

TAG Names Locomotive for John A. Chambliss

by Fred Schneider

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John Alexander Chambliss was described as a “great philosopher, a man of high ideals, a true lover of nature and a source of strength and inspiration” at ceremonies Tuesday when a shiny diesel locomotive was named in his honor.

Close friends and relatives gathered at Terminal Station at 11 A.M. when the Tennessee, Alabama and Georgia Railway dedicated a 2,000-horsepower General Motors diesel engine that cost about \$200,000 to the prominent Chattanooga attorney whose interests and abilities are wide and many.

E. M. Tolleson, president of the TAG, introduced Dr. George W. Long, pastor of the Lookout Mountain Presbyterian Church, who offered the invocation and said he was delighted “to live in a land where God is known and recognized on occasions such as this.” He praised the pioneering spirit of the builders of the nation, its railroads and other assets.

After welcoming those attending, Tolleson gave some facts about the new locomotive. He then presented Garrison Siskin, chairman of the board. Siskin described Chambliss as the “engineer” of the TAG, whose connection with it dates back to 1928.

Chambliss has guided the railroad “from the dark tunnels of depression through the deepest valleys of receivership to its present position as one of the few railroads in the nation that is debt free and one of the few railroads in the nation that has paid a dividend every year since 1938 except one – 1946,” Siskin asserted.

Grandson Helps

As he spoke Siskin stood on the front platform of the locomotive with the honoree and his youngest grandson, Alexander W. Chambliss, 7-year-old son of Mr. and Mrs. Sizer Chambliss. Alexander assisted his grandfather in pulling ropes that unveiled the large sign on the front of the diesel carrying the “John A. Chambliss” name and the number 80.

The figure “8” cropped up constantly in talks at the Terminal Station and at a luncheon that followed at noon at the Read House. Chambliss is in his 80th year, Siskin commented in his talk at the luncheon, at which he presided.

“Today we honor a man who is God-fearing and humble,” Siskin said. “God has seen fit to give our honored colleague four-score years and we know the many strengths of Mr. John. Our prayer is that his life will take a good railroad trip to 120 years, as Moses did.

“You know, Moses was four-score years old when he began his greatest life’s task. We are never too old to dream dreams and to strive to fill them. Mr. John’s dreams for the TAG began back in 1928.

“In fact the figure ‘8’ is significant today for many reason: We have just dedicated the John A. Chambliss Locomotive No. 80 in celebrating our 80th year of progress. It was 8 years ago in 1960 that we dedicated the Dave E. Hedges Locomotive No. 50 (Hedges, now deceased, at that time was president of the TAG and had been with the line 50 years. Siskin said at the Terminal Station ceremonies it was the first locomotive named after a living person.)

“The TAG has moved forward with a profit since 1938. Over the past eight years, we have purchased \$880,000 worth of new equipment and the entire \$880,000 debt has been ‘liquid-8-ed.’

“Mr. John, it is impossible to tell you how much you are ‘appreci-8-ed’ by everyone here today, and now without further ado, it is time we ‘8’.”

Receives Replica

About 50 relatives and close friends and associates of John Chambliss attended the luncheon at the Read House. There an exact replica, desk-top display size, of the locomotive which had been made by General Motors was presented to Chambliss.

In talks at both the Terminal Station and the luncheon, the honoree told of his love of railroads and locomotives which began when he was a small boy living on Lookout Mountain and admired the old steam railroad that operated before the earliest inclines. Jac Chambliss, his son, elaborated on the father and sons’ love of trains and said the used to like particularly to see and hear the Dixie Flyer as it rounded the mountain and went through Wauhatchie.

Chambliss first became connected with the TAG as an attorney in 1928 when he had a claim against the railroad and must have decided “if you can’t lick ‘em, join ‘em.” Along with John and L. C. Smallwood, and several others, Chambliss led in forming a syndicate to buy the railroad which operates between Chattanooga and Gadsden, Ala.

The purchase was made from Webster T. James, the son of the late C. E. James, a pioneer builder and developer of this area. This developer reportedly interested the late Russell Sage in putting up money to build the line about 80 years ago.

Praises Vision

Chambliss described Chattanooga as being famous as a railroad junction and praised the ability of James and Sage to envision the value of building the railroad. He said that today the owners and operators of the TAG are profiting from the great vision of these two developers.

Describing his years of connection with the TAG he said the “mutual conquest of difficulty is the cement of friendship.”

At the luncheon, short talks were made by son Jac Chambliss, and grandsons Dan and John Chambliss III as well as several others making remarks commending the honoree.

At the Terminal ceremonies Siskin reviewed Chambliss' connection with the TAG. For some time he has been a member of the board, member of the executive committee and executive vice president and general counsel. He has been general counsel and a stockholder since 1928.

Judge Frost, representing Hamilton County and the City of Chattanooga, at the Terminal Station ceremonies, declared: "This is a wonderful occasion for the people of Chattanooga and Hamilton County. This is the greatest nation on earth and this is the most wonderful community in it. Our greatest wealth lies in our people . . . I want to offer my congratulations to Mr. Chambliss."

Chambliss entered the cab and blew the whistle of his namesake as the ceremonies came to a close.

Brig. Glenn Stovall and Lt. Wesley Short led the singing of railroad songs at Terminal Station and at the luncheon. Stovall said the one sung at the luncheon, "Life's Railway to Heaven," was written by a friend of his who is a real locomotive engineer.