

[Page 22 - On the S&L Railroad Part Two](#)ISSUE : [Issue 29](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1981/8/1

On the S & L Railroad, Part two Russell Cunningham: We were pulling out one day, in the winter, and there had been a big snowstorm and the plow went through to Sydney, and we were going to Sydney, IA colliery was working that time--that's long ago. So we made a train up, had to take a train of coal in to the steel com? pany. We made a train up in Dominion yard. It was nearly all hoppers, We had no air brakes. So we got our orders. I was head? end brakeman on that train--that is, I rode the engine. So I lined the switches out and I went out and got in the cab, And we were drifting--it's down hill from Do? minion. You go down the hollow and you ' come up the Gardiner light--not a steep grade. She just rose. We had quite a train on. And the fellow who was conductor was killed, he had his two legs cut off right in Caledonia, after thato Quite awhile af? ter that, I often think about it. He was killed the same way, except it was differ? ent- -but, dismembered. So we drifted down. I was sitting on the brakeman's seat. And when we went through down at Mitchell's Crossing, there was a bunch of kids there. And I turned around because I knew what they were on for. The snow was deep now and the plow had gone through. But she hadn't been winged. She was cut straight. You understand? Straight cut from the plow, it hadn't been winged out. So there was about 3 foot of snow on the level, I guess. Cut with just room for the cars and the train to get through. Well, the train would be brushing. So I watched these kids, turned around and kept watching. They'd jump on the train, they'd go down a little piece, and jump off--and they'd jump off in the snow. That was great. Jesus, it was giving me the shivers. I said, "Great god almighty, boy, look at those kids what they're doing!" They were depending on jumping out, to get off. What could we do? We had no air brakes, Meanwhile the driver lifted her out, be? cause he had a hill to go up. So I kept watching. Finally, I saw a little fellow go to jump off a car, and I saw the black sEadow go down, in the side of the snow. Then I saw a coat flying. I hollered to the driver to hold her. Well, he couldn't hold her there. So I jumped out and I got some brakes on. And I got the train stopped and I went back. Here was this lit? tle fellow, 6 or 7 years old, his two hands off, and his leg off down here, and other leg was off--oh, terrible. Well, that little fellow--in that condition-- this was in the snow--had his two little stumps of arms up like he was saying a prayer, he was praying. I'm sure he was praying, just a child's prayer, I couldn't do anything. I ran down and took my jack- knife and cut the goddamned bellcord. We got a tourniquet on him. Some people came with blankets and stuff. And they rushed him to the hospital. Well, I couldn't eat my lunch. And I wanted to go home--but you couldn't just go home when you were on the railway. That poor little fellow. And I can see him yet, saying something, like a prayer. And long after, the conductor of that train--he was over at Caledonia--it was a dull day and he was braking, I think it was a Saturday, And he was cutting off