

THE FLYING YANKEE

A remembrance by David D. Wallace '52, MArch '56
(Written initially for his grandchildren in September 2006)

When you see the word “yankee” that dreaded baseball team may come to mind. However, this story has nothing to do with baseball in case you are worried. It is about a train of the future that fascinated me when I was ten, or so, years old. I am reminded of it because there was a story in the August 6, 2006, edition of the *Sunday Boston Globe* about the on-going restoration of a 1930's train. The train was named the Flying Yankee. The article says it was “Commissioned by the Boston & Maine, it was built by the E. G. Budd company of Philadelphia. It cost \$280,000 and was modeled after another streamliner, the Pioneer Zephyr, that had caused a stir in Chicago in 1935.”

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The Flying Yankee in Nashua, N.H., in 1935

PHOTO ABOVE, AND MAP BELOW COURTESY FLYING YANKEE RESTORATION GROUP

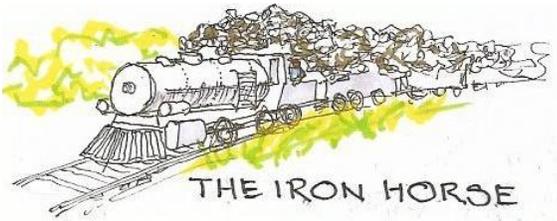
Flying Yankee getting back on track

The Flying Yankee (FY) caused quite a stir for me in Plaistow, NH, where I spent the summers from 1934 to 1943 at my Grandpa Conley's farm. The FY would zip through the Plaistow grade crossing at 10:15AM every day. That grade crossing was 4 miles from the farm so I jumped at any chance I had for a ride in that direction. Uncle Bob Meyer would occasionally go to Dustin's General Store next to the RR tracks to buy a

newspaper. Knowing that I wanted to see the FY, he timed his errand to arrive there at 10:05 AM. We would drive in his “Buick” convertible that was as much in the future, I thought, as the Flying Yankee. It had red leather upholstery, gray paint, with lots of shiny chrome trim AND a rumble seat. It was the best car I had a chance to ride in. Riding in it made the trip doubly worthwhile. While he went into the store for his paper, I would wait by the crossing for the train to speed by at 90 miles an hour. It couldn't have been in my view for more than a minute but what an exciting minute it was. You could hear the woOSH OF IT COMING AND THEN RECEDing as it faded from sight. It was a blurry silver streak whizzing by my eyes.



The Flying Yankee may not seem unusual to those of you who were not around in the 1930's, but 65 years ago it was a marvel. Remember those were the drab and struggling depression years. All other trains had Iron Horse type engines which burned coal.

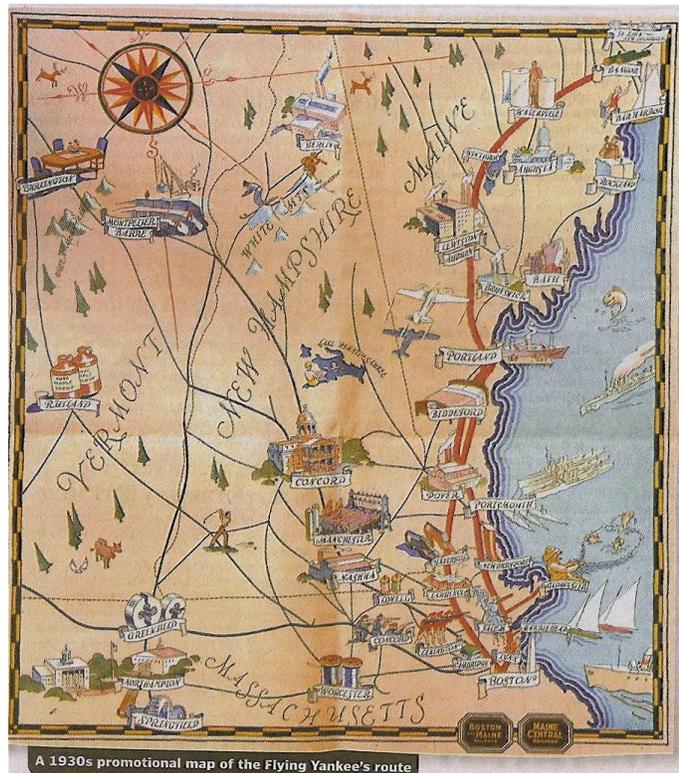


They belched thick black sooty smoke as they chugged by at 35 miles per hour. There was no air conditioning on those trains. If you opened a window on a hot muggy summer day to cool off a bit, smoke would fly in the window and in seconds you were covered with black specks on your clothes and sweat covered skin.

The Flying Yankee was AIR CONDITIONED. It was QUIET for the passengers. They didn't hear the clickey-clack of the rail joints as you did in other trains. The coach's interior had a modern “art deco” design, a new upholstery design, and there was indirect lighting. These things had never been in trains before. What a treat it must have been to ride in it back then. Unfortunately, I never did. I got my enjoyment just looking at it.

It had a 732 mile daily run schedule. The route looped from Portland, Maine to Boston, Massachusetts to Bangor, Maine and back to Portland to spend the night.

To quote the *Boston Globe* article, “powered by diesel and electricity instead of steam, the Yankee flew be-



A 1930s promotional map of the Flying Yankee's route

tween Boston, northern New England and New York for 22 years, dazzling passengers with its quiet, cushioned ride ... Then, in the 1950's, car ownership exploded." As a result, ridership on the Flying Yankee plummeted. "The Flying Yankee was retired after nearly three million miles of travel and left to sit in a Carver (Massachusetts) rail museum for almost four decades as vandals pocketed bits of its Art Deco features and rot settled into its once-plush seats and carpets."

Now it is being restored to its original beauty. Soon it will again be taking passengers on tours throughout New England.

To find out more about the restoration effort, visit www.flyingyankee.com.

