

3-20-1995

## Excerpts from Newsletters of the North Alabama Railroad Museum, Inc.

Historic Huntsville Foundation

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### Recommended Citation

Historic Huntsville Foundation (1995) "Excerpts from Newsletters of the North Alabama Railroad Museum, Inc.," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*. Vol. 21: No. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol21/iss1/5>

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**EXCERPTS FROM Newsletters of the  
North Alabama Railroad Museum, Inc.**



In the *Employee's Time Tables, Memphis and Charleston Railway*, year 1887, some of the rules cited were fraught with implications. Rule 138, which says in part: "Coupling (of cars) by hand strictly prohibited. Sticks must be used... Getting between cars in motion to couple or uncouple them... (is) dangerous (!) and in violation of duty."

The coupling system consisted of an oval-shaped link on one car, and a simple pin on the other. Rule 138 allowed as how the hapless crewman was to balance the pin ready to drop it on the one car (with the 'stick' aforesaid), while nudging the link on the other straight; the idea being that the pin would drop in just at the instant of impact.

What the writer of Rule 138 overlooked is that the laws of physics would still apply, Rule 138 or no—and upon impacting, the cars would immediately rebound, usually before the pin could drop in; thus confronting a brakeman with two cars now too far apart to couple.

The cure for this, of course, was to get right in there and guide the pin in with one's hand—which is what was usually done, for to spend minutes balancing pins with sticks was going to earn the ire of everyone from the conductor up to the division super. One could get pretty good at it, of course—but one could lose a finger, or an arm, or even one's life.

The Rules has an answer for that too: Rule 8 stated, 'If an employee should be disabled by sickness or other cause (see above), the right to compensation will not be recognized.' Thus, the rules piously mandated a procedure which in practice didn't work, and then washed its hands when trainmen were injured or killed ignoring the rules to get the job done.