

History of the A B & old C Railroad

All good tales start with, or are at least based on some portion of the truth. And so will mine.

History

Both my great grandfather Charles A. Croshere and grandfather Austin Burton Croshere Senior were painters. To say they were just painters would be demeaning. They were known throughout the New England area as the finest painters. They won awards for alphabet design at state fairs and the like. They painted the very finest railroad coaches, fire houses, fire engines and autos. Their forte was lettering and pin striping. They lacquered gold leaf letters and stripes onto the bright red fire engines they painted. When a car was painted by them the owner's initials were pin stripped on the car door.

My grandmother Gladys Dearden Croshere's significant trait was she was a New Englander. New Englanders believed with the greatest amount of frugality you could squeeze wine from a turnip. Sorry but that's my impression of the sort of New Englanders I was raised around. The great depression of '29 for them was just a test of their inherent fortitude.

Now you're wondering what is this all about. Remember this is still the historical (true) portion of the preamble. As a young boy at eight or nine years of age my grandmother Gladys told me this story, which I'm sure she believed. I don't think my grandmother ever spoke anything but the truth. Remember, a New Englander, salt of the earth. I'm sure her husband or father-in-law was slightly prevaricating as she was told this tale. Anyhow, granny told me that at some early time a railroad coach's steps were built down and out protruding from the side of the coach. The problem was if you were standing too close to the train as it pulled into the station the jutting out steps would hit you and most likely break your leg. She then went on to tell me with great deal of pride her father-in-law was instrumental in having all coaches steps moved into their present location, in board of the sides of the coach.

Let the tale begin

Charles Augustus Croesus was a railroad man. Unlike the historical man of wealth, he pronounced his last name Crow-sus. He chose to pronounce the 'o' in his name and not the 'e'. As a young strapper Charles had worked his way up to fireman on a wood burning American loco. He was quite adept at keeping the grate covered with embers and therefore he becoming sought after in his trade. One day as he was waiting for old loco number 29 to depart he was looking down from the left side of the cab and talking with a new lad, Horatio. Horatio, engaged in the conversation, didn't pay much heed to the Starlight pulling in on the adjoining track. As was the fate of those not paying attention in those days, the steps of the first coach hit and broke his leg, down he went. Charles, witnessing this, knew if passenger railroading was to ever be really wide spread something had to be done about these protruding steps. His first thought was we've got to move the steps, but where? Hell, let's move them into the coach so they don't stick out.

Charles' next move was to his Uncle Wilbur, an attorney who had used his influence to get him the job with the railroad. He told his uncle Wilbur, we need to patent this idea of moving the steps of coaches inboard. In short order his patent made him one of the wealthiest railroad men in the country. Every coach builder paid him royalties. The monies from Pullman alone were staggering. When automobiles did away with running boards, it was pointed out that this also came under his patent. As time progressed his uncle was cunningly able to update C. Augustus

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Croesus' patent to the point where it would seemingly never run out. When they sought to apply the same patent to the aeroplane industry something had to be done. Teddy Roosevelt, an old man by then, a notorious trust buster, pointed out that perhaps their patent was valid pertaining to the aeroplane, however it would put too much wealth in the hands of one man and that wasn't good for the country. C. Augustus Croesus and his team acquiesced to Teddy's point and let it go. He didn't need any more money anyhow.

The wealth of Mister C. Augustus Croesus had spread far and wide. No matter how benevolent he became, and he was very generous, it only increased the stories of his holdings. (Some say the Disney team in later years based their Scrooge McDuck and his money bin on Charles' life).

Charlie couldn't let go of his first love of railroading. He felt the country would prosper only through hard work and that was with trains as he knew it. Early on he purchased the railroad rights to a small valley. The railroad would run from the town of Austin to the high country town of Burton. The Austin & Burton Railroad was established. Austin was to become a relatively large town and the railroad was set up to the north side of town. The town of Burton was in the high country and the only access to a beautiful agriculture valley of great potential. With the railroad and their reefer cars the crops of the valley became an economically viable struggle. As the A & B RR's business increased it became apparent that a known coal field to the north would also have greater viability if his railroad would haul the coal. C. Augustus was a railroad man and didn't like the coal business. But as his railroad grew he used more and more of the black stuff. He figured if he established a town close to the coal field he could control the conduct of the mine owners without being in the business. So the town originally known as Coalville grew up. As the railroad brought in more and more commerce the locals started calling the town Croesus. When the town's new name was finally adopted the railroad became known as the Austin Burton & Croesus RR.

Early on in Mister C. Augustus Croesus's railroad ownership he was able to make certain bridge or swing loans to various other railroads to carry them through difficult or rough time. It wasn't his intent to be a banker, but he liked to help out when others wouldn't. His generous financial strategies brought him wide spread respect in the railroad world. The other railroads, in thanks, always sent whatever business they had his way. The A B & C RR was always happy to cooperate with any railroad.

Unions were one of Mr. C. Augustus Croesus' dislikes. The compassion he had for his railroad employees and their families was legendary. There was no extreme his railroad wouldn't go to help any of his employee's families in time of need. A new employee that might suggest unionization was either quickly straightened out by fellow workers or the new guy would be sent packing. Because of their admiration for the boss his employees started calling him "the old man". With respect the term "old" was being chalked into the road name before Croesus by his devotes. After the passing of the founder of the A B & C RR the term 'old' was adopted into the freight portion of the road name. The 'old' would be used in slanted script style letters like the early chalk tribute the men used to honor their boss.

One of the richest traditions amongst the locomotive engineers can be witnessed as a loco starts rolling. An engineer can be seen reaching down and patting the road's herald on the side of the cab in thanks for continued employment. The older railroad men who had worked for Charles Augustus Croesus loved him.

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Post Script

The A B & old C RR is named after my father Austin Burton Croshere (Jr.) who made some of the finest models I've ever seen. My mother on occasion called dad A B old C, hence the name.

The A B & old C RR is a fictitious railroad. It is a 25' x 13' HO layout in the basement of my home in Sebastopol, CA. The year I modeled is 1936 and steam is king. The modeled location ... well the Railroad's tagline says enough. "Like Shangri-La, many know of it, but not where".

Dave Croshere