

War and the Post-War Era

James J. Hill died in 1916, and his place on the Burlington directorate was filled by the Empire Builder's understudy—Ralph Budd. This Iowa-born railroader later carried out many of Hill's policies, and he in due time would head the "Q." In the meantime, war clouds were on the horizon. Then, on that fateful Good Friday, April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on the Central Powers. Just before the end of the year the Nation took over the railroads.

In the shake-up during Federal control Hale Holden was called upon to be a regional director. Thereupon Charles E. Perkins, Jr., became president of the corporation for the duration. Son of the former president, 37-year-old Perkins was born in Burlington. Educated at Harvard, he had been a director of the "Q" since 1914 and was familiar with its policies.

Fortunately, during 1917, the West Burlington locomotive repair and machine shops were rebuilt. Completed in 1883, these facilities had become inadequate to meet the demands of the larger engines rapidly coming into use. After modernization, however, they were able to cope with newer motive power, already hard-pressed to expedite

the greatly expanding war-time railroad traffic.

With the Armistice signed on November 11, 1918, and the subsequent return of the railroads to their owners, Holden resumed his role as chief executive of the Burlington. During this time the old Adams Express was replaced by the American Railway Express Company.

The post-war years again brought up the plan envisioned by Hill to consolidate the Burlington, Great Northern, and Northern Pacific into one unified, compact system. This giant corporation would be called the Great Northern Pacific. Hearings were held over the years. Finally, early in 1930, the ICC gave its official approval for the two Northerns to merge. But in doing so the Commission specified that the Burlington be divorced from control by the Northerns. It meant, in effect, the cornerstone of the new "house" would be left out. Management felt that such a plan without the strategic Burlington would not be desirable, and the matter was reluctantly dropped.

For the most part traffic held up fairly well during the post-bellum decade except for passengers. Better highways, more automobiles, and the rise of the motor bus took their toll, especially of short-haul riders. To combat this declining patronage and still provide passenger service, the Burlington made widespread use of rail motor cars. At first they were of mechanical transmission, but with the perfection of gasoline-electric

propulsion the latter soon predominated. In 1928, for example, the road acquired 31 "gas-electrics," principally for branch-line use, in a valiant effort to reduce expenses. With the traditional steam power a minimum of five men was required; whereas the "doodlebugs," as the motor units were dubbed, needed only a three-man crew.

On the twenty branch lines in Iowa, some of which spilled over into Missouri, ten made use of the motor units by 1929. Usually supplanting steam passenger trains, they in some instances merely supplemented the steamers. Occasionally mixed trains and even "freights" provided an additional service of sorts.

On the Shenandoah branch a motor unit traversed the 244-mile run in slightly under 10 hours, making 37 stops en route. The little train, which left Keokuk and thence dipped down to Alexandria, Missouri, went west by northwest through Missouri and Iowa to its Shenandoah destination. It made a 20-minute lunch stop at Sedan. Its counterpart, leaving Shenandoah on the eastward run, took a little longer, due in part to a half-hour meal stop at Clarinda.

A few lightly-traveled branches, such as between Keokuk and Mt. Pleasant, the two stub lines out of Hastings, and the 19-mile Red Oak-Griswold feeder, had, by this time, degenerated to mixed train service only.

The year 1929, better remembered for the stock-

market crash, saw a new man at the helm. Hale Holden had left the road, in the traditional Burlington manner, to become chairman of the executive committee of the Southern Pacific. His place was filled by Frederick E. Williamson, formerly vice president, who came to the "Q" from a similar position on the Northern Pacific.

After the Wall Street debacle traffic began to decline and a sharp falling off continued for the duration of the depression. That tragic year, too, marked a relatively high point in passenger miles although not in riders. It forms a suitable benchmark from which to take a look at the over-all picture of Burlington passenger service.

The road's "candy" train was its *Overland Express* with through sleepers from Chicago to San Francisco (Oakland), via Omaha, Denver, and Salt Lake City. Also between its headlight and markers were an observation-lounge, a diner, plus a full assortment of chair cars and coaches. It operated over the Rio Grande west of Denver and the Western Pacific beyond Salt Lake City. This was in the days before the Rio Grande went "through the Rockies, not around them" with its Dotsero cut-off. As a result, the *Overland* had to detour south from Denver to Pueblo, before heading west. Scenic-wise the ride was "tops," but in elapsed time it could not compete with the much shorter Union Pacific-Southern Pacific route.

On the Burlington one left Chicago at 11:30

p.m.; and, what with an hour layover in Denver plus a nearly two-hour rendezvous in Salt Lake City, the train pulled into the Oakland Mole at 4:20 p.m., four days later. Actually the scenic sojourn took three full days plus the better part of a fourth. Commercial travelers in particular would fortify themselves for the long jaunt. It was waggishly observed that when one found four drummers in the cars one usually found "a fifth."

In comparison with the *Overland's* figurative "dog trot" across Iowa, the schedules of the *Colorado Limited* and the *Chicago Nebraska Limited* were more of a sprint. The former train linked Chicago and Denver, and the latter, Chicago and Lincoln. Both trains, of course, went across Iowa from Burlington to Council Bluffs. They had the usual make-up of pullmans, diners, coaches, and chair cars, plus an observation-lounge unit, the latter being described as "a palatial rear car." The Nebraska train also trundled a Peoria-Lincoln sleeper, which it picked up from a connecting local at Galesburg.

The 1929 timecard shows only one through train using the Plattsmouth, Nebraska, bridge in crossing the Missouri River. This was No. 4, a plodding accommodation, leaving Omaha at 9:35 a.m. and stopping everywhere before pulling into the Windy City's Union Station at 10:55 a.m. the next day. In crossing Iowa it made exactly 49 stops, only a few of which were on flag! Leaving

the state, it gained more stature with a Chicago sleeper picked up in Burlington. The sleeper had come up on a connecting train from Keokuk.

The Burlington, in addition, had fairly good trains north and south through Iowa. Best of the lot was the *Twin City Limited* northbound and its southern counterpart, the *St. Louis Limited*. They shuttled between St. Louis and St. Paul-Minneapolis via Keokuk, Ft. Madison, and Burlington. North of Burlington was the responsibility of the Rock Island.

In the western part of the state there were more and better trains on the line running south from Council Bluffs to St. Joseph. Over this route came sections of the *Overland Express* and the *Colorado Limited* from St. Louis with cars designed for sleeping, eating, lounging, and just "sitting up."

To make the record complete, the "Q" had shuttle service from Dubuque to East Dubuque, Illinois, connecting with all Chicago-Twin City Limiteds. On the western border the Burlington came in from Nebraska to Sioux City over track-age rights on the North Western.

The depression was in full swing when Frederick Williamson resigned at the end of 1931 to head the New York Central, where his railroad career had started. Thereupon Ralph Budd was given a dual title: director *and president*.

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