert L. Ripley's "Believe It or Not" cartoon proclaimed. . . .

The old C. & E. has hauled, in addition to children and a new United States Senator, a lot of milk and cream, eggs, strawberries, apples, grapes, canned vegetables, rabbits, hides and furs, crushed stone, hogs, wheat, cows, sheep, goats and horses, gasoline and oil . . . . Some other railroad somewhere will have to take over the honored place of shortest standard-gauge independently-owned and operated public carrier in our broad land.

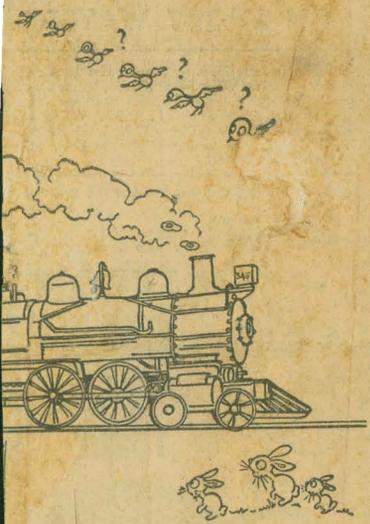
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*Ethel Homer.*  
Sunrise Mountain Farm . . . . .

# Ozark Railway

and flew to a near-by tree, I could see the spread of their wings.

The texture of the earth turned over by two men plowing in the field looked like the breaks in freshly dipped chocolate ice cream. At a field of alfalfa, I could see where the sower had turned his team and drill at the end of the field; the green rows making wide swirls against the brown earth like a beautifully patterned rug. The leaves in



the sheltered valley had not lost their bright color, and the slow tempo of our passing thru the panorama of gold and scarlet seemed to have a dignity I had never noticed in a swanky car.

I found myself holding my chin high, as tho I might have been

wearing a crown instead of a bandana on my head. Then suddenly we came on a deep cove where trees were festooned with long boughs of bittersweet, bright with scarlet-orange berries. I stopped my mental play-acting and shrieked with longing. "We'll stop and get you some when we come back," promised Cece.

The way grew more steeply upgrade and Cece began shoveling in dead earnest. Each shovelful of coal made just that much more black smoke that billowed back into the cab. "Fightin' a head wind," quipped Bert. "Slows us down!" As we inched up the grade, an overalled farmer swung up on the engine, rode a short distance, chatting with the crew and the Jedge, then swung down again. Just taking the train over to a neighbor's! A little later, we passed another man walking along the road. Bert leaned out of the cab and called: "Get that lard you was lookin' for?" The man's answer came clearly: "Yupp! Got some yestiddy. Much obliged!" Bert turned to me and explained: "Poor fellow. Plumb' out of lard the other day. Havin' to use butter. Store's got some in now, and I thought I'd bring him some."

Cece went thru the routine of scoop, stomp, and swing. More smoke billowed over us. Cece leaned on the shovel and asked: "Did you know this railway is mentioned in the Bible? It is! There where it says: 'and all creeping things.'"

We paused at Exeter only long enough to leave our two empties and hitch two freight cars, one filled with corn, the other with coal,

to the nose of our engine. "Downgrade all the way, so we back down!" explained Bert. Cece flung his shovel into the coal car, Jack climbed on top of the corn car, the Jedge took a new hold on another corner. Bert released the air brakes a bit; they hissed softly, and old 345 began to coast backward. We went back down the valley with just about the same speed we had made coming up. At intervals, during which I could count to six, Bert would release the hissing brakes. When we came to the cove with the bittersweet, both Bert and Cece remembered the promise to stop. Bert fussed with the air brakes until the engine was brought to a full stop at the exact spot where the berries were brightest and thickest.

Jack put an old fence post under the rear wheels. We all climbed out and an armload of bittersweet was cut for me. When we reached the field where the men were plowing, we saw one of them holding a rabbit that the dog had obviously just caught. The Jedge leaned from his private coal car and shouted: "I'll give you two bits for that rabbit." "It's yourn!" yelled the farmer. Bert obligingly brought the train to a stop. The Jedge climbed down, got his rabbit, paid his quarter and brought the rabbit back to the coal car, where he put it on his private corner. Supper had been achieved!

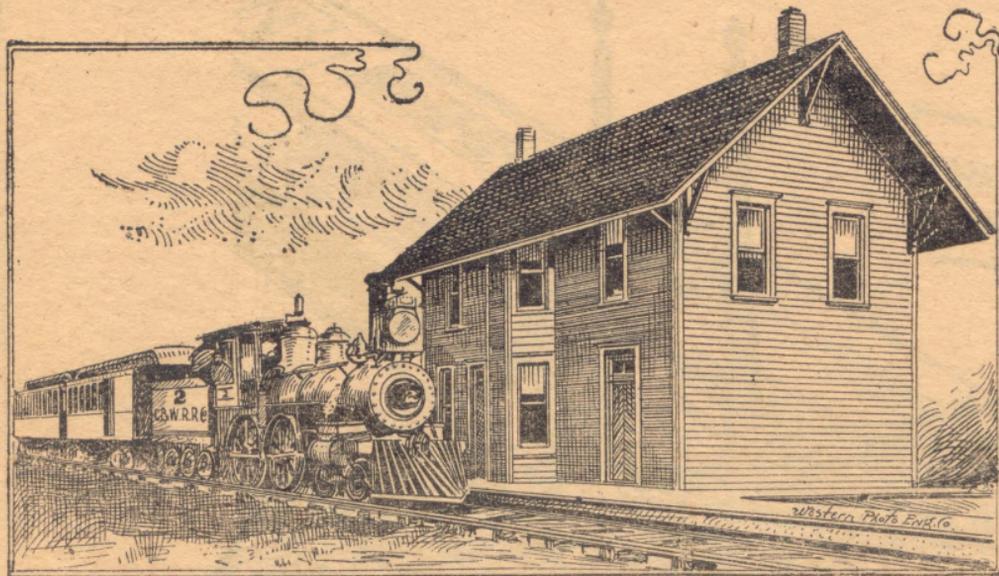
"Now," said the Jedge, "I'm going to get up on top of this box-car with Jack!" He swung up the ladder on the side of the car and stood on the roof, silhouetted

against the bright sky. I clutched the window ledge, and the train started up. The Jedge hastily sat down. Perhaps the tracks were smoother on the old G. B. & W. He didn't try to walk, and after a while he began making bad order signals indicating that the top of the car was hard and bumpy. But he was still gamely atop when we reached the mended rail and then the siding above the depot. There he dismounted and watched from the sidelines when the two box cars were shunted to the side tracks by means of a long wire cable and stout hooks. I rode the engine until we reached the depot, wondering if Casey Jones might have been kin to me.

Bert and old 345 have been working together 37 of the 50 years the Cassville and Exeter Railway has been in existence. At first, the railway was owned by two Cassville men. Now their widows run it, with Mrs. Ida Dinger as president and Mrs. B. C. Ault as secretary. Mrs. Dinger's son, Ray, is vice president. His wife, Lona, is general agent, handling waybills, express, and all the technicalities common to a railway with hundreds of trains. We had a nice visit with her as the Jedge rested on a cushioned chair in the little depot office. Ray was not around. He was up in Missouri, said Lona, looking for 56-pound steel with which to repair the track, and making a bid on a new engine. Old 345 is about due for the retirement list.

The Jedge, too, is willing to admit that his railroading days are over.

# CASSVILLE REPUBLICAN



The above picture was taken on July 4, 1896. On that day the then owner of the Cassville & Exeter railroad, John M. Bayless of Cassville, gave a free trip to Exeter and return to all pioneer citizens of the county who attended a big Fourth of July celebration in Cassville on that day. The first trip on the new railroad had been made only a few days before. The railroad was completed in June 1896. Its rolling stock was placed in operation July 1, 1896. The official name of the railroad at that time was the Cassville & Western.