

## He's an Expert in Keeping Engine on Rails

*J. M. Rossiter of Indiana Division Has Been*

*Forty-One Years in the Passenger Service*

(Sept 1923)

**J**. M. ROSSITER of Mattoon, Ill., passenger engineer on the Indiana division at 68 years of age, is as active as many men only half that old. He is a typical railroader, enjoys his work and takes an unusual pride in caring for his engine. He has the record of never having had a wheel of a passenger train off the rail between stations. In this day and age, when "Safety First" is receiving so much attention and campaigns are being vigorously waged to prevent accidents and injuries, his splendid record in this respect stands out boldly: He has been fortunate in never injuring a passenger or an employee, nor has he been injured himself; also, in the last eight years he has not killed or injured any live stock.

Mr. Rossiter is held in high esteem by his fellow employees. For many years he held the position of presiding officer of the locomotive engineers. He has a wonderful memory, which is shown by the following interesting account he gives of his railway experience, dating back to the time he was 16 years old:

### **Started Railroading at Age of 16**

"I was born in Mount Vernon, Ohio, June 24, 1855. In 1871 I came west to visit a brother who was an engineer at Knightsville, Ind. I was told that the I. & St. L.<sup>1</sup> was moving its shops from Litchfield, Ill., to Mattoon, Ill., and that I might get a job firing out of Mattoon. I went there some time in July, 1871, and after being looked over by the master mechanic was told that he thought I was too young to fire an engine.

"While I was waiting for a train to go to Chicago or St. Louis, a man asked me if I was not the boy who was in the master mechanic's office looking for a job firing. I admitted that, and he told me that there would be an excursion train run to the St. Louis races in the morning and that if I would go out as an extra brakeman on it he would see what he could do for me when I got back. He said that all I would have to do would be to couple the engine on and string the bell rope, for the train had straight air brake.

"At that time all engines and cars were coupled with link and pin<sup>2</sup>. I noticed that the I. & St. L. engines had two vicious looking bumpers on the rear of the tender that were noted for cutting off fingers, hands or arms if a wrong move were made while coupling. That night I stopped at the old Sullivan House on Western Avenue and lost some sleep thinking what would happen in the morning when I would have to couple the engine on.

"Morning came—I got by all right. When the train started, at 6 a. m., the conductor asked me if I knew the road. I said I did not; so he gave me a hat check with all the names of the stations printed on the back of it. The train must have gone through the first station without stopping, for I got in bad when I called out the next station. A Mattoon man said: 'Sonny, come inside and shut the door; you're lost.'

### **Saw Eads Bridge Being Built**

"At that time there was no bridge over the Mississippi River at St. Louis. We went over on ferry boat. I got in the city and did not come back to Mattoon. After taking in the sights there for a few days, I went down to the levee or water front to see the steamboats. The piers for the Eads Bridge<sup>3</sup> were not finished yet; some were only a few feet above the water. I saw two new engines going down the river on a barge and was told that they were for the Iron Mountain

Railroad, that this road was changing from wood-burning to coal-burning engines and that the shops were at Carondelet, about eight miles south of St. Louis.

“I went down and asked the master mechanic, Mr. Haynes, for a job firing. I got the job and went out that afternoon on a wood-burner with a train of iron ore dumps. This road was down hill almost all the way to the end of the trip. I had a ‘colored gent’ in the wood-pile who was an artist at putting wood in the fire-box. I passed him the wood, and he put it in—but, coming back, things were different! I was all alone with a train of nineteen loaded iron ore cars, with dry cottonwood; it was just one continuous fire, and that was from one wood pile to the next.

“We got in about 10 p. m., with my back very sore, face blistered, hands and fingers full of splinters, and a \$1.50 pair of gloves completely worn out! The engineer told me my pay would be \$1.75 for the trip—I took the first train for St. Louis and never went back. The Iron Mountain still owes me that \$1.75; if the interest were compounded after fifty-two years, it would be worth while now. This trip was made in . . .” [*text missing*]

“My next job was on a passenger train between East St. Louis and Decatur, on the Toledo, Wabash & Western Railway, as a brakeman. This was before the days of air brake on that road. I was promoted to train baggageman January 1, 1872, and held this position until November, 1876.

“I then started firing on the Wabash Railroad, out of Decatur, Ill., and in October, 1877, I went to the P. D. & E.<sup>4</sup>, (now the Indiana division of the Illinois Central) and fired for a few weeks. I was then promoted to night roundhouse foreman at Pekin, Ill. I went on the road again in 1878; was promoted to engineer December 31, 1879; ran a switch engine in the Pekin, Ill., yard six months; after that I ran freight, broke in new engines that were being received, pulled the pay car and specials. I was given a regular passenger run on February 11, 1882, between Mattoon, Ill., and Peoria, Ill., which I kept for twenty-five years. In 1907 I took trains, Nos. 205 and 222 between Mattoon, Ill., and Evansville, Ind., and I am still running them, which makes forty-one years for me . . .” [*text ends here*]

Notes:

1. Indianapolis, St. Louis and Chicago Railway Company

2.



Link-and-pin system  
[AmericanHeritage.com](http://AmericanHeritage.com)

3.



Eads Bridge under construction  
St. Louis, MO



Eads Bridge, St. Louis

4. Peoria, Decatur & Evansville Railway