

## Midcentury and After

Ralph Budd's successor was his associate, Harry C. Murphy. Murphy worked closely with Budd in Chicago from the time the latter first came with the Burlington. It made for continuity in management and, incidentally, brought together two men reared in small Iowa towns.

Born in Canton, Illinois, August 27, 1892, Murphy as a child moved with his family to Eldora. He spoke of his youth in that town with affection and found the people much to his liking. Not afraid of work, young Murphy had a variety of part-time jobs while in grade and secondary schools. He also gravitated to the depot, as did many boys, to watch the old Iowa Central trains steam by. Sometimes a friendly engineer would let him ride in the cab of a little American Standard locomotive. Later he worked for the Iowa Central as a laborer and station-helper in Eldora.

After graduating from high school, Murphy went to Iowa State College at Ames, where he took up civil and mechanical engineering. Finishing college, and still interested in railroading, he got a job as a clerk in the Burlington's Chicago accounting office. Later he switched to the engineering department as rod and instrument man.

During World War I Murphy served as a pilot in the Air Force. Upon his discharge from the Army in 1919, he returned to the Burlington as assistant engineer at Centralia, Illinois. The next few years found him at various points as division engineer, engineer of maintenance of way, assistant superintendent, and division superintendent. In 1933 he was promoted to executive assistant to the president. Six years later found him assistant vice president of operation and by 1945 he became operating vice president. With Budd's retirement in 1949, Murphy succeeded to the presidency.

As a line officer prior to becoming chief executive, Harry Murphy had assisted Budd in replacing conventional passenger trains with *Zephyrs*, in switching from steam to diesel motive power, and in extending centralized traffic control. Murphy's place, by the way, as operating vice president, was taken by Samuel L. Fee, who had started his Burlington career as a station helper in Knoxville, Iowa, where he was born.

In 1952 the Kansas City cut-off was completed, reducing the distance of the Chicago-"KC" line by 22 miles. This bit of "super railroad" meant completely rebuilding almost 30 miles of the Carrollton branch. In addition, it called for an entirely new 42-mile line to Missouri Jct., where trackage rights on the Wabash were held jointly to Birmingham, thence over the Burlington rails to Kansas City. Besides being much shorter than the

old line, it had far less curvature and only half the ruling grade of the former route. So rugged was the terrain that the track went through a mile-long cut 95 feet deep at one point.

Murphy, being very passenger-minded, chalked up another "first" for the Burlington when he put Slumber coaches on the new *Denver Zephyr* in 1956. These cars provided the coach rider with a small room by day and a roomette-type bed for the night, including a built-in toilet. Passengers paid only coach fare plus a nominal charge for the room. Four years later the road reported the highest passenger revenue since 1946.

Freight service perhaps showed even more improvement. In 1962, for example, the road inaugurated a meat train from Omaha to Chicago that took less than ten hours for the 488-mile run. This carding was comparable to the schedule of the *Nebraska Zephyr*. The train handled a complete line of specialized equipment including standard refrigerator cars, refrigerated trucks and containers on flat cars. Fresh meat from Omaha reached the East 12 to 24 hours earlier.

Murphy, while he was thoroughly committed to diesel power, had a nostalgic fondness for steam. In his wood-paneled office there was a color painting of a powerful Baldwin-built 2-10-4 type locomotive steaming through Thayer, Iowa, along with a signed photo of Ralph Budd and an oil painting of James J. Hill. Furthermore, he

endeared himself to railroad buffs by donating a majestic Hudson type engine (4-6-4) to the City of Burlington along with other cities.

The railroad has always favored its namesake community. When Burlington's depot burned in 1943 a modern fieldstone structure replaced it. The new station was dedicated by Governor Bourke B. Hickenlooper, Mayor Max A. Conrad, and Ralph Budd on March 28, 1944. During the ceremony a large panel on the west wall was featured honoring Charles E. Perkins.

It is significant that the busy West Burlington Shops still gives employment to many local people. Originally built on a 1,000 acre tract, the facility was opened in 1883. At its peak it employed about 1,600 men. The shops had facilities for building freight and passenger cars, along with locomotive repair. Some of the road's finest steam engines were also constructed at West Burlington.

The shops are now considerably smaller due to fewer men needed for diesel repair. While construction and repair of rolling stock, other than locomotive, is currently done elsewhere, West Burlington is the sole facility for heavy diesel repair with 500 employees on the payroll.

When Harry Murphy retired in 1965 after 51 years of railroading, West Burlington had seen its last steam locomotive. He, next to Budd, had done most to effect this transition.

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