

## The Greater Burlington

The mid-1960's and thereafter was one of change in top management and in traffic characteristics. Louis W. Menk succeeded Murphy to the presidency in October 1965. Menk, who had headed the St. Louis-San Francisco, remained with the Burlington for only one year when he left to become chief executive of the Northern Pacific. The Burlington's top post then went to William J. Quinn, formerly Milwaukee Road president.

It was evident that the Burlington, along with most of the other railroads in the United States, found passenger trains becoming increasingly unprofitable. What precipitated a crisis, however, was the Postal Department's policy of shifting mail from train to truck and plane. Heretofore many passenger trains just about paid their out-of-pocket costs, thanks to income from carrying first class mail. The annual report for 1967, for example, laments that in dropping 22 Railway Post Office cars the Burlington suffered a revenue loss of \$900,000. The grim fact is that unless it is subsidized, passenger service cannot meet its out-of-pocket costs, much less operate at a profit.

A casualty of the trend from rail to airway and highway was withdrawal of the famed *Fast Mail*

in 1967. This 83-year-old train, renowned in story and song, was a Burlington institution.

One by one the road's proud streamliners operating through Iowa were discontinued, until only the *Denver Zephyr*, the *California Zephyr*, the *Ak-Sar-Ben Zephyr* and the *Nebraska Zephyr* remained. The "CZ," up for abandonment in 1968, was given a year's reprieve by the ICC, and its future is very much at stake. Similarly, the Burlington has petitioned the ICC for permission to end its *Nebraska Zephyr*.

From the days when the first trains steamed across Iowa on the old Burlington and Missouri River until the present, however, freight was and is the backbone of the railroad and its main source of income and reason for being. The future of the big Granger Road lies in carload tonnage by the trainload. Time freights now speed across the state on passenger-train carding. Specialized equipment, such as "piggybacks" hauling trailer trucks on "flats" and tri-level cars toting a dozen automobiles in one unit, bring new traffic formerly considered lost to the highway. Unit trains of one commodity, and use of "jumbo" freight cars reduce the unit cost and keep the railroad competitive with truck and barge competition.

Indeed, the road's main stem linking Burlington and Council Bluffs is admirably suited to heavy mass-movement of tonnage. Virtually double tracked with rail mostly in the 129 to 136 pound

(per yard) category, the line has few curves and limited grades. Moreover, the "high iron" is fully protected by either Centralized Traffic Control or automatic block signals.

In concluding the story of the modern Burlington, mention should be made of the proposed merger with the Great Northern, Northern Pacific and lease of the Spokane, Portland & Seattle. As we have seen, James J. Hill tried to bring the two Northerns into the fold with the Burlington. Again in the late 1920's another attempt was made to consolidate the roads. Finally, during the 1960's the matter was brought up with renewed vigor.

In 1967 the ICC lent its support to the long-sought merger only to have the Justice Department bring it before the Supreme Court, where it should be decided in 1969. In light of several major consolidations already consummated, some of which have similar characteristics to the "greater" Burlington, there is every indication the Northerns and "Q" will be in one family in 1970.

At first it was decided to call the new 25,000-mile railroad the Great Northern Pacific & Burlington. This cumbersome title was later given up in favor of the shorter Burlington Northern. But Iowans, and probably most of the Nation, will strive for further brevity. They will call it Burlington. Charles Perkins would have liked that, too.

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