

How do I?

An occasional series

*This week: What is a RAILFAN and
What do they do?*



A tip of the hat to TA Beckett for the inspiration for this week!

People have been fascinated by trains since the first train appeared in the 1820s. For most people, it's something to see. For others, maybe an annoyance. But for somewhere between one and three percent, it's more than that.

I grew up about 45 miles from Johnstown, Altoona, and Chambersburg, PA. It was nearly impossible to go to any of those towns without seeing at least one train. One of my earliest memories is seeing what must have been Western Maryland chopped nose GP9's in Chambersburg in the early 1970s.



I received a hand-me-down Lionel set when I was 6 years old and an HO scale set when I was 7.

But the bug really bit when I was about 11. That was when I found EP Alexander's *Down at The Depot*. It was a coffee table book containing photos of railroad stations from the 1850s through the late 1950s or so.

A copy of Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg's *Mr. Pullman's Elegant Palace Car* sealed the deal!

My early interest was railroad stations. I have lost track of how many I have seen, either still in use, or long ago converted to other uses.

Just like amateur radio operators, railfans come in many categories. The vast majority are modelers, looking for real life scenes to recreate in miniature. Some just like to see locomotives. I am in the small, but seemingly growing, minority who realize locomotives



need cars to pull. My car photos far outnumber my locomotive photos.

The included photos were taken in December, 1985 shortly after I had my own 35mm camera. The views are from locations around the former Western Maryland Railway facilities in Hagerstown, MD.

Today my equipment has improved. Not only the camera, but my amateur radio hand-held transceiver (HT) makes a really good scanner.

Some tricks of the trade:

Information! There are a variety of sources, particularly on groups.io. So while you are poking around groups.io looking for radio groups like the CARC group, check out some of the railroad groups.

- www.heritageunits.com is very good for tracking the whereabouts of the plethora of special paint scheme locomotives.
- TRAINS magazine and RAILFAN & RAILROAD are two monthly magazines.
- And don't forget historical societies, whether the National Railway Historical Society or groups devoted to your favorite railroad. I find it fascinating that the Western Maryland Historical Society, nearly 50 years after the road was merged out of existence, still has nearly 900 members on (I think) three continents.

Patience: You need a lot. Take something to read, and take food. Being a Rail Fan is like hunting, or fishing, only easier!

Catch 'ya on the air!