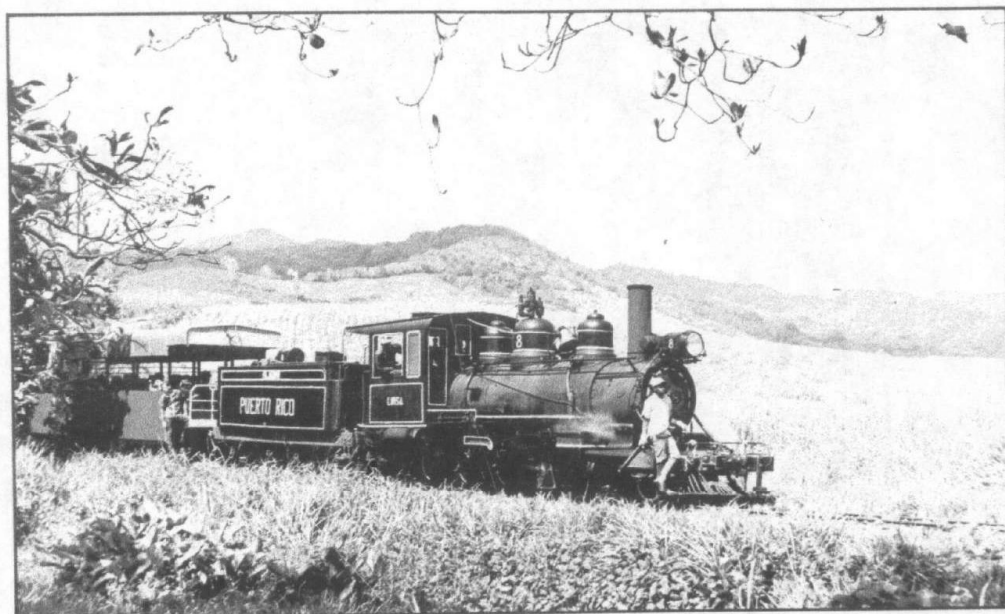


Railroading



NUMBER 43 SECOND QUARTER 1972

“Conservando una Romántica Tradición”

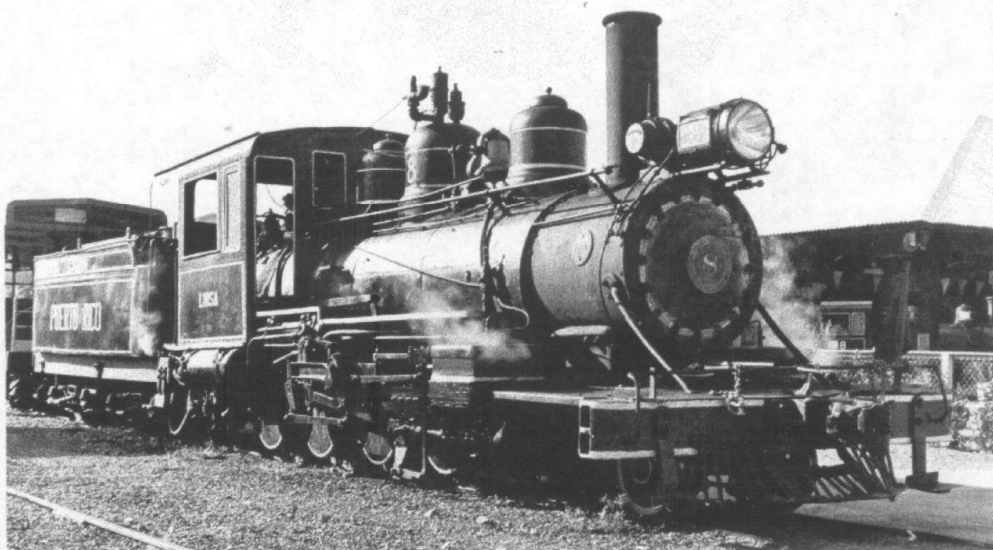
PUERTO RICO'S FERROCARRIL HISTORICO OFFERS A RIDE
THROUGH THE CANE FIELDS BEHIND METER-GAUGE STEAM

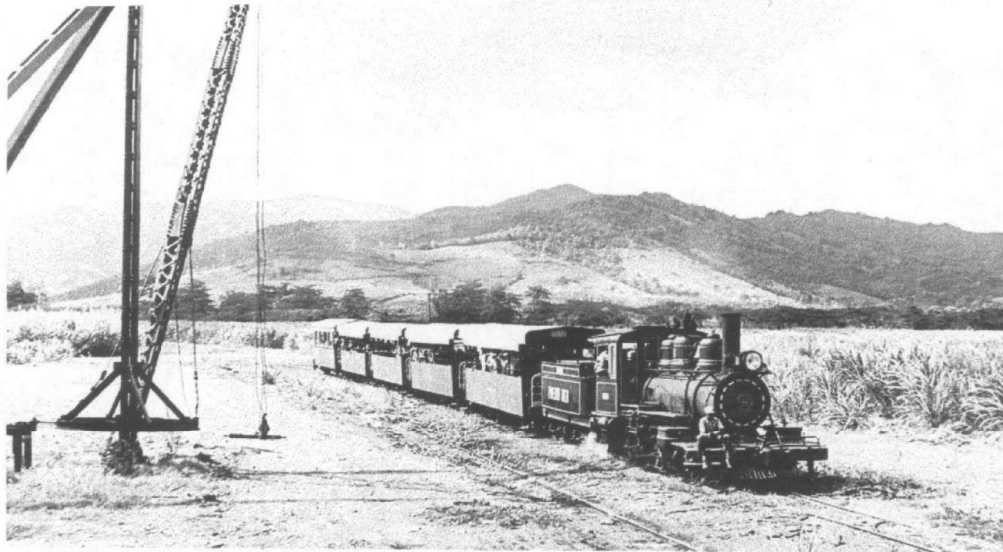
On the lush east coast of Puerto Rico, about 35 miles from San Juan, since late summer of 1971 a number of young Puertorriqueños have had their first encounter with a live steam locomotive. For their elders, the new Ferrocarril Histórico de Puerto Rico at Fajardo has stirred memories of childhood or recalled days spent in the employ of the sugar-cane industry. Increasing numbers of non-islanders, too—some of them from Fajardo's first luxury resort, El Conquistador, which opened recently—have been taking rides on the Ferrocarril Histórico. “Conservando una Romántica Tradición,” the railroad's tickets declare. Certainly the atmosphere is authentic. The 4.6-mile track is a cane-fields branch still used by the local mill, or *central*, for the annual January-to-June harvest. The present active locomotive, No. 8, *Luisa*—named for the owner's wife—is an outside-frame Baldwin 2-8-0, which

came to Puerto Rico in 1928 for the Central Pasto Viejo, a mill about 15 miles down the east coast from Fajardo. The Ferrocarril Histórico's width between rails is the common width of Puerto Rico's principal railroads: one meter, a gauge introduced in the late nineteenth century by Spanish and French engineers.

There were other gauges, though. Apparently the island's first railroad was a steam dummy from San Juan to Río Piedras sanctioned by the Spanish authorities in 1880; its width was 76 centimeters, or 30-inch gauge. The Ferrocarril Histórico's No. 8 was originally 30-inch gauge, but was changed on arrival in Puerto Rico to meter gauge, 39.37 inches. The United Puerto Rican Sugar Company had just amalgamated a number of mills, and instead of going to Central Pasto Viejo No. 8 was assigned to Central Juncos, an inland mill about 20 miles from Fajardo.

Seeing double. No. 8, Luisa, at the Fajardo station. In background is the line's other No. 8, on exhibition. DAVID D. DEVO





On a return trip from the foothills of El Yunque, Luisa passes one of several loading derricks along the line. DAVID D. DEVO

While No. 8 was up on blocks at Juncos in 1928 for the change of gauge, her forward sandbox acquired a permanent dent when it was struck by an airborne section of metal roof during a hurricane. Later, in 1939, No. 8 was converted from coal to oil.

In other ways, the Baldwin's history explains that of the island's railroads, as well as the Ferrocarril Histórico's reason for being. After working until 1933 as a main-line locomotive for Central Juncos, No. 8 came under new ownership when United Puerto Rican Sugar sold out to Eastern Sugar Associates. Eastern Sugar sent No. 8 southeast to Humacao and to Central Pasto Viejo—and west to Caguas and Central Santa Juana. As the Santa Juana's heavier motive power, No. 8 often double-headed cane trains with a Belgian-made 0-6-0. The difference in sound between the Baldwin and her European ally has been recalled as a chug from the former, a resonant hiss from the latter.

Most of the Baldwin's chores were on the main line, somewhere between Playa Humacao and Caguas. Often she was seen running backward as pusher for a long string of loaded cane cars; on the head end might be one of Central Juncos' six-wheeled Davenport diesel-mechanical locomotives. The mufflerless Davenport would loudly announce its approach, which was augmented at night by flames and sparks shooting from the straight exhaust. In a few minutes along

would come No. 8, chugging away, light from the firebox illuminating the ground beneath her.

In 1958 the Eastern Sugar properties became Fajardo Eastern Sugar Associates. That same year the island's principal rail carrier, Puerto Rico Railroad & Transport Company, went out of business, after two bankruptcies in seven years; previously the American Railroad of Puerto Rico, it had been developed by French and American interests into a meter-gauge network that ran two thirds of the way around the island, with 259 miles of line and more than fifty locomotives—including Baldwin compound 0-6-6-0's that were among the earliest American-built Mallets. Railroading in Puerto Rico hasn't been quite the same since, but several sugar producers continued to use railroads, and No. 8 still spent a good deal of time around Central Juncos—after 1961 as No. E462 of C. Brewer de Puerto Rico, a division of the Hawaii-based major sugar growers, and the latest owner of the eastern mills. The Baldwin had her first brush with the excursion business in 1966, a year before she was finally taken out of service and laid up at Central Santa Juana. C. Brewer, which was interested in the development of Hidden Treasure Beach at Playa Humacao, proposed a scenic railroad between its westernmost mill, Central Canovanas, and the Beach. The erstwhile No. 8, C. Brewer's favorite steamer, made a trial run between Fajardo and Central Pasto Viejo.





Luisa's-eye view as the train backs toward the mountains. At left is newly planted cane, for harvest in two years; at right, blossoming cane ready to cut. Facing page: Luisa makes smoke at one of the branch's two major grade crossings. DAVID D. DEYO

Before the scenic railroad could materialize, C. Brewer sold or leased most of its holdings in Puerto Rico. (In 1969 a tourist railroad was also proposed for southwest Puerto Rico.)

Steam appeared to be done on the island, and the few steam locomotives left appeared likely to be scrapped. Not No. 8 or a sister engine, No. 7, however. In 1967, for little more than her scrap value, the latter was sold for display at a housing-development office at Levittown Lakes in Cataño, across the bay from San Juan. No. 7 was taken there by truck from Central Santa Juana in the summer of 1967, and restoration was completed that fall. No. 8 went to someone whose plans were more ambitious.

Jorge J. Wirshing had long dreamed of buying No. 8. She was in good condition, and the price was right. Wirshing, a lean, blond man of German and Puerto Rican descent, was born in Puerto Rico thirty-three years ago and has spent much of his life on the island. He lived near Clewiston, Fla., while his father was administrator of a large farm there; later he studied at

the University of Miami and at Inter-American University in San Germán, P. R., receiving bachelor's and master's degrees in business management. Before starting the Ferrocarril Histórico he worked for Destilería Serralles, the makers of Don Q rum. Jorge Wirshing was taken with cane-field railroads at an early age. He spent part of his childhood on his grandparents' farm in Caguas, where he used to watch No. 8 and other engines laboring up the grade to Central Juncos. Later he would often hire someone to drive him to various *centrales* to see and ride locomotives. In 1957, at the age of eighteen, he became the owner of a rare Glover 2-6-2T from the southeast corner of the island, having saved from his allowance to buy the engine for its scrap value, \$581.25.

C. Brewer's last steam locomotive was his second acquisition. In September, 1968, under power of an ex-Central Santa Juana six-wheeled Whitcomb diesel, No. 8 was moved across the river bridge at Caguas to a stretch of track in a field opposite the mill, where she remained until her 1971 resurrection. The Glover, ex-Central Mercedita No. 4, also meter gauge, was stored there too.

Wirshing now had his locomotives, but no place to run them. First there was the matter of capital. It was several years before he could borrow enough to realize his dream of putting No. 8 back into service—this time in front of a passenger train rather than a string of cane cars. Wirshing spent quite a bit of time trying to convince the Administración de Fomento Económico, Puerto Rico's economic development agency, that his project could be both profitable and of historical value. He also sought permission from the Autoridad de Tierras—the government land authority, which now operates a string of sugar mills—to use the Luquillo-Fajardo section of the former Fajardo Development Company railroad running northwest from Central Fajardo. The high cane yield once tapped by this line was no longer accessible by

rail: floods had washed out three large bridges. At first the Autoridad reacted unfavorably. It pointed out that vandalism to its own trains had been high on this section, and that the problem would be worse for a passenger operation. In 1970, however, it was agreed that Wirshing could operate his Ferrocarril Histórico on the Paraiso branch, which extends southwest from Central Fajardo. His own resources were supplemented by a Fomento loan.

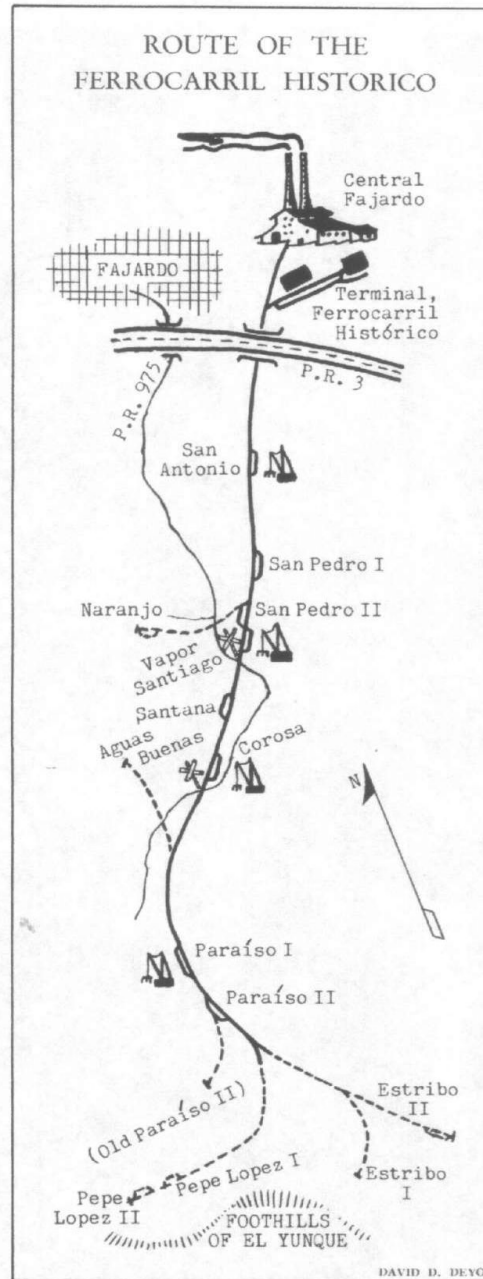
After an overhaul, No. 8 was moved to Fajardo by truck, rolled off onto rails, and shifted to her new home by one of Central Fajardo's large—for Puerto Rico—50-ton Plymouth diesel-electrics, No. E442. The Autoridad de Tierras approved construction of a spur at Fajardo for the Ferrocarril Histórico's terminal. The building of an engine shed and water and fuel tanks

A rare freight move for Luisa came when, on one trip, the passing track was found to be blocked by cane cars. DAVID D. DEYO



was begun early in 1971. April saw a start on the station building, which would house an office, ticket window, washrooms, souvenir shop, and a cafeteria where visitors could partake of local cuisine and drink tamarindo or ajonjolí. No. 8 made trial runs in midsummer under the supervision of her chief mechanic, Don Domingo Cruz, whose years of experience with No. 8 and other steamers at Central Juncos made him a likely man for the job. On September 4, 1971, using five converted Gregg cane cars, the Ferrocarril Histórico began running the first scheduled passenger trains in Puerto Rico since the American Railroad gave them up in the early 1950's.

The building of the Paraíso branch, which follows the Río Fajardo toward the Sierra de Luquillo, a principal mountain range, was approved by the Executive Council of Puerto Rico in 1905. It was completed in 1917, and included the most difficult stretches on the entire Fajardo Development Company railroad. There are steep grades, a series of *mediacortés* or half cuts above the river, two large bridges and several smaller ones, and one long deep cut. The line is laid with 60-pound rail. Fajardo Development's parent, Fajardo Sugar Company, used to be a major sugar producer, but in the 1950's, in keeping with a trend that was becoming apparent throughout the island, several spurs and loading cranes along the Paraíso branch were abandoned because of decreasing cane yields. In 1958 Fajardo Sugar and Eastern Sugar Associates merged as Fajardo Eastern Sugar Associates, and in 1961 FESA sold out to C. Brewer de Puerto Rico (now C. Brewer Caribe, Inc.). C. Brewer abandoned two more spurs on the branch before selling or leasing most of its holdings in Puerto Rico to the Autoridad de Tierras in 1967 because of continued declines in production. There has been talk of abandoning use of the Paraíso branch altogether, which could mean that the Ferrocarril Histórico would have to take over the line or move elsewhere; a new location is, in fact, under government study. Because of the flood damage of several years ago, the main line from Fajardo to Carolina (once part of eastern Puerto Rico's principal rail route, an interline service between San Juan and Humacao) was recently abandoned. Central Juncos has reduced its trackage by almost 25 percent, and other cane railroads have been discontinued, most recently the meter-gauge line at Central Eureka in Hormigueros, near the west coast. Central Eureka's only locomotive, a four-wheel 20-ton Davenport diesel, has been sold to Safari Park, which operates a zoo and amusements at Vega Alta, west of San Juan. Track is being laid around the park's perimeter





Above: The train digs into the line's worst grade, and flagman pours sand on the rail as owner Jorge Wirshing observes. Facing page: The descent from the hills. Left: Conductor Greg Montañez checks out a gift from Puerto Rico Telephone Company, former American Railroad velocipede. DAVID D. DEYO

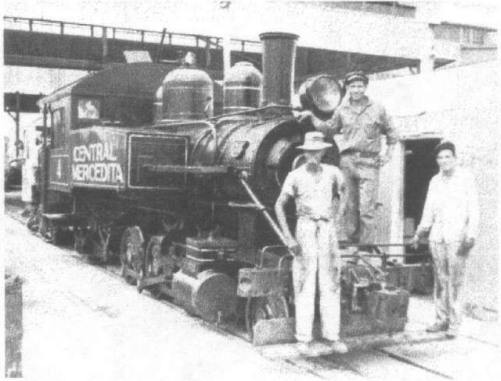
for a train ride.

From January to June the Paraíso branch is in use six days a week for the cane harvest, and the Ferrocarril Histórico operates Sunday only. The rest of the year it operates on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and certain holidays. A maximum of 180 tickets are sold for each trip, and since the line opened sellouts have been the rule except for the first trip of the day, at 10 a.m., which often carries only about a hundred passengers. The adult fare is \$1.75; the ride takes about an hour. Groups with advance reservations, at reduced fares, usually predominate on morning trains.

No. 8 begins each trip from Fajardo to the plantation village of Colonia Paraíso running in reverse, as she did for so many years in the Juncos valley. The first ten minutes of the journey, along fairly





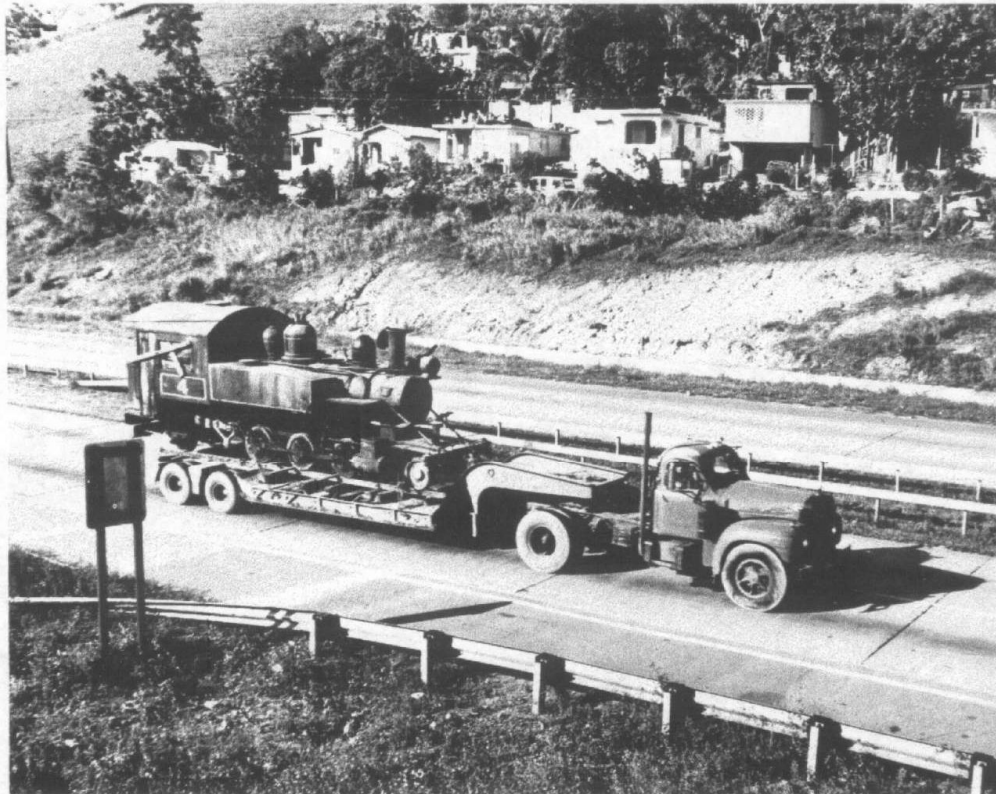


Central Mercedita four-wheel Plymouth moves rare Glover No. 4 to scale to determine sale weight in 1957. JORGE J. WIRSHING



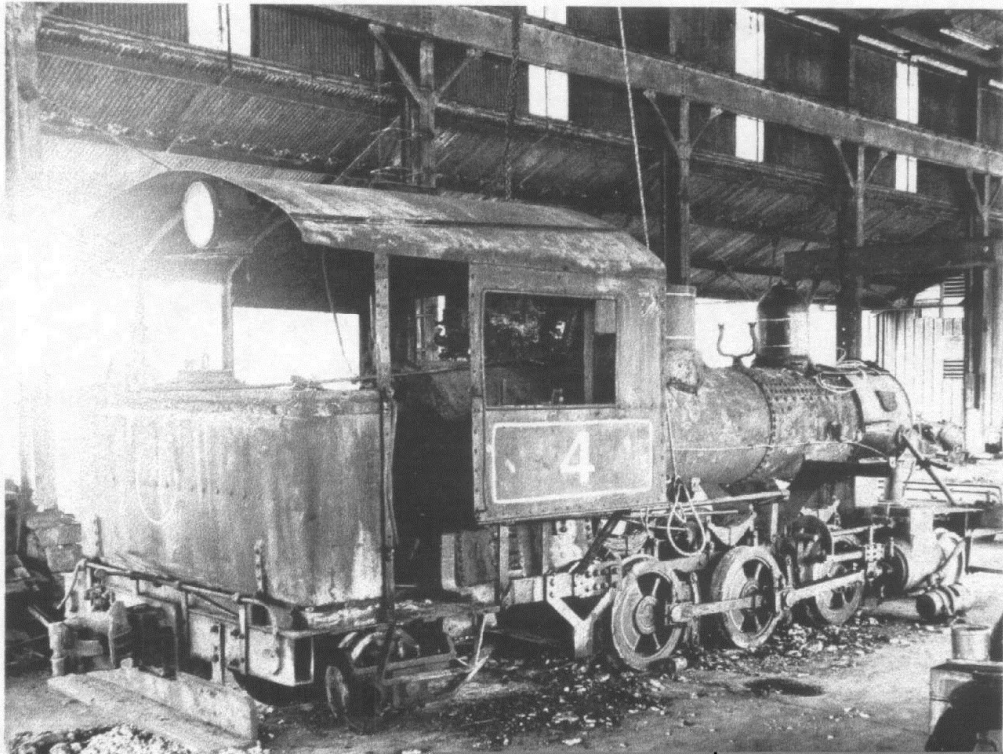
Close to fifteen years later, construction machines and a truck yank No. 4 from storage at Caguas. DAVID D. DEYO

Below: The Glover en route to Central Juncos, February 2, 1972. Facing page: Stripped in Juncos' tractor shop. DAVID D. DEYO



straight and level track, reveal nearly every phase of the cultivation of sugar cane. There are fields of newly planted cane, fields in the first year of growth, fields whose white tassel-like flowers indicate cane ready for harvest. The train passes loading cranes and sidings. Then it crosses the Fajardo-Paráiso road and begins climbing a 1-percent grade through a cut between cane fields. Next, large clusters of bamboo crisscross above the track. Then, whistle blowing, exhaust resounding with a new vigor, No. 8 enters a narrow passage between forests of bamboo. The train crosses a wooden trestle over a small stream, while frightened cattle run up the stream bed, and passes through a forest of large trees whose roots upheave the track here and there. The engineer brings No. 8 to a crawl, the fireman begins preparations for the 3.5-percent grade ahead, and the flagman runs ahead to flag a second crossing as the engine renews her pace with a cloud of smoke, several blasts of the whistle, and an

audible determination to make the hill. Yards beyond the crossing she rounds two extremely sharp curves—which suggest why all locomotives in Puerto Rico with six or more drivers had blind tires—and begins the hardest part of her trip. Along this stretch the track is on a narrow ledge 50 to 70 feet above the Río Fajardo. Slipping frequently, the engine begins laboring her hardest as the flagman scrambles to a sand drum atop the tender, fills several large cans, and spreads their contents over the rails while crouched on the tender's footboard. Halfway up the grade, clusters of banana and orange trees grow above the track. At the other hand the riverbed is strewn with large boulders, and the banks are lush with palms. Then the grade levels off, and then there is a shorter climb, and then No. 8 stops at the foot of El Yunque Mountain—a rain forest of fern trees, parrots, and cascades. Here the line used to divide, the two spurs each going on a little ways to the Estribo and Pepe Lopez loading tracks;



the Ferrocarril Histórico hopes to rehabilitate the spur to Pepe Lopez and build a picnic ground there. On the return trip, passengers review their favorite vistas, while the crew spend half the journey braking No. 8 on the grades.

Before summer's end the Ferrocarril Histórico expects to have a relief engine: No. 4. "Marietta," as she was called at Central Mercedita—Glovers were built in Marietta, Ga.—was trucked from Caguas to Central Juncos in February, and is being rebuilt in Juncos' tractor shop by the Ferrocarril Histórico's Domingo Cruz, an employee of the mill who has rebuilt most of its locomotives in years past and works on the 2-6-2T in his spare time. As far as is known, Puerto Rico's will be the only Glover running anywhere in the world.

Jorge Wirshing has managed to corral most of the steam locomotives left on the 100-by-35-mile island. Three Baldwin 2-8-0's from Central Aguirre's Ponce & Guayama Railroad—Nos. 7, 8, and 13—were donated to the Ferrocarril Histórico in 1971 and brought by truck from the south coast to be displayed at the station in Fajardo. Part of P&G No. 8's boiler has been cut away to show internal details. Wirshing owns three

other engines that are stored behind the mill at Fajardo: ex-Central Fajardo Alco 2-8-0 No. 9, ex-Central Juncos Porter 2-8-2 No. 9, and ex-Central Canovanas 30-inch-gauge Porter 0-6-0T No. 7—which he would like to rebuild for operation as a 2-6-0 with tender. Ultimately the Ferrocarril Histórico hopes to get the last three steamers from the now-closed Central El Ejemplo of A. Roig Sucesores, about 20 miles down the coast at Humacao: outside-frame Baldwin 2-8-0 No. 5, Baldwin 2-6-0 No. 7, and Alco 2-8-0 No. 11, a former American Railroad engine.

Photographs of the island's railroads are being accumulated for a display inside the station at Fajardo. It has been guessed that over 400 steam locomotives and more than 150 gas and diesel units once ran in Puerto Rico. There are now only about thirty-five diesels—and one active steamer, No. 8. Of the four major cane railroads remaining, two are expected to close in 1972. More and more, a ride on the Ferrocarril Histórico de Puerto Rico is a journey into the past.

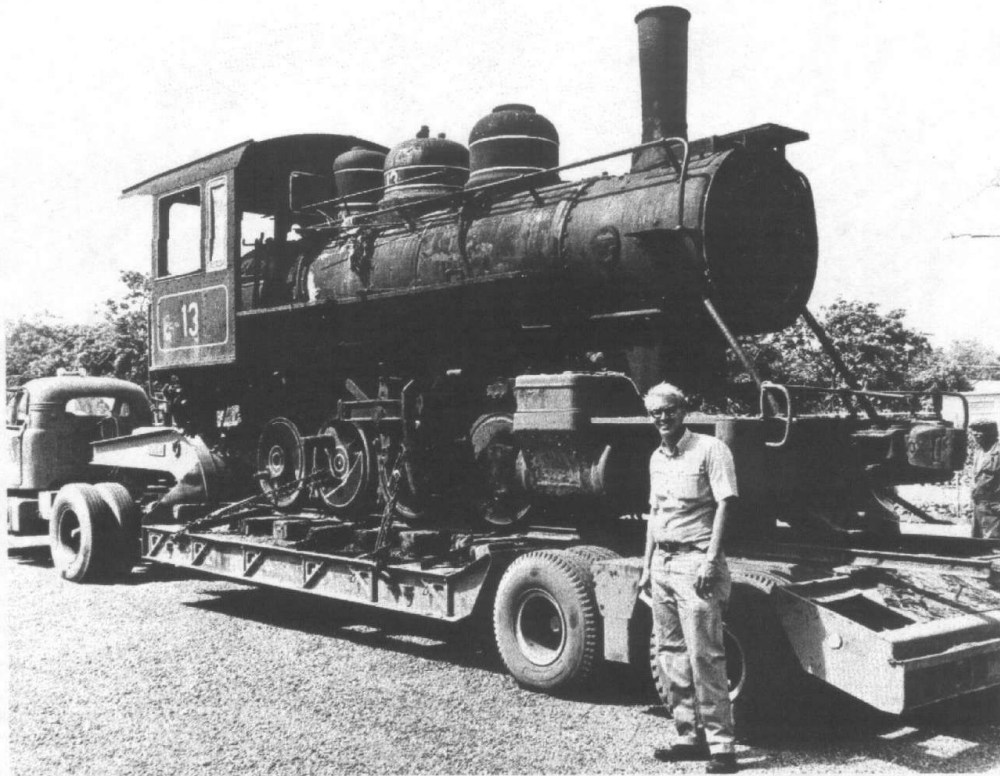
—DAVID D. DEYO

Mr. Deyo, a professional photographer who hails from Susquehanna County, Pennsylvania, met his wife during Navy service in Puerto Rico, and they now make their home there.

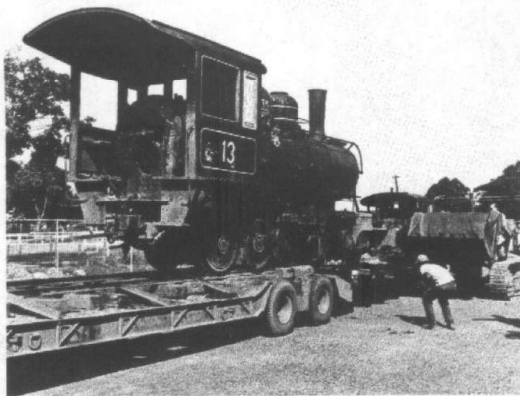
LOCOMOTIVES OF THE FERROCARRIL HISTORICO (METER GAUGE)

Number	Wheels	Builder and Date	C. N.	Number	Wheels	Builder and Date	C. N.
4	2-6-2T	Clover, 1925	121645	E451	0-6-0T	Porter, 11-1912	5221
<i>Ex-Central Mercedita 4. Reputedly built as 0-6-2T. Weight 27 tons, cylinders 12x16, drivers 30. Sold to J. Wirshing, 1957. Being rebuilt for service, 1972.</i>				<i>Ex-Melchior Armstrong & Dessau (agents), Central Canovanas 7, Fajardo Eastern Sugar Assocs. 7, C. Brewer de P. R. E451. Gauge 30 inches, cylinders 11x14. Last used 1965. Sold to J. Wirshing, 1970. Ferrocarril Histórico is considering rebuild for service as meter-gauge 2-6-0. Stored at Central Fajardo.</i>			
7	2-8-0	Baldwin, 12-1917	47234	E463	2-8-2	Porter, 8-1927	6601
<i>Ex-Ponce & Guayama R.R. 7. Drivers 36. New boiler BLW XO #1100, 1929. Last used 1964. Donated 1971 for display.</i>				<i>Ex-Central Pasto Viejo (30-inch gauge), Central Juncos 9, Eastern Sugar Assocs. 9, Fajardo Eastern Sugar Assocs. 9, C. Brewer de P. R. E463. Weight 45 tons, cylinders 16x18. Last used 1966. Donated 1971 for display. Stored at Central Fajardo.</i>			
8	2-8-0	Baldwin, 9-1927	60181	E465	2-8-0	Alco/Schenectady, 12-1935	68721
<i>Built as Central Pasto Viejo 8 (30-inch gauge); later Central Juncos 8, Eastern Sugar Assocs. 8, Fajardo Eastern Sugar Assocs. 8, C. Brewer de P. R. E462. Weight 36 tons, drivers 30. Converted to meter gauge, 1928. Sold to J. Wirshing, 1968. Placed in service 1971. Name, Luisa.</i>				<i>Ex-L. W. & P. Armstrong (agents), Fajardo Development Co. 9, Fajardo Sugar Assocs. 19, C. Brewer de P. R. E465. Weight 52 tons. Last used 1966. Donated 1971 for display. Stored at Central Fajardo.</i>			
8	2-8-0	Baldwin, 10-1920	53857				
<i>Ex-Ponce & Guayama R.R. 8. Drivers 36. New boiler BLW XO #353, 1932. Last used 1964. Donated 1971 for display.</i>							
13	2-8-0	Baldwin, 1-1924	57599				
<i>Ex-Central Los Canos I Bayaney, Ponce & Guayama R.R. 13. Weight 34 tons, drivers 34. New tender BLW XO #16083, 1-1926. Last used 1964. Donated 1971 for display.</i>							

—DATA BY DAVID D. DEYO, HAROLD L. GOLDSMITH, ALTON B. LANIER, JORGE J. WIRSHING, AND WILLIAM S. YOUNG



Above: The Ferrocarril Histórico's Jorge Wirshing with Ponce & Guayama 2-8-0 No. 13, just arrived at Fajardo. When unloaded (below), luckless 13, ignoring stop signals, continued past end of track and onto the gravel of parking lot. DAVID D. DEYO





"The engine lost its footing when it left San Juan," translate the opening words of a popular song from the days of steam railroading in Puerto Rico. "Les encantará!" ("She's enchanting!") exclaims a present-day newspaper of the Ferrocarril Histórico's No. 8, Luisa. DAVID D. DEYO