Newsletter
August 2019

DRISA in short

DRISA plans to present, on the internet, a searchable catalogue of the Transnet Image collection, with a thumbnail of each image, freely accessible to railway and history researchers all over the world.

DRISA provides raw thumbnails with brief descriptions. Images are not cropped or enhanced, with no attempt to remove duplicates. Should images be required for illustration or publication, the high-resolution versions are available from the Transnet Heritage Library (THL). Users can digitally restore and enhance the images to suit their own purposes.

New collections of the SAR&H magazine on the internet

This newsletter announces the publication of two more collections of the SAR&H Magazine a few weeks ago. There are now eight collections accessible on the internet, from the first SA railway magazines up to December 1940:

- NGR Magazine 1905 to 1907 (18 issues)
- SAR Magazine 1906 to 1910 (52 issues, published jointly by the NGR and CGR)
- SAR/SAR&H Magazine 1911 to 1915 (60 Issues, name change from January 1914)
- SAR&H Magazine 1916 to 1920 (60 issues)
- SAR&H Magazine 1921 to 1925 (60 issues)
- SAR&H Magazine 1926 to 1930 (60 issues)
- SAR&H Magazine 1931 to 1935 (60 issues)
- SAR&H Magazine 1936 to 1940 (60 issues)

Up to December 1940, there were 430 issues with 54 521 pages. All the issues up to this point had two parts. There was a commercial part numbered with latin numerals exclusively devoted to advertisements at first, but after 1912 also including the "Staff Changes" section. From January 1930, the latter part of the "System News" section also started spilling over from the regular section with arabic numbering to the latin section. From the start, the "latin pages" were not scanned. These pages repeated themselves over many consecutive issues, but most importantly, they were not

readily available. The bound copies were stripped of the latin pages before binding; loose issues of the magazine are hard to get by. It is a pity for genealogists that DRISA therefore does not cover "Staff Changes" after 1912. The "System News" section, however, was considered too valuable to skip over and from January 1930 DRISA started to add all the latin pages up to the end of "System News". DRISA users will therefore find both arabic and latin (prefixed with "L") numerals from 1930 onwards.

The SEARCH facility for the SAR&H magazine

The previous newsletter announced this newly added facility, which has now been further improved and expanded. Users of the DRISA website would have noticed that the individual articles and images had been indexed in the sidebar up to December 1926 to assist users in finding material of interest. These issues were published before the SEARCH facility was available. The practice of presenting the indexes published by the magazine itself every year as the 13th "month" of every year, continues.

The SEARCH facility is a presents a powerful and efficient way of finding material of interest. Users should find it easy and fast to use. For more focused searching, the narrower limits can be set as shown in the following examples, copied from the previous newsletter:

Users can narrow their searches by compounding the query with the logical AND / OR operators:

stockton AND tunnel	*(28 results)*
port AND elizabeth	*(5399 results)*
royal AND train AND (1910 OR 1925)	*(78 results)*

A further method is to constrain the date range using the "start_date:" tag, like:

port AND elizabeth AND start_date:<1910	*(121 results)*
port AND elizabeth AND start_date:>1925	*(3826 results)*
port AND elizabeth AND start_date:(>1914 AND <1919)	*(423 results)*

The SEARCH facility is now more efficient than the first version. The OCR (optical character recognition) step was rerun on all the scanned pages, using the versions that were scanned at 4000 pixels per page width, rather than the 1400 pixel-wide versions presented on the DRISA web page. This step improved the computer legibility of the text by about 25% - in other words, 25% more successful results per search.

The older issues, up to about 1925, were printed on paper of low quality and printing technology was primitive. This makes it harder to extract computer-legible text. After 1925, both the paper and the printing technology improved and from about 1930 the computer legibility is probably higher than 90%.

Contact details

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