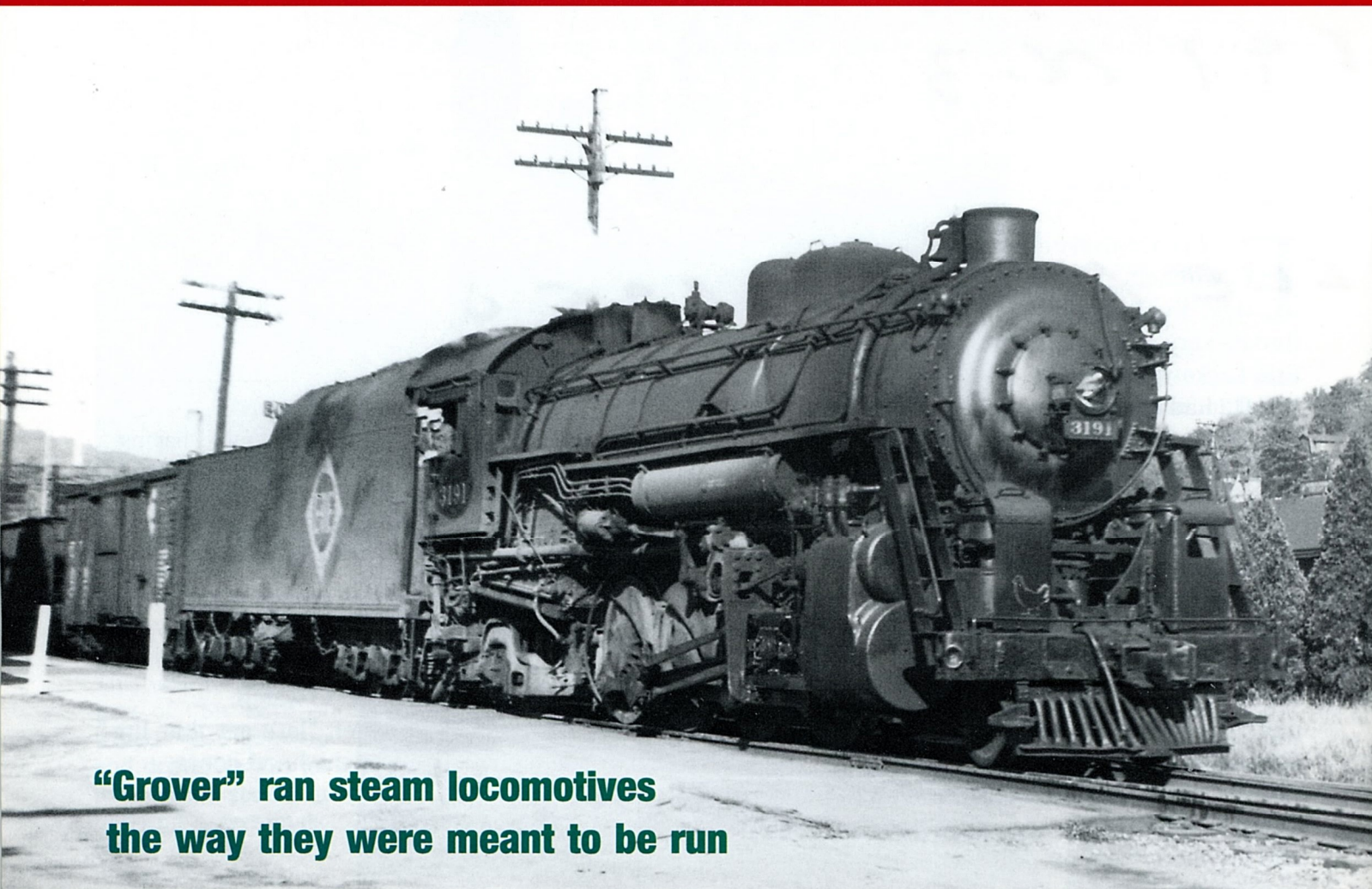


A MAN OF STEAM



**“Grover” ran steam locomotives
the way they were meant to be run**

BY CHARLES LOCKWOOD

as reminisced to his wife, Marilyn, circa 1990

Every steam locomotive had its own personality, and so did the engineers who worked on them. When the age of steam passed into the era of diesels, the railroads lost much of their romance, and as the old-time engineers retired, the age of colorful individualists passed with them.

Not all the memories of old engineers die, though. They become legends as seen through the eyes of awestricken, amused and—sometimes—terrified firemen and brakemen. I had the privilege of working with one of these legends, although at times I question his sanity and my own. We'll call him Grover.

My first experience with him was when I bid to work trains 18 and 71—an eastbound way freight and a fast

freight west—between Hornell and Elmira, N.Y., usually with locomotive No. 3167, equipped with a Duplex stoker.

It was my good fortune to work with a man of Grover's caliber despite my low position on the roster, because he had been disqualified for service on other runs. It was said he had two speeds: standing still or wide open. He was short in stature, so it appeared that he stood up to pull the throttle back, and when his rear end hit the seat, that was his working position with the throttle wide open. But he knew every curve, every signal, every slow order on the route and he respected them in his way.

My first trip with Grover was uneventful, but in the next few months I observed how much he enjoyed breaking the monotony with creative antics or by the unex-



ABOVE: A hundred cars notwithstanding, 2-8-4 No. 3378 appears to be barnstorming right along the Erie main line at Big Flats, N.Y., east of Corning, with a westbound mixed bag of freight circa 1947.—JEREMY TAYLOR, COLLECTION OF THE ERIE LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

LEFT: Mike 3191 works at Wellsville, N.Y., in June 1950. The author often fired 2-8-2s like this when working freights 18 and 71. Could the wizened little fellow at the throttle in this scene be engineer "Grover" featured in this story?—R. GANGER



pected orientation of a new brakeman. Grover's reputation as a runner was well deserved, and his trains usually got over the road in very good time. Not every freight engineer was allowed to precede No. 1, the westbound *Erie Limited*, into the next terminal, but Grover enjoyed that confidence evidenced by the dispatchers. (Main Rule: never stick a passenger train.)

Grover was a good teacher, and I must have learned the Main Rule from him. When I was promoted to engineer, the dispatcher would often let our train go ahead of No. 6, the eastbound Lake Cities, so we could make our connection at Binghamton. Credit Grover.

On one trip we had a brakeman who had just completed his trial trips, and then he got Grover! Coming from Addison into Corning, there was a slow order coming up and the brakeman was mentally applying the brakes

when he noticed Grover on the floor apparently having a seizure. The brakeman was wide-eyed and speechless, but pounded my shoulder, pointing at Grover. At the last moment, Grover ended his little stage play, calmly arose and wound on the brakes. The brakeman never uttered another word, and a different man showed up for the next trip. Those days weren't for the faint of heart.

The Erie main line ran down the middle of Corning's Main Street (one-time State Route 17) with a watchman at each intersection. Grover always received enthusiastic waves from the kids and appreciative salutes from the older "kids." One day he decided to liven the trip with his own unique shenanigans. He grabbed some waste (wiping material used on locomotives) to make a big mustache, climbed from his seat to stand on the tool shelf, slid open the ventilating cover on the cab, stuck his head through the hole, cocked his hat to one side, stuck out his false teeth and went through the middle of the city blowing the whistle with his foot and waving at all the pedestrians. With the reverser lever screwed down to the corner and the throttle wide open, the engine snorted, sounding as though it was racing. Actually, we were doing only 25 m.p.h. A memorable day!

Grover was a good engineer. He worked the engine hard enough to keep the firebox glowing and to give the fireman a predictable work load. One night, the stoker plugged up and we had 45 miles to go, almost a sure lack of steam unless I could shovel enough coal to keep up. Grover proved his expertise on that trip by cutting back on the use of water and throwing out his "runner" philosophy. I sweated off several pounds shoveling and worrying. When we arrived at the terminal without stalling for steam, he said "Well done," but added, with a chuckle, that he could have taken it away from me (stalled) at any time. I knew that, and I also appreciated what a considerate gentleman he was.

Grover loved kids but he could exercise tough love, too. One winter's day put snow on the ground—the kind that makes good snowballs. We were stopped to switch a car when the brakeman gave us a highball to back up. When the engine didn't move, he repeated the signal. I finally pulled my head in the window and looked over to see if Grover had the signal. No Grover! He was rapidly disappearing up the street close on the heels of a boy. He returned out of breath but satisfied that the spanking he'd administered on the lad's back porch was what was needed. The boy's snowball had broken Grover's glasses as he looked out of the engine. Needless to say, we had no need to dodge snowballs in that area again.

In his own way, too, Grover respected the illness (diabetes) that had disqualified him. His wife had packed his lunch pail with a soft-boiled egg and toast but had forgot-

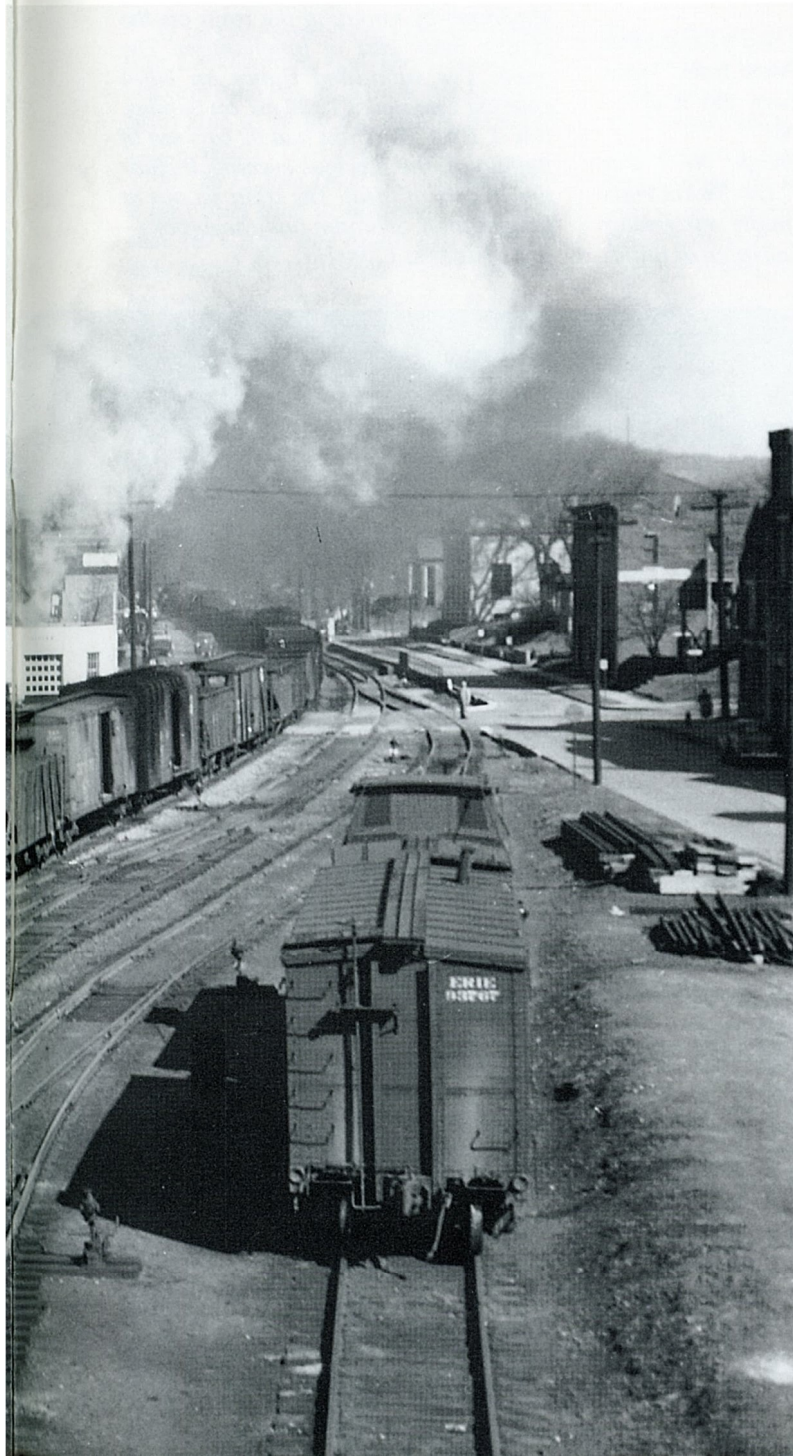
ten to include a spoon. He tried to eat it but the egg ran all over. Thoroughly frustrated, he threw it in the firebox, looked at his lunch pail and threw that in too. His Thermos met the same fate. Then he marched to a nearby diner. On his return he exclaimed, "That will show her. I had steak, mashed potatoes and gravy—the works—and a piece of apple pie, too!" Grover came out for the next trip, all happy and calm again, with a new lunch pail and Thermos. He admitted, finally, that he'd told his wife he lost the old ones.

Many tales demonstrated Grover's "runner" philosophy and only some were apocryphal. A friend told me that he saw our train go through Addison so fast that the automatic gates were still going down long after we'd passed them. I must admit that sometimes I used the stoker valve to keep from falling out of the seat rather than to add coal





Dispatchers had so much confidence in Grover's ability to move freights over the road in a timely (or better) manner that he was one of the few engineers allowed to take his train out ahead of Erie's flagship passenger train when it was in the vicinity. Pacific 2944 wheels the *Erie Limited* along near Waverly, N.Y. circa 1947.—JEREMY TAYLOR, COLLECTION OF THE ERIE LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



to the firebox. One thing is sure: Grover was never called into the office to explain slow time.

One crew missed their deadhead and that engineer rode the engine with us to Hornell. We were highballing up the line and the overspeed whistle was tweeting occasionally. We were approaching a slow order at a "temporary" bridge (put in after the 1935 flood on the flats between Corning and Elmira and still in use 15 years later). Our rider paced nervously and asked me when we'd slow down. Knowing every inch of the rail, Grover wound on the brakes at the right moment and crossed the bridge at the required 25 m.p.h. It took good nerves and confidence to ride with him.

I heard of only one accident in which Grover was involved. According to accounts, a light engine was allowed to back on to the main track in Hornell after Grover had left the station on a clear signal. In spite of applying the brakes, his engine hit the rear of the light engine. Only cuts and bruises resulted. Grover's train was allowed to proceed and, upon reaching the next stop, he asked the agent (who was riding in the Railway Express car in his train) what kind of stop he had experienced. The agent replied, "Hell, I thought it was one of your regular stops!"

A saint he wasn't, but he was patient . . . and impatient; a teacher and a student of human nature, sometimes down but more often up, one who stretched the rules a bit but respected them; enjoyed people but despised phonies; and lived life with imagination—in every way a regular guy but more unforgettable than most. I am proud to have called him a friend.

I admit time may have mellowed my memories and some stories may have grown with repeated tellings. I wonder, now that I'm retired, what tall tales are told about me. I do know that those romantic steam locomotives are gone and all the Grovers with them. But as long as someone cares, they live on in our memories and legends.

Berkshire 3321 eases away from the Corning street trackage with an 82-car westbound in March 1949. This might be westbound No. 71 that author Lockwood talks about.—JEREMY TAYLOR, COLLECTION OF THE ERIE LACKAWANNA HISTORICAL SOCIETY