

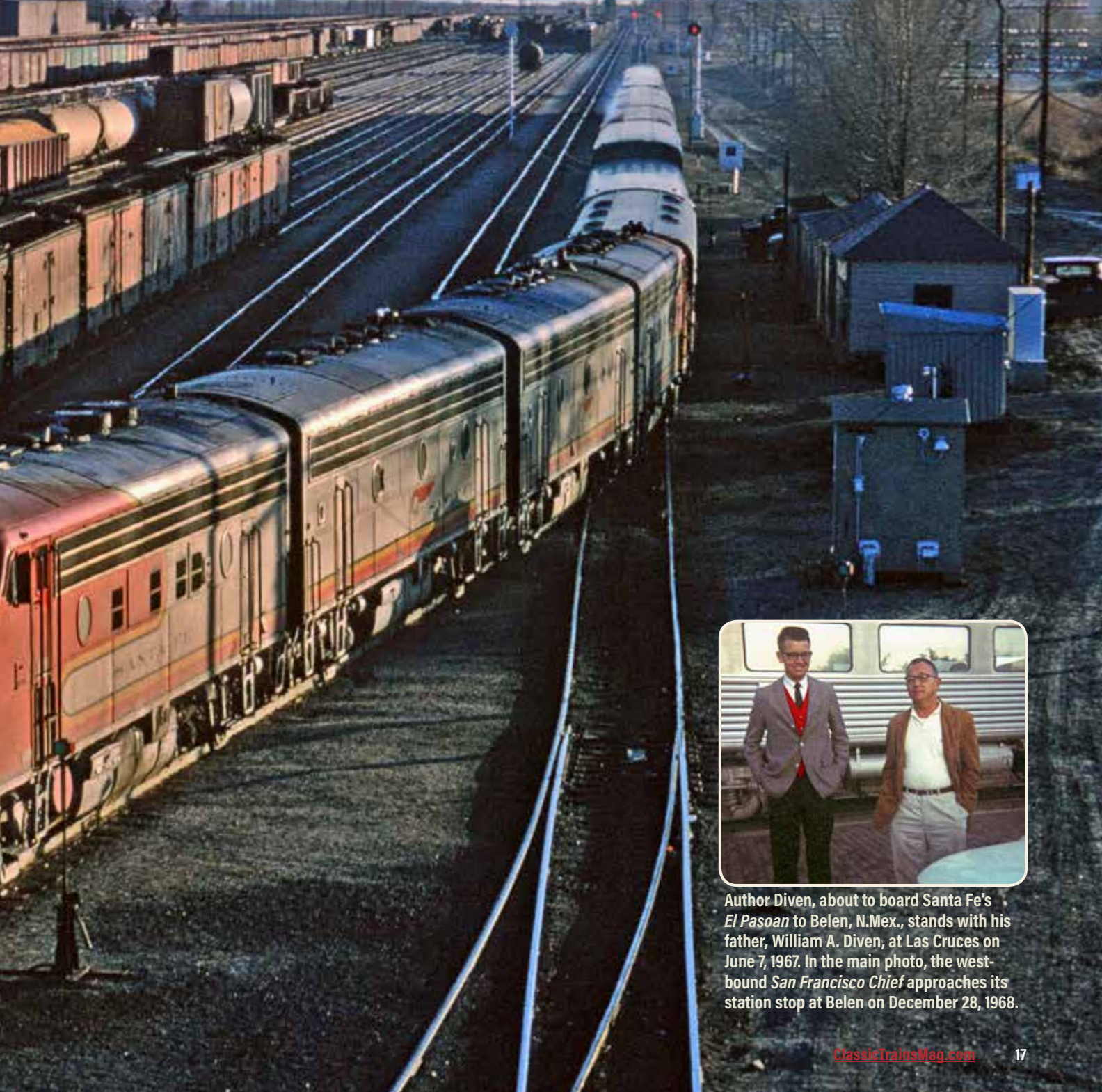
End of the



Summer trips from New Mexico to Illinois exposed a high-school boy to a world of Midwestern railroading and the final flowering of Santa Fe passenger service

trail

BY WILLIAM P. DIVEN
Photos by the author



Author Diven, about to board Santa Fe's *El Pasoan* to Belen, N.Mex., stands with his father, William A. Diven, at Las Cruces on June 7, 1967. In the main photo, the west-bound *San Francisco Chief* approaches its station stop at Belen on December 28, 1968.



Early light brightens the tail of the *El Pasoan* as it rides north onto a fill across the Rio Grande floodplain 15 miles beyond Las Cruces in April '66.

Idling in regal impatience, the *San Francisco Chief* stood poised for departure as a pair of humble Budd cars shuddered to a halt two tracks over to let loose a few connecting passengers. On this brilliant New Mexico day in June 1967, the streamliner from California arrived in Belen punctually at 10:05 a.m. with 25 minutes allowed to take on fuel, water, and a new crew while granting travelers a quick stretch. In the 22 hours since leaving the East Bay at Richmond, Calif., the newest of the Santa Fe Railway's long-haul trains skipped down the San Joaquin Valley, twisted over Tehachapi on Southern Pa-

cific trackage rights to Mojave, and joined the transcontinental main line at Barstow. From there this *Chief* galloped across Arizona and western New Mexico to Dalies and the Belen Cutoff.

Trailing the *San Francisco Chief* by 2½ hours, the combined *Super Chief-El Capitan* from Los Angeles clattered through Dalies, veering northeast to Albuquerque and the slow summits of Glorieta and Raton, yet winning the race to Kansas City Union Station by 25 minutes and Dearborn Station in Chicago by 30. Yes, the *El Capitan* crowded over extra-fare Hi-Level reserved seats while the *Super Chief* preened as The Train of the Stars on

which my father once sipped Scotch whisky with actor Victor Mature. The *San Francisco Chief*, though, topped the timetable as train Nos. 1 and 2.

The Budd Rail Diesel Cars delivering me from Las Cruces, N.Mex., to Belen that morning came from different stock, tramping the Rio Grande Valley and desert backcountry as trains 13 and 14, the *El Pasoan*, escaping their namesake city with the dawn to follow the Spanish cart road 253 miles to Albuquerque before scuttling back to Texas before midnight. Cars DC-191 and 192 displaced a conventional consist two years earlier, easily handling local business except when



Cab ride on No. 2, June 7, 1967: Alco PAs on No. 1 hold the main for a meet with 2 at Fort Sumner. Train 26 from Carlsbad — a PA, baggage car, and coach-obs — stands at Clovis as 2 rolls in. Engineer Paul Shur (left) and fireman B. E. Clenenger pose at Clovis after hosting Diven from Belen.

Christmas traffic and express brought back an E8M, baggage car, and two coaches. The inglorious history burdening the RDCs escaped notice when the Las Cruces newspaper announced the change with a handout photo of the coaches as built in 1952, glossing over the conversion of DC-192 to coach-baggage after the 1956 Redondo Junction rollover in Los Angeles that killed 30 passengers. Following low-key assignments in Kansas, the cars appeared on the “Horny Toad,” the southern New Mexico line nicknamed by early Santa Fe men for the spiky lizard common in the country.

The Santa Fe still hustled varnish with style, as did the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, whose *Zephyrs* and Hill Lines brethren graced the Chicago–Twin Cities route through Oregon, Ill., the hometown my family had left a few years earlier. Now the Santa Fe and Burlington were ferrying me to the Midwest for a summer job in the kitchen and dining hall at a YMCA camp outside Mukwonago, Wis., 100 miles from Oregon.

DRESSED FOR TRAVEL

Gentlemen did not yet travel in sweat pants, so the high-school junior boarding the *El Pasoan* in Las Cruces that morning dressed in slacks, blazer, vest, and tie and carried a briefcase holding among its contents the latest *TRAINS* magazine and a 1966 *Official Guide* liberated by the friend-of-the-family CB&Q agent in Ore-

gon. The RDCs bleated *adios*, ambled up the valley, and stole across hostile desert, rolling into Belen shortly after the *San Francisco Chief*. I handed No. 2’s conductor my ticket and two letters, one from the Santa Fe authorizing my presence in the cab of his train, the other from my parents absolving the railroad should it maim or kill me during the ride. One can only surmise what engineer Paul Shur and fireman B. E. Clenenger thought when a kid dressed for the spring dance climbed into their cab.

Extra fare to ride the locomotive amounted to 5-cent stamps for neatly typed letters mailed early in the year to railroad officials gleaned from the *Guide*. The cordial responses proved uniformly negative. CB&Q General Passenger Traffic Manager W. F. Burke suggested a forward seat in a Vista Dome as a substitute for the thrill of a cab ride, while his colleague Al M. Rung, director of public relations, regretted that only operating personnel were allowed in cabs. Santa Fe General Passenger Traffic Manager Ross E. Chappelle expressed regrets, while R. D. Shelton, operations vice president, said cab rides were allowed only in exceptional circumstances, “otherwise the situation could quickly get out of hand.” At least they responded, unlike the Chicago Cubs when I inquired about becoming a batboy.

The only glimmer of hope arrived from Santa Fe general offices in Amarillo, Texas, in the triple-qualified response of

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George T. Grader, special representative for public relations. “I would like to suggest there may be some possibility we may be able to honor your request,” he wrote. With another stamp I proposed a grand day from Kansas City to the bumping post at Dearborn Station. Instead Grader offered something within his purview: a 4-hour 35-minute sprint from Belen to Clovis over the Second and First districts of the New Mexico Division. The Belen trainmaster, he added, would assign a chaperone.

Notching out the throttle of F3 No. 24C, Shur diverged east off the Toad at El Paso Junction, crossing the Rio Grande for the ascent to Abo Canyon and the scrubby highlands beyond. The *San Francisco Chief*’s 20 cars trailed his five red-



Fairbanks-Morse H12-44TS 541, one of only three built, places the *Super Chief-El Capitan* consist at Chicago’s Dearborn Station on June 15, 1970.

The combined *Empire Builder*, *North Coast Limited*, and *Morning Zephyr* slows for its stop at Oregon, Ill., on June 7, 1968. The first dome car is one of the two prototypes the Q rebuilt from flat-roof coaches.



CB&Q agent Rupert L. "Roy" Sharick stands on the brick platform at Oregon on June 13, 1967. Camp cars, living quarters for a maintenance crews, are parked in the background.



The mixed from Oregon switches the Kable Bros. printing plant at Mt. Morris, Ill., in August 1966. Diven and his cousin were aboard NW2 9224 as paying passengers.



and-silver Warbonnet diesels: a Railway Post Office; three baggage, mail, and express cars; five regular chair cars; four Hi-Level chair cars and a Big Dome lounge; a standard-level diner; and five sleepers. Shur and Clenger shared orders and protocols with me, and the diesel maintainer, my designated handler whose name I didn't record, gave me a tour of the prime mover and steam generator before vanishing aft to wait for something to break or me to get into trouble.

I yelled an occasional question and shot pictures from the fireman's seat with my Kodak Instamatic and the parents' Polaroid, but mostly stood in awe. I'd ridden switch engines and fast trains before, but never flown in the nosecone of a rocket. We owned the single-track. Freight trains stepped aside, flashing by in a blur of blue-and-yellow GP30s, Alligators, and new SD45s tugging walls of dull-colored cargo.

At the Fort Sumner flag stop, four Alco PAs running late with No. 1 held the station track as we eased up the siding making the meet usually held 20 miles farther west. Shur rolled into Clovis on time at 2:50 p.m., starting the clock on 30 minutes for the crew change, servicing, switching out Dallas and Houston sleepers, and coupling office car 37 to the rear. After posing Shur and Clenger for a photo and thanking them again, I took a

slow stroll past division offices, officials' cars, and the daily *Cavern* up from Carlsbad — Alco PA 58, a baggage-express car, and chair-observation 3197, built in 1940 for the *El Capitan* — before boarding one of No. 2's chair cars. Still to come were a zebra-striped Baldwin VO1000 switching out the business car in Amarillo, a diner dinner, kaleidoscopic train-watching from Kansas City into Chicago, and the westward flight of the *Afternoon Zephyr* from Union Station 99 miles in two stops and 84 minutes to touchdown at Oregon. Yet 9 hours out of Las Cruces, the new conductor in Clovis closed the curtain of my high drama by checking the ticket of just another chair-car occupant. The Chicago Cubs may have crushed one childhood fantasy, but bless George Grader for making another dream come true.

GREAT TRAINS, TOUGH TIMES

In that summer of 1967, flashy trains bearing legendary names masked an industry in free-fall gutted by stifling regulation, lousy returns, deferred maintenance, subsidized competition, and internal sloth. Desert newspapers provided spotty coverage, so TRAINS delivered a monthly dose of business press, little of it good, with Editor David P. Morgan connecting dots into an unpleasant picture. Passenger service withered slowly, a *Tippecanoe* here, a *Laker* there, before plunging



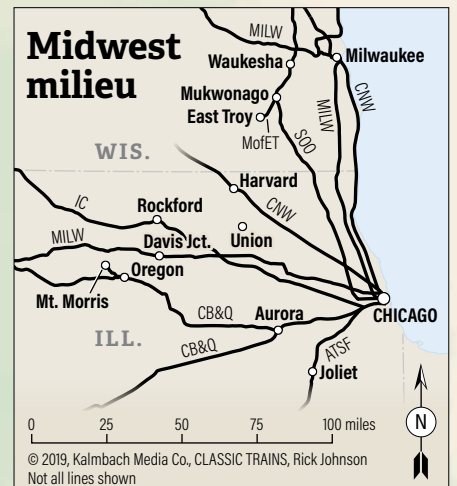
New and old GN liveries mingle in the *Empire Builder* east of the Oregon station in mid-1968. In Big Sky blue is diner *Lake Ellen Wilson*, while Great Dome *River View* wears Omaha orange.



CB&Q Mikado 4960 crosses the Rock River as it departs Oregon with an Illini Railroad Club excursion returning to Chicago. The June 26, 1966, trip handled local freight en route.



Burlington Northern's eastbound *Morning Zephyr* (combined with the *Empire Builder* and *North Coast Limited*) breezes into Oregon at 1:16 p.m. on June 15, 1970. Trackside, the bold older brother decides he's half a step too close to the rails, while a departing soldier strikes a jaunty pose.





Oregon agent Val Fischback holds up orders for an eastbound freight racing to stay ahead of the *Morning Zephyr* on June 15, 1970. Three months after the BN merger, the train is led by SD45s from NP, CB&Q (in a trial pre-merger livery), and GN. At right, Bob "Silver Skate" Meade, who has worked the Oregon switch job, waits for the *Zephyr* to deadhead home.

off a cliff when the Post Office Department abruptly ended most rail contracts in September. Twenty years after its heroic role in winning a world war, railroading's brave posture devolved into train-off petitions, abandonments, and a scramble to merge what might be saved. Companies battled the Interstate Commerce Commission, Supreme Court, Wall Street, unions, and each other, no holds barred. The iconic *20th Century Limited* didn't last the year; sponsor New York Central and arch rival Pennsylvania vanished two months later behind the mat-

ing-worms herald of Penn Central. The Hill Lines sought again to turn a 70-year courtship into proper matrimony, this time as the Great Northern Pacific & Burlington Lines. Labor grievances shut down the national system for two days a few weeks after I arrived at camp.

In the cocoon of the old hometown of 3,500 people, the only stoplight in the county cycled at the courthouse square, and 14 name trains called at the depot overseen by agent Rupert L. "Roy" Sharick, a Burlington man at Oregon since before my grandparents married in 1919. As the kid hanging out on the crew side of the depot, I'd become friends with Mr. Sharick, as I always called him, and we'd maintained a correspondence after our family moved to New Mexico. Engineer Henry "Hank" Fruit and conductor Jim Kereven, 50-year men themselves, and a series of brakemen managed the Oregon job switching coal and lumber yards, the Carnation milk plant, Quaker Oats equipment shop, the E. D. Etnyre & Co. tank-truck factory, and National Silica, formerly my granddad's and a partner's flint quarry 2 miles west of town.

Most days the Oregon job and its NW2 ran the Mt. Morris branch on 7 miles of ex-Chicago & Iowa track that had been stubbed at the Kable Bros. printing plant when the CB&Q pulled up the rest to the Illinois Central connection at Forreston in 1932. Kereven considered the waycar a nuisance, so the rare passenger on the mixed train usually paid 50 cents to ride



A rearward view from a dome on BN's *Afternoon Zephyr* shows Gulf, Mobile & Ohio E7s shoving the *Abraham Lincoln* toward Chicago Union Station before its afternoon departure for St. Louis on June 5, 1970. At right is the former PRR Polk Street Freight House and an ex-PRR SW1.



The joint Union Pacific-Milwaukee Road *City of Portland-City of Denver* brakes to its eastbound stop at Davis Junction, Ill., where MILW's western main line crossed CB&Q's branch to Rockford, on August 25, 1967. At Chicago, Diven transferred to a Santa Fe train out of Dearborn Station.

the cab and deck of the diesel or an empty boxcar with Kereven.

Beside its own *Morning* and *Afternoon Zephyrs* from Chicago and Minneapolis, the Burlington handled Great Northern's *Empire Builder* and Northern Pacific's *North Coast Limited*. Marketers holding sway on the GN dumped the road's Omaha orange and deep green passenger colors for Big Sky blue, and buffed Rocky the goat into a "more vigorous, dynamic critter," to quote a GN ad placed in *TRAINS*. Many supposed the expense and timing of the makeover foretold the post-merger colors of the GNP&BL. Oregon remained a flag stop for those West Coast trains, so the *Builder* and *North Coast* blazed through town restricted to 75 mph, occasionally barely stopping for passengers to or from Fargo, N.Dak., and beyond. In reality 14 names equaled 8 trains in June 1967. The *Builder* and *North Coast* were combined, as were the eastbound *Afternoon Zephyr* and GN's *Western Star*, while the nighttime hours mingled the *Western Star*, CB&Q's *Blackhawk*, and NP's *Mainstreeter* going west and the *Blackhawk* and *Mainstreeter* coming back.

My return trip to New Mexico in 1967 began not with a *Zephyr* but the joint Union Pacific-Milwaukee Road *City of Portland-City of Denver*. Cousin John provided the shuttle to the Milwaukee's crossing of the CB&Q Rockford branch at Davis Junction for the 80-mile trip to Chicago Union Station. Out of Dearborn



At Rockford, Ill., on Illinois Central's Iowa Division, an eastbound freight departing the yard behind two GP9s gets its orders from the agent at the passenger station on June 11, 1968.

on the *San Francisco Chief*, Santa Fe PAs led the way, pausing this time in Clovis to pick up the Dallas and Houston sleepers for the West Coast. It would be 20 years before I rode behind a PA again, and that would be out of Nogales in Mexico.

MAKING FRIENDS IN "MUK"

Heading to camp in 1966 aboard the *Super Chief-El Capitan*, I sat down for dinner on the 90-mph track east of Trinidad, Colo., and met Rev. Frederick and Bess

Ringe returning to Wisconsin and, to our mutual surprise, the tiny village of Mukwonago. The unheralded highway crossroads giving rural Phantom Lake YMCA Camp its mailing address claimed maybe 1,500 residents and a Unitarian church pastored by Ringe. On my days off from the camp, meals and Scrabble with the Ringes competed with cheeseburgers and chocolate malts at the Rexall soda fountain, neither of which kept me from the Soo Line station at the north end of town.



Crewmen of a morning C&NW commuter train operating in push mode confer at Harvard, Ill., before departing for Chicago on July 5, 1968.



On the same date, Illinois Railway Museum volunteers work on Chicago "L" car 1808 at Union, Ill., home to the museum since 1964.

Agent Doug Seibert held court for the Soo in 1966 and '67, frothing over the sorry state of society, politics, and rail-roading when he wasn't shuffling freight bills for feed and coal dealers and interchange with the electric Municipality of East Troy Railroad, an 8-mile loose wire from Milwaukee's interurban era. The last *Laker* blew through Mukwonago early in 1965, leaving Seibert only freight traffic to inspect as it rolled by, waiting for the creaky maroon wooden caboose or a new International white-and-red wide-cupola model to wave an all-clear to a crewman or, as I failed to notice until a family slide show, exchange one-finger salutes.

On days when I didn't paddle a camp canoe across Upper and Lower Phantom Lake to "Muk," as the camp staff called it, the 2-mile hike mostly followed the MofET tracks bought in 1939 by a town clinging to its rail connection as The Milwaukee Electric Railway & Light Co. withered away. Crewmen Tom Chart and John Frymark worked the Soo connection the day I was invited aboard the M-15, a 1920 box motor. Another day I rode the back of the camp's staked truck on a field trip to Madison, but escaped to the Milwaukee Road station, where the *Varsity* was positioned for its late-afternoon trip to Chicago. The YMCA in Waukesha managed the camp, giving me time on another day to wander that town while the camp director attended to business. That led to the Soo main and yard, where a switch crew hailed me aboard their Alco S2 for a few moves around the brick shops dating from Wisconsin Central days.

When steam was due for an appear-

ance in Milwaukee on June 30, 1967, the morning bus from Mukwonago reached the city 5 hours ahead of the special train carrying wagons from the Circus World Museum at Baraboo. Knowing the city only from railfan and modeler magazines, I first targeted Walther's Terminal Hobby Shop on Water Street to gawk at HO merchandise and express condolences on the passing of founder William K. Walther the previous month. My first try at riding a big-city bus ate time while accomplishing nothing, so I gave up on finding the TRAINS office on Seventh Street. Instead I walked to the new Milwaukee Road station, a modernistic box unloved by its many critics and home to MILW *Hiawathas* and Chicago & North Western 400s. An E7 led Milwaukee train 12 into the station for its 11:30 departure for Chicago, while a Fairbanks-Morse station switcher paddled around in the colors of western partner Union Pacific.

A dozen blocks east at the lakefront, only a tall ribbon of weeds defined the single track on the C&NW property recently scraped clean of coach yard and roundhouse, with only the classic towered station, whose few remaining trains had been moved to the MILW station a year earlier, awaiting demolition. Nervous North Western brass prudently ordered an F-M switcher into the jungle, where it confirmed the presence of track and promptly broke a rail. Trackworkers drilled and spliced the pieces and replaced a tie as other men whacked weeds and exhumed steel from a paved-over crossing.

The special arrived 90 minutes late, as Richard Jensen's Grand Trunk Western

5629, its tender labeled for sponsor Jos. Schlitz Brewing Co., whistled and clanged ahead of a rainbow consist of circus wagons on flats trailed by three heavyweight passenger cars in red, white, and blue. Alco bred the 4-6-2 to run, but my preference tilted to Burlington 4960, the dowdy 2-8-2 that handled the special in previous years. We'd last met two years earlier when it took over the mixed Eola-Oregon wayfreight handling pickups and setouts on a well-patronized fantrip. But new CB&Q President Lou Menk snuffed the steam program, dooming the road's monumental 4-8-4 5632 and sentencing 4960 to decades of wandering.

THE AIRLINES WIN

By the summer of 1968, railroad devotion had come to New Mexico. The Santa Fe discontinued the *El Paso* in

The mixed train's conductor considered the waycar a nuisance, so the rare passenger usually rode the cab of the diesel or an empty boxcar.



In Milwaukee, C&NW E8 5019B eases into the Milwaukee Road's three-year-old station with the *Bi-Level Peninsula 400* from Ishpeming, Mich., to Chicago on a rainy June 29, 1968.



About an hour later, MILW's Chicago-Minneapolis *Morning Hiawatha* takes on fuel and changes crews during its Milwaukee stop. FP7 100A and E9 34C sandwich an F7B.

April, so my cab-ride letter-writing campaign targeted officials on lines east of El Paso and north of New Orleans without success. Kansas City Southern Vice President and General Manager R. J. Blair said sorry but no dice, while Gulf, Mobile & Ohio Assistant Vice President-Public Relations B. M. Sheridan signed his regrets "Berney." However, Sheridan also sent consolation prizes: an annual report and Howard Fogg lithograph depicting Alco FAs and banana reefers departing the port at Mobile, Ala. So, for this summer American Airlines, a bus, and Cousin John delivered me to Oregon in time for dinner.

For the first time I packed a 35mm camera and a driver's license coupled to

temporary custody of a 1959 Mercury V-8 battlewagon, giving me freedom to roam. Rockford, Ill., revealed the Burlington's sedate yard, while next door an Illinois Central agent hooped up orders to a freight departing eastward behind two GP9s. Chill rain grayed Milwaukee on my return to the MILW station, where C&NW's Ishpeming, Mich.-Chicago *Bi-Level Peninsula 400* came and went, MILW's daily-except-Sunday train 27 arrived from Chicago, and the sun shone on cue for the circus train, hooked again to GTW 5629.

The Merc swilled transmission fluid, but still made Waukesha, where the Soo ran fast freight behind EMD GP30s on Alco trade-in trucks. Along with a camp



A Soo Line F unit still dressed in the road's classic maroon-and-gold scheme leads a westbound freight at the north edge of little Mukwonago, Wis., in July 1966.

friend, I ventured to his home in the northern woods at New London for Green Bay & Western switching with an Alco RS27-C424 duo. A swing into north-eastern Illinois started at Harvard, terminal for C&NW Northwest Line push-pull commuter service and the bi-level coaches shoved by F7 4070C toward Chicago, 63 miles away. At Union, a few Illinois Railway Museum volunteers labored among the July weeds on the fledgling stable of mostly electric rolling stock relocated to the country a few years earlier. The Burlington still enlivened Oregon, although the *Empire Builder* and *North Coast Limited* were now combined most days with the *Morning Zephyr* from the Twin Cities and the *Afternoon Zephyr* out of Chicago, and Kereven and Fruit's Mt. Morris turn had become freight-only. Traditions seemingly held firm, but in truth I witnessed a museum of railway collectibles decorating the landscape.

As college loomed, the next summer led to a job on a survey crew pounding stakes in the New Mexico desert for real money — \$3.20 an hour plus overtime. It would be June 1970 before the *El Capitan* and the *Afternoon Zephyr* delivered me to Oregon for a short visit, their sweet rides belying a world turned upside down. The Santa Fe, its postal income gone, applied to drop 33 of its 39 daily trains, and mostly succeeded. The CB&Q vanished in March, replaced by the amalgamated Hill Lines thankfully known simply as Burlington Northern. Agent Sharick had retired, conductor Kereven was dead, and engineer Fruit, after taking his fill of two

officials nitpicking his switching moves, told them to get off. When they didn't, he did, leaving them and his motor idling in the Oregon yard. Even the vast concourse of Chicago Union Station fell to air-rights development, wedging passengers into a basement dungeon.

When the *Super-El Cap* departed Dearborn for Albuquerque, three EMD FP45s bought with freight capabilities in mind led the way, maintaining a stoic Warbonnet face past a battered trade-in line of Warbonnet F units outside EMD's La Grange plant. Railpax, looming not quite a year in the future, by which time it was rebranded as Amtrak, ended passenger trains to Oregon as well as the *San Francisco Chief*, 17 years after its silvery sleekness first glided through New Mexico.

SURVIVORS SOLIDER ON

Not everything went to wreck and ruin, of course. The Pacific Railroad Society is restoring the surviving *El Paso* Budd car, DC-191, and the *Empire Builder* still connects Chicago and Seattle, albeit through Milwaukee and not Oregon, where dedicated volunteers and the town government have saved and restored the 1914 depot. Even the wispy electric line from East Troy to Mukwonago remains under juice, connecting with Soo successor Canadian National but hauling only tourists and dinner patrons. Both its M-15 and a maintenance motor are preserved at the now-expansive Illinois Railway Museum, whose rolling-stock collection has grown tenfold since 1968 [page 88].

While CB&Q 5632 and GTW 5629 infamously went for scrap, the Q's 4960 steams onward at the Grand Canyon Railway where a slick restoration extended its life while erasing its Burlington roots. Even four Santa Fe PAs remain, two still in Mexico, one in Portland, Ore. (in Nickel Plate colors), and one being restored to Warbonnet glory at the Museum of the American Railroad in Frisco, Texas, which is also home to Santa Fe obs car 3197. Passenger trains even call at Belen again, although extending state-sponsored Rail Runner Express commuter trains to points down the Horny Toad is only hope and chatter. And the Howard Fogg print mailed by Berney Sheridan hangs in my office as a reminder of how a few stamps can bring priceless adventure. 📄

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An eastbound Soo local led by GP9 2401 stops at the Mukwonago station before switching town industry and the Municipality of East Troy Railroad interchange a mile ahead on June 18, 1968.



Before being invited aboard to ride a few switching moves, Diven photographed Soo Line Alco S2 2107 pulling into the Main Street yard at Waukesha, Wis., on August 10, 1967.



MofET's ex-Milwaukee Electric motor M-15 rests in East Troy, Wis., on June 18, 1968. At left is the ex-interurban line's power substation, now the depot for East Troy Electric Railroad trains.