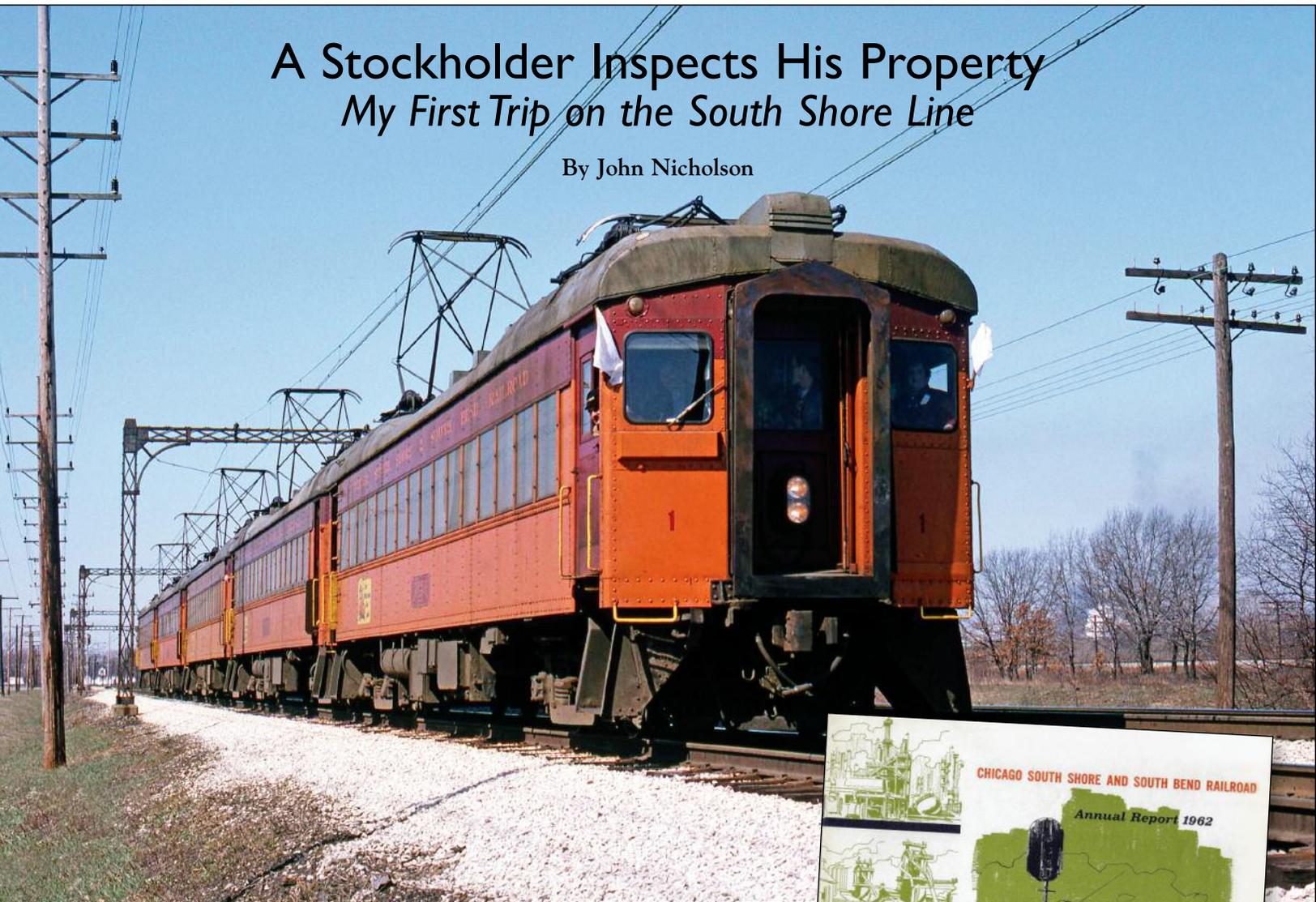


A Stockholder Inspects His Property

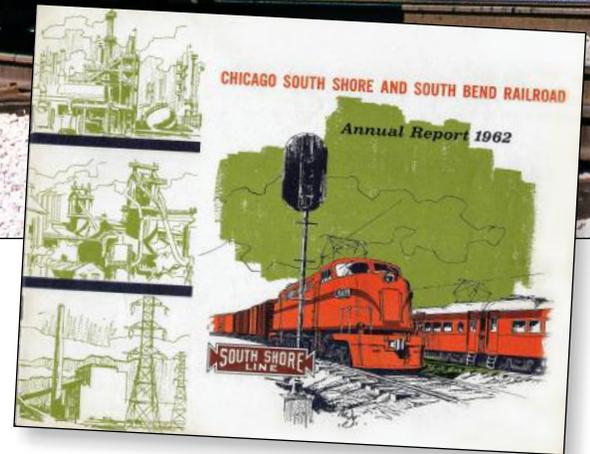
My First Trip on the South Shore Line

By John Nicholson



▲ The Insull-era catenary towers at Wagner Siding were a pleasant surprise to the author on his first South Shore trip and rekindled memories of journeys along the North Shore's Skokie Valley Route. This view, dating to April 1975, was of a Joe Diaz-sponsored fantrip using South Shore coaches 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.—*Lou Gerard photo.*

▶ 1962 South Shore Line annual report.—*Author's collection*



Few industries in America had as rapid an expansion and as equally rapid a decline as the electric interurban railways. Considered the “dot coms” of their era, new interurban lines proliferated in the early part of the 20th century connecting towns large and small, offering a service far more flexible than the steam roads. Expansion continued until peak mileage was reached in 1917. Yet, less than two decades later, the vast interurban network had virtually vanished, a collapse as astounding and complete as any in American business history.

So, why would a 14-year-old boy want to invest in an interurban in 1963?

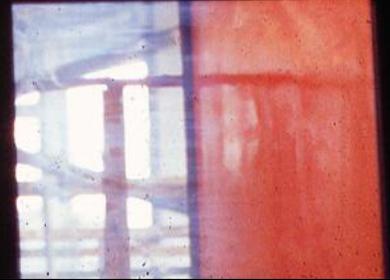
I guess the best answer is “Because I could.” By 1963 the Chicago South Shore and South Bend Railroad was the last interurban company operating in North America. Some claimed it was no longer an interurban, that it bore a closer resemblance to an electrified Class One railroad. I decided to find out for myself.

While I had seen many photos of the South Shore in my early years, I didn't personally encounter it until the summer of 1962 when I was a student at the Junior School of the Art Institute. I always pocketed the lunch money I had been given (it could be put to better use) and instead spent my lunch period out on the Monroe

Street bridge watching South Shore and IC Electric trains arrive and depart from the Randolph Street Station. If I turned my head to the left, I saw North Shore and “L” trains pass by over Wabash Avenue a block away. If I could have put a “stop button” on time it would have been there and then.

My interest in the South Shore was put on hold for a few months as I rode and photographed the North Shore while I could. When I made my final North Shore journey on the last day of operation, it was hard for me to accept that the line had come to an end. Many traction enthusiasts somberly announced the interurban era was truly over. However, the weekend *Chicago*

CHICAGO SOUTH SHORE & SOUTH BEND R.R.
HAMMOND — EAST CHICAGO — GARY
MICHIGAN CITY — SOUTH BEND
TO TRAINS



▲ A sight familiar to many riders of the South Shore Line was the neon sign over the entrance to the train platforms at Randolph Street Station. To the author it was the gateway to another era.—Robert Konsbruck photo, author's collection

▼ The old wooden platforms at South Shore's Randolph Street Station had a "temporary" look about them, but "temporary" would last for several decades. Combine 109 and coach 26 layover between runs in 1974.—Lou Gerard photo





▲ After a fast ride over tracks of the IC Electric, the South Shore set out on its own at Kensington, where it crossed the IC mainline on its way to points east in Indiana. No. 25 leads a Loop-bound train as it picks its way over special work in a July 1982 view.—Lou Gerard photo

► A favorite spot of the author for photos was at Hammond with its ancient station. The problem with shooting rush hour photos on the South Shore was that the sun was always behind the westbound morning trains and the eastbound afternoon trains. The sun was right for this morning view of No. 106 approaching Hammond in April 1973.—John Nicholson photo



Tribune featured an interview with the South Shore’s president, William P. Colliton, who assumed the post two years earlier. From the beginning, the new management had been saying, “Don’t call us an interurban!” and seemed to be taking steps to distance itself from its interurban past. A new herald appearing on equipment proclaimed this was not the old Insull-era South Shore Line, but the modern, progressive South Shore Railroad. Now, in a surprising volte-face, Mr. Colliton claimed that the South Shore was indeed an interurban and cited several reasons. Unlike the other two interurbans I had been acquainted with, the Chicago Aurora and Elgin and the North Shore Line, this one was profitable. And its stock was being traded.

Which now takes us back to all that accumulated lunch money. My father always tried to instruct me in the ways of finance and investment and I’d follow the

financial performance of various companies, especially railroads. In my research, I noted that South Shore common stock was selling for \$15 a share in the spring of 1963. I instructed my father, as my “broker,” to purchase five shares of the stock for me. I couldn’t come up with the entire \$75, only half, but Dad arranged to loan me the rest, to be paid back whenever the

stock was sold. The shares were purchased and in due course I received a copy of the South Shore Line 1962 annual report. Now that I was an investor, I made plans to inspect my company. Also, since I had ridden the North Shore many times, I wanted to see in what ways the North Shore and South Shore were similar, in what ways they differed, and to see how



▲ Gary was a fascinating place to view South Shore operations. The facility featured a pocket terminal and a large coach yard. One could watch arrivals and departures as well as cuts from and adds to certain trains, a procedure that could also be repeated in Michigan City. This was a favorite location of the author in his days as a traveling auditor for Greyhound Lines. Once business was concluded at Greyhound's Gary station, there was always time to stop by the South Shore station and take a few photos. The old station is shown here on June 12, 1981. Banks of telephone booths anywhere nowadays are as rare as interurbans.—John Nicholson photo

much of the South Shore's interurban heritage remained.

Armed with the annual report, an October 1962 timetable, and my mother's Pony 135 camera, my father and I set off from Park Ridge for the Loop on Sunday morning, April 21, 1963. I couldn't help but note the date was exactly three months after the North Shore Line shut down. We left the car in the Monroe Street parking lot (above ground back then) and walked over to Randolph Street Station, which the South Shore shared with the IC Electric.

Interurban terminals never had any pretensions of grandeur—architectural landmarks they were not. True, there were large and elaborate facilities in Indianapolis, Akron, and Los Angeles, but most of the terminals were housed in modest store fronts (think of the Lake Shore Electric's station on Public Square in Cleveland or even the North Shore's on Wabash Avenue). There was a subterranean feel to Randolph Street Station and the air quality reminded me of being in someone's basement after a flood. But it

was a bustling place and it was hard to top the convenience of its location at Randolph and Michigan.

Alongside a wall was a simple ticket window where my father purchased round-trip tickets between Chicago and South Bend. Under a long neon sign displaying the names of important stops along the line, a set of doors led to a wooden ramp which in turn led to the train platforms. Little did I know at the time, but over the years those doors were to be a portal to another era. The platforms themselves were constructed of wood and meant to be temporary when built in 1926; they had become "temporarily permanent" by 1963. While waiting with others for the train to be announced, I asked a passing trainman if stockholders had early boarding privileges (they did not). I realized at that moment I had the same sense of anticipation I used to experience at the North Shore's Milwaukee terminal, waiting for the chain to be unhooked so I could run ahead on the platform to grab the railfan seat on the Electroliner or a Silverliner.

At last, we were allowed out to the plat-

form to board South Shore No. 15, due to depart at 10:00 a.m. Unlike the days when I ran all out to be the first on a North Shore train in Milwaukee, I decided to moderate my pace in a manner becoming a respectable stockholder, so my dash out to the platform was merely "sub-sonic." Two cars awaited us. The lead car was a lengthened combine equipped with picture windows, air conditioning, and fluorescent lighting. There were even antimacassars with the South Shore herald on each seat back. The second car was a lengthened coach, but with regular-size windows.

We departed on time and proceeded on our way down the Illinois Central to Kensington. While we were still on IC trackage, my father engaged the conductor in a conversation, pointing at me and saying that I was probably the South Shore's youngest stockholder. The conductor smiled and responded, "Well, in that case, would your son like to ride up in the baggage section and view the line?" Would I! The few times I had ridden in a North Shore Line combine, riding up in the baggage compartment was strictly *verboten*. I was already

warming to the South Shore and I had only been on board for fifteen minutes.

The bulkhead separating the front platform from the baggage section featured a large pane of glass that afforded me an excellent view out the front end. Before long, we rocked and rolled our way across the special work at Kensington and were now on South Shore trackage. I wanted to take note of the characteristics of the line and the improvements made to it—what I already knew and what I read in my copy of the annual report.

The importance of freight service was evidenced by the size of Burnham Yard, which appeared as we neared the Indiana border. In a minute or so, we were rolling over a section of newly installed 115-pound welded rail that I had read about in the annual report. Just east of the antediluvian Hammond station, I noticed what must have been remnants of the line that had continued on into East Chicago. I was impressed by the construction standards of the five-mile East Chicago bypass, but wished I could have ridden the cars down Chicago Avenue in the days of street running. One observation I made riding along



▲ Tremont station was once considered one of the gateway stations for visitors to the Indiana Dunes. Since closed, it was still open for business on July 29, 1967, when the author and Steve Scalzo were out photographing the line. Coach 28 boards passengers on its westbound run. Riders now access the Dunes via the appropriately-named Dune Park station.—*John Nicholson photo*

▼ The interurban era seemed truly alive and well when riding the electric cars over the streets of Michigan City. In true interurban fashion, trains stopped in the middle of the street to pick up and discharge passengers. A four-car train paused in front of the station on a westbound run on September 5, 1966.—*Owen Leander photo, author's collection*





▲ Local traffic comes to a halt as express from an eastbound combine is unloaded in front of the Michigan City station. The date is June 27, 1966, but it was a scene repeated in many small towns every day when interurbans covered Indiana. Like the North Shore, South Shore Line operated its own Emergency Package Service, offering frequent parcel service to points along the route.—*John Nicholson photo*

this section: while the track was magnificent, the riding quality of the South Shore cars was anything but.

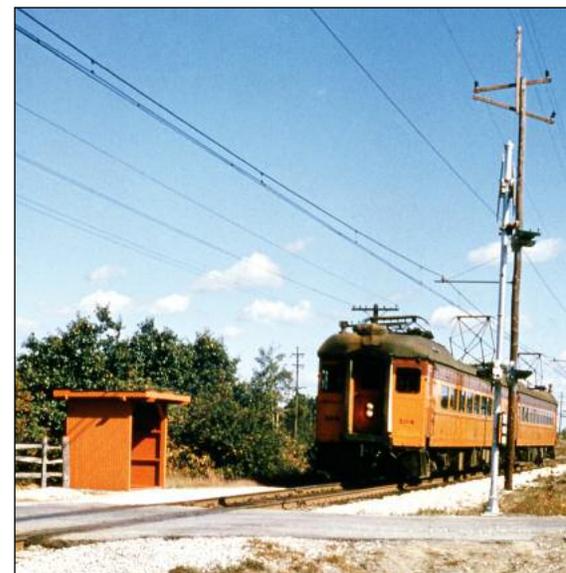
Thirty-one miles and 45 minutes after our departure, we arrived in Gary. The Gary station served as an originating and terminating point for much of the South Shore's commuter traffic, many of the trains operating out of the pocket terminal just west of the station building. The coach yard just to the west was still in service at this time and was filled with cars awaiting weekday assignments. As we pulled out of Gary and crossed Broadway, I took note of a Y-shaped track to the east of the station. I surmised this was used for set-outs and add-ons of cars.

If I was looking for an obvious similarity to the North Shore, I found it when our train entered Wagner Siding where the catenary support bridges were virtual twins of the ones found on North Shore's Skokie Valley Route. For a moment I felt as if I was back on the North Shore, but the illusion lasted for less than two miles.

Just west of the Baileytown stop I tried to get a glimpse of the construction activi-

ty at Burns Ditch where Midwest Steel had opened a steel plant two years prior and Bethlehem Steel was in the middle of construction of a similar facility. The industrial development in this area and its potential for freight traffic was making the South Shore attractive to a number of large railroad suitors. The annual report even showed possible integration of CSS&SB with roads such as Chesapeake and Ohio, New York Central, and Pennsylvania Railroad.

When our train entered the street running in Michigan City the overall tone changed from "Northwest Indiana Industrial" to something resembling a small Midwest town in the twenties or thirties when the day's stillness was broken by the sound of the electric car's arrival. Just as was done in countless other small towns in the interurban era, the electric car stopped in the middle of the street to load passengers and express from a storefront station (in the case here, a building with a pleasingly ornate front dating back to 1927). At the Michigan City Shops, we dropped our second car and continued on



▲ Occasional local trains served the flagstops that dotted the line between Michigan City and South Bend. This traffic, modest as it was, all but vanished when street running into downtown South Bend ended in 1970. Typical of these stops was Chain-o-Lakes which was being passed by a westbound limited in September 1963.—*William Jaroszewski photo, author's collection.*



▲ South Shore trains, in true interurban fashion, terminated in the middle of the street in South Bend in front of the line's storefront depot on LaSalle at Michigan. Combine No. 104 had just arrived at South Bend, heading a two-car train, on May 7, 1969. Street running had a little more than a year remaining before service was cut back to Bendix Drive in the summer of 1970.—*John Nicholson photo*



▲ Once the train had unloaded passengers and express, it crossed Michigan and then over the St. Joseph River before entering a compact coach yard for layover. Several cars were on hand in this view from May 9, 1970. In less than two months, all service into downtown South Bend over city streets would cease.—*John Nicholson photo*

our way to South Bend. From this point on the South Shore became a real interurban.

There were still numerous small flag stops (“Use light at night” the timetable advised) that could bring the speeding interurban to a stop to pick up or discharge a passenger. This part of the line was where the South Shore could really roll and I felt that same exhilaration I experienced when running all out on the North Shore. But then, with its single track, passing sidings, and rural surroundings, I could easily have found myself on the Indiana Railroad (except I was riding over trackage that IRR could only have dreamt about).

Entering South Bend was a real trip back in time. As our car rumbled down an unpaved Orange Street, all that was missing was a flivver or a horse and wagon to give the scene the sense of another time. Arrival at the South Shore Line station at LaSalle and Michigan was right on time at 12:05 p.m., two hours and five minutes after our departure from Randolph Street Station.

Instead of a lunch counter inside the terminal building, my father and I were greeted by a line of vending machines. The



◀ A westbound train loads passengers in the middle of the street in front of the South Shore's South Bend terminal. South Shore wasn't that particular where combines were placed in the trains. In this view, travelers boarded at the baggage end and proceeded through to the passenger compartment as seen here in May 1969.—*John Nicholson photo*

annual report informed the stockholders that the company-operated counter service in South Bend, Michigan City, Gary, and Hammond had been replaced by vending machines, turning a large loss into a modest profit. "Modest profit" did not translate into "edible lunch," but Dad and I made the best of our limited options. I thought the South Shore's vended fare left a lot to be desired, but it was *Michelin Guide* three-star quality compared to what I was to sample on the Southern Pacific automat cars several years later.

After depositing passengers and express in the middle of LaSalle Avenue, I watched our combine roll across the intersection, down a grade over the "Mighty" St. Joseph River, and into a compact off-street coach yard. Our layover lasted only 20 minutes before the same car once again pulled up in front of the station. I had noticed that the combine was always on the north end of a train on the North Shore, but the South Shore didn't particularly care where they were placed. We even boarded the car on the baggage end and walked through that section to our seats in the passenger compartment.

By the time we arrived back at Randolph Street at 2:31 p.m., I was convinced of the wisdom of my investment and I now had a new "favorite" electric line. Even though the North Shore had closed three months earlier, there was a sense of continuity that carried over to the South Shore. While there might have



▲ The section between South Bend and Michigan City was South Shore Line's "Twilight Zone" where one was truly transported back to the interurban era. No. 22 on a westbound run was caught at speed at Lydick in July 1982. No other Indiana interurban could boast of trackage of this quality.—*Lou Gerard photo*

been smaller green cars with trolley poles on the one road and larger orange cars with pantographs on the other, many similarities cropped up. Both roads had been under Insull management and operated 1920s-era heavyweight interurbans over deep-ballasted rights-of-way with heavy rail and compound catenary. The two lines both scheduled trains with combines and offered Emergency Package/Baggage Service. They both had sections of interurban-style street running and offered frequent service to points along their lines.

One could go on with similarities, but there was one major difference. Over half of the South Shore's gross earnings came from carload freight revenue while the North Shore's freight income rarely topped 15% of total earnings in later years. That was why I could ride the one interurban in April 1963 while the other was now history, to be revisited only through the pages of a CERA Bulletin.

In this day of bulk commodity unit trains, stack trains, hard-to-remember

diesel classes (does "SD70ACU" or "ES44DC" resonate the same as "Big Boy" or "Hudson"?), bland-looking gallery and Amfleet cars--can any of this capture the imagination of a young person today the way trains of previous generations did? By way of consolation, we still have the South Shore Line. The cars and many of the stations may be newer, but it still speeds along between Chicago and South Bend under catenary of 1,500 volts D.C. It's still there to be revisited by the old and discovered by the young.

Postscript

And what about those five shares of South Shore Line stock I purchased in 1963 at \$15 a share? As previously mentioned, the South Shore became an attractive property to larger railroads in the area. When the C&O made an offer to current South Shore stockholders in 1966, I accepted. So, the stock I purchased for \$15 a share was sold to C&O for \$42.50 a share. Who says you can't make a killing investing in traction?