

How wonderful it would be if one's vocation could be thoroughly enjoyed. Some of us do, to be sure — but too many of us don't. Life demands that one work... at something. Even the humblest of tasks can exalt one. Remember the laborer who only carried heavy stone when working on a building, but proudly said: "What am I doing? Why, I'm helping to build a cathedral!"

# The Birmingham Eccentric

BIRMINGHAM, MICHIGAN

Thursday, March 24, 1960

SECTION B



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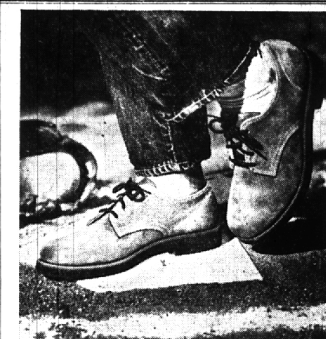
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# Takes a Last Run on Old 6327

## Rides a Steam Engine Just in Time to Fulfill Lifelong Dream

### EDITOR'S NOTE:

Dike Baldwin, manager of the Bell chapel of the William R. Hamilton company, Birmingham, has been an avid steam locomotive fan ever since he can remember. He finally had a chance to fulfill his lifelong ambition and rode one of the last steam engines in the country, which is scheduled to go out of service to be replaced by Diesels March 27.

### By DIKE BALDWIN

Special Writer

Arrangements were made through our local agent, Harry J. Wichman for official permission granted by F. A. Gaffney, vice president and general manager of Grand Trunk Western railroad to ride in the locomotive.

Final consent was given by the engineer, whose prerogative it is to accept or reject the holder of the official permit. Milo Baird was the engineer of train number 54, that left at 5:40 p.m. with conductor Charles Townsend in charge.

BAIRD SUGGESTED I dress warmly. In spite of the heat from the back head of the boiler, he said, it would be drafty and not too warm in the cab.

So, dressed in insulated underclothing, blue jeans, wool shirt, lined jacket, engineer's "balloon" cap, gloves, goggles, and overnight bag I climbed up into the "vestibule" cab of engine 6327—apparently the net and darning of engineer Baird. A vestibule cab is one that

is completely enclosed, protecting the crew from the weather.)

THE CAB was large and spacious, dominated, of course, by the back head of the boiler, covered by the many gauges registering steam pressure—which is kept just under 250 lbs.—and air pressure used to operate the engine and train braking system.

The so-called water columns, each containing a hollow glass tube indicating the water level in the huge boiler, are among the various valves, wheels and levers—each designed for the safety and comfort of the crew and passengers.

The fireman occupies a comfortable seat on the left hand side of the cab, and seldom finds it necessary to leave this seat in tending to the raging inferno within the firebox.

COAL IS FED through a mechanical stoker, which is controlled by several hand-operated valves within easy reach of the fireman. He can tell at a glance the condition and temperature of the fire in various sections of the firebox by checking several instruments before him.

This firebox measures 12 1/2 by 20 1/2 inches. The locomotive

is designated a northern type, built by the American Locomotive company in 1942.

In a railroad man's language it would be called a 4-8-4 because of its wheel arrangement (four pilot wheels, eight driving wheels—78 inches in diameter—and four trailing wheels, supporting the weight of the firebox).

The combined weight of the engine and its tender is 473,500 lbs. and its length is 95 feet, one and one-quarter inches.

THE TENDER'S water capacity is 74,800 gallons and it carries 16 tons of coal. Baird controls this massive piece of machinery as easily as an automobile. This he does with a group of fairly small levers, including the throttle which used to be impressive in size on older models.

Shortly after I boarded, Baird got his signal to proceed from the conductor — what sounded like a couple of long notes from a peanut whistle, located somewhere in the upper reaches in the cab.

IT THEN seemed that without a jolt or jar we just gently began to move forward. Then the first blast of exhaust from

the stack, followed by others in a rapidly increasing crescendo as we quickly gained speed.

At about that point Baird shouted across the cab to invite me to occupy a cushioned seat directly behind him that is usually reserved for the road foreman of locomotives when he is aboard, and so it was that I was permitted to see everything as the engineer does—what a thrill!

He had to shout, since the cab wasn't exactly quiet once we got under way.

THERE IS a sensation of great power as those big pistons, connecting rods, size rods and other reciprocating parts flash through their motions as they send this ponderous machine "rocking and rolling" along the track.

After leaving the protected "fenced-in" portion of the right-of-way, it was necessary for the engineer to blow the whistle for all crossings, which he did faithfully.

It was amazing to see the frightful chances some motorists will take despite the elaborate system of warning signals of grade crossing bells, flashing lights, engine whistle and bell. It might be good if they could

see themselves as I was permitted to.

UPON ARRIVAL in the round house in Durand, Baird turned his engine over to the hostlers (service people) who would care for it through the night, and have it ready for its return trip to Detroit, the following morning.

Taking me to his own home as a guest, I spent a pleasant evening with him looking at pictures of his engines—pictures he has accumulated since he started railroading in 1913. Baird retires in April. One fervent wish of his is that someone he can continue to engineer his beloved steamer 6327 until the day he retires, rather than relinquish it for a Diesel-powered locomotive.

WE REPORTED at the round-house for duty at 5:45 a.m. and found number 6327 ready and waiting.

After Baird looked it over carefully we went to the depot where it was coupled to its waiting train.

Leaving the depot in Durand at 7 a.m. we eventually found ourselves behind a freight train which slowed our progress and threw us off schedule.

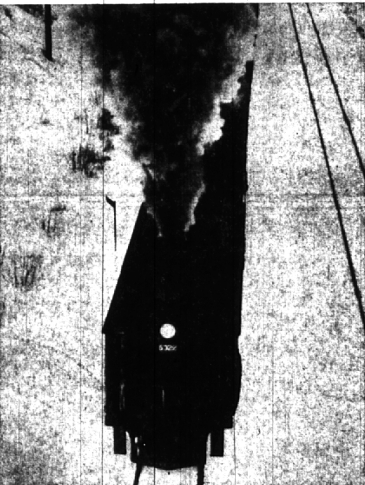
The right-of-way being single track from Durand to Pontiac and operated as a block system, we had to stop and wait at the entrance to one block while the freight cleared from it.

We passed the freight on a siding at Pontiac, picked up passengers at the depot and then fairly flew to Birmingham. There were no stops at Bloomfield or Charing Cross and my trip was over all too soon.

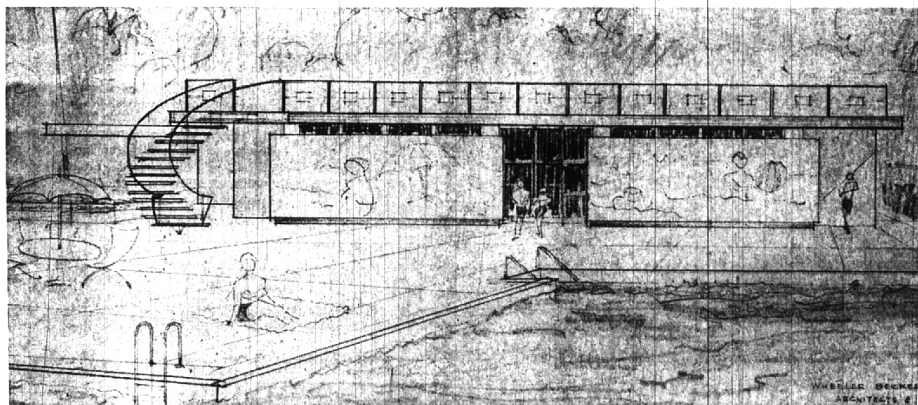


Dike Baldwin (right) gets the "thrill of a lifetime" as he takes his first ride in the cab of one of America's last steam engines. Engineer Milo Baird (left)

takes one of his last runs before his April 20 retirement. Baird has been an engineer with Grand Trunk Western Railroad since 1913.



Billows of smoke and steam trail off behind the engine as it "highballs" it north toward Pontiac. The smoke and steam will soon stop when diesels replace the old steam engines that run through Birmingham.



## Swimming Pool Dream's Taking Shape

Despite a snowbound spring, a group of Birmingham area residents are planning for summer, when they expect to make this swimming pool sketch come true. Last week the Forest Hills swimming club released this sketch by architects-engineers Wheeler, Becker and Sando, Inc. The view looks toward the bathhouse, to be located on the north side of the newly-organized club's pool site adjoining Eton park, Birmingham. A sun deck will top the bathhouse, to be decorated with colorful murals. The junior-Olympic-size pool will be 25 metres long, 42 feet wide. Diving boards will be located alongside a 30 by 30 foot diving el, and a separate children's wading

pool is planned. Additional space is allotted for lawn area around the pool and for parking. Club President Leslie Fleming, 1007 Mohegan, Birmingham, said construction will start early in May, with completion about mid-July. Total cost of approximately \$130,000 is being financed through the sale of \$300 in stock to each of the 350 families making up the eventual membership. Annual dues of \$10 per family, and a \$100 initiation fee. Mrs. John Holmes, 1063 Mohegan, is taking membership applications. The group has set no boundaries to its membership area.



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