

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DULUTH-SUPERIOR TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION FROM 1940 THROUGH 1963



This item was a presentation given by the current Editor Robert Parsons at the October 2005 Annual Dinner of The Duluth-Superior Transportation Association highlighting some of the early history of our organization. The group was founded as The Duluth-Superior Transportation Club in 1940. Mr. Parsons served as Editor of the newsletter since 1983 and it was renamed “The Headlight” in 1992, Much of this report will be based on newsletters of the organization from May 1955 through 1963. This information is as accurate as possible.

When the group was first formed there was no newsletter. Meetings were held on a regularly scheduled basis as now, but notification was by postcard and minutes were regularly taken, recorded and reported by the club secretary. The first issue of “Twin Ports Transportation News” appeared in May of 1955, Elmer Alexy of the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railway, Editor. Although other sources of information are available The Transportation News until December 1966 has provided most of the information for this report. Much of the format of the group has been the same as it was in the beginning in 1940. Many of our meetings early on were held at The Spalding Hotel in Duluth. The Spalding, for those who were not around at the time, was at Fifth Avenue West in Duluth, a major hostelry that was an early victim of downtown urban renewal in Duluth. Early dinners were \$2.00 and for a long while meetings were in held one place. Early on a Spring Dinner-Dance was held that included spouses.

Early on our group was heavily represented by the railroad industry. In addition to many railroads having representatives in the Twin Cities there were a number of railroad representatives based locally. Since then, especially as a result of mergers and deregulation there are fewer railroad members in our group. Currently there are only six major rail lines in the country: Burlington Northern Santa Fe, Canadian National, Canadian Pacific, Chessie System, Norfolk Southern and the Union Pacific Railroads.

Currently the computer is an important tool that almost all of us cannot do almost anything without. In 1957 it was beginning to emerge as a most important tool and the Great Northern Railroad installed a Univac, the first electronic computing system. Several years ago on a tour of the Air Force Sage

Building in Duluth one full floor of a computer system, a backup the size of a desk, and its backup a desk top unit not as powerful as a current low-end laptop.

In an April 1957 "News" item by President Harry Larson on membership in our group he said: "By attending meetings and asking questions we can in many instances solve most perplexing problems and at the same time establish valuable friendships. We believe that every firm shipping or receiving merchandise or raw materials should seriously consider the benefits to be derived from a Traffic Club membership."

In the November 1958 of "The News" there was a list a page long of a large number of members on various Annual Dinner committees. Primarily it served as a placing of many names in print that would not usually be done.

In January 1959 Jack "Great Northern" Wallace, a position he held until January 1983, assumed "The News" editorship. Prior to then our social hour was "Fellowship Hour"; it became an hour of some activity that varied monthly and repeated only about once or twice during his tenure as editor. Your current editor has not continued this tradition. It was reported in the media that on June 26, 1959 President Eisenhower and Queen Elizabeth of England dedicated the St. Lawrence Seaway. Although foreign ships were into the lakes before then the uniform channel depth opened lakes ports to the world. September 1959 North Central Airlines, predecessor of the current Northwest Airlines, inaugurated beer flights over Wisconsin. By February 1961 it was reported that NCA was reported carrying a total of one million passengers in 7-1/2 years, two years later it was a total of 2 million and it was a total of 3 million by 16 months after that.

The Annual Dinner of 1960 in November was attended by a total of 180 members and guests. By 2005 our attendance for this event was only about 25 percent of that total. Can we approach that total in the years to come?

Shippers Night in October 1961 demonstrated how large base of firms belonged to our organization. Now in 2005 here is what has happened to those firms. These firms were: American Steel & Wire, Andresen Ryan Coffee, Central Cooperatives, The Chun King Company, Clyde Iron Works, Crescent Creamery, Cutler-Magner, Diamond National, Diamond Tool & Horseshoe, Duluth Brewing and Malting, Duluth Glass Block, Duluth Iron and Metal, Duluth Plumbing Supplies, Elliot Packing, Great Lakes Coal and Dock, Great Lakes Storage, International Refineries, Modern Distributors, Northern Cold Storage, Northwest Paper, Oliver Mining, Osborne McMillan Elevator, King Midas Mill, St. Germain Bothers, Superwood, Weyerhaeuser Container, Wood Conversion, and Ziegler. Now in 2005 there are fewer than ten industrial firms represented in our organization!

The December 1961 issue reported the Duluth-Superior High Bridge (highways US 53 and now Interstate 535) officially opened at 11 AM December 2, 1961. 193 persons attended our 1961 Annual Dinner at the Spalding Hotel Ballroom. This dinner was at first held by our organization in December and later

in November and at some point in the late 1970's or early 1980's changed to October to allow for better attendance and favorable weather.

February 1962 the paid-up member drawing of one draw for \$5.00 and \$5.00 added for a non-winner was inaugurated in 1962. The \$5.00 payout was boosted recently to \$10.00. Annual dues became \$5.00, the first increase in more than 10 years. March 21, 1962, was Off-Line Rail Night. Those railroads sponsoring the evening were: Akron Canton and Youngstown, Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe, Baltimore and Ohio, Canadian Pacific, Chicago Burlington and Quincy, Chesapeake and Ohio, Cotton Belt, Clinchfield, Chicago Great Western, Chicago and Eastern Illinois, Chicago North Shore and Milwaukee, Chicago and Illinois Midland, Central of Georgia, Delaware and Hudson, Detroit Toledo and Ironton, Chesapeake and Ohio, Denver Rio Grande and Western, Erie Lackawanna, Green Bay and Western, Gulf Mobile and Ohio, Illinois Central, Kansas City Southern, Kansas Oklahoma and Gulf, Lehigh Valley, Louisville and Nashville, Minneapolis Northfield and Southern, Missouri Kansas and Texas, Missouri Pacific, Nickel Plate, New York Central, Norfolk and Western, Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh and West Virginia, St. Louis and San Francisco, Southern, Southern Pacific, Texas and Pacific, Toledo Peoria and Western, Union Pacific, Wabash, and Western Pacific. Thanks to mergers many of these railroads are now part of larger systems.

Golf outings for the organization in 1962 were held at Ridgeview in Duluth and Nemadji in Superior on July 18 and September August 22 attended by 57 and 42 respectively. In the past there were even special fishing parties. Hearings for the proposed Northern Lines (Great Northern, Northern Pacific, Chicago Burlington and Quincy, and Spokane Portland and Seattle) were concluded on July 10, 1962, but the merger was not finalized until 1970. The initial hearing on the proposed New York Central and the Pennsylvania railroads merger was held in Washington DC in August 1962.

During the early 1960's our group would have as many as about 12 to 15 individuals attend the Minneapolis Traffic Club's Annual Dinner. In more recent times our organization our group has not been represented.

Motor Carrier Night February 20, 1963, featured participation by the following firms: Admiral Merchants, Arrowhead Van and Storage, Briggs Transportation, Century Motor Freight, Cloquet Transfer, Glendenning Motorways, Hart Motor Express, Indianhead Truck Line, Midwest Motor Express, Moland Brothers, Murphy Motor Freight, North Shore Freight Lines, Rookey Transfer, Schirmer Transportation, Security Storage, Thrun Truck Line, Watson-Wilson Truck Line, and Wherley Moving and Storage. Like the railroads listed earlier a most of these firms are no longer members of our organization, due to mergers or changes in operations.

At a meeting in April 1963 a lakes vessel 1,045 feet long and 150 wide was proposed for the great lakes. Now, 42 years later, there are a number of larger

vessels of somewhat similar dimension serving the lakes shipping industry, but they are limited to the four western most great lakes. Welland Canal, linking Lake Erie and Lake Ontario, limits vessels to about 750 feet or less in length.

In 1963 there were Once again two golf outings, one on the 17th of July attended by 108 at Cloquet and one on August 28 at Nemadji in Superior. The September 1963 "News" reported the closing of The Spalding Hotel in Duluth on July 1. The hotel opened in 1889 served as a location for many of our meetings and is the site is part of the Duluth Gateway Urban Renewal Project. As 1963 drew to a close a number of students of transportation taught by Fred Schuppert were recognized as well as those planning to continue for another year. Fred was Traffic Manager at Northwest Paper, now Sappi Fine Papers in Cloquet.