

# WESTERN RAILROADER FOR THE HISTORIAN

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## RECOLLECTIONS AT LAKESIDE

*The following is a letter written by Fred H. Crawford, dated March 8, 1957 and addressed to the Station Agent, Lakeside, Utah. It went into Southern Pacific archives and was given to Chapter Board Member Lynn D. Farrar, retired Southern Pacific Transportation Valuation Engineer, by Mr. Alan D. DeMoss, retired SPT Executive Officer. He offered the letter to Lynn some years ago in connection with a report Lynn was preparing on "The Southern Pacific and the Great Salt Lake," an official report with a talk / slide presentation. The Chapter later published Lynn's report with photos (see Western Railroader: For The Historian, Fall 1990).*

*This "living history" gives a very interesting insight as to what a dispatcher's life was like during the construction of the Great Salt Lake trestle and fill work that was started in August, 1902 and opened for operation in March, 1904. The entire letter is presented here:*

"I have before me four pages of the January issue of *Popular Science Magazine*, showing the operation of transporting crushed rock from the mountainside to a wharf in the lake via a conveyer belt system.<sup>1</sup>

I understand the theory of the operation and am really amazed at the wonderful strides what have been made in the last fifty years with relation to handling material. What I'm particularly interested in is where is the rock being quarried and if it is not asking too much from an entire stranger,<sup>2</sup> I should like to know the approximate location.

I was one of the train dispatchers at Lakeside from January 22, 1904 until the completion of the construction work, when it was turned over to the operating department in January 1905<sup>3</sup> and remained on the job as a stand-by dispatcher for the operating department until February 15, 1905 to take over in case of emergency, such as a "sink" or a bad wind storm. Occasionally the lake became so rough the heavy waves would knock down the telegraph poles during a gale and of course that would cripple communication from the Ogden Dispatchers' Office that had taken over from the Construction Dispatchers' Offices at Promontory Point and Lakeside. Up until this time Promontory Point had handled the line from Midlake to Ogden and Lakeside from Midlake to Lucin.

A book could be written about the construction of the Lucin cutoff, but it isn't my intention to burden you with a lot of the happenings so long ago, however if you will permit me, I should like to relate a few of them. You will probably find some of them amusing and others pathetic and still others extraordinary.

I had been working a trick in Livingston, Montana for some time when the force was cut right in the middle, which left me an extra man and those days, even though we worked every day of the year, the salary was so small, very seldom did anyone take a day or two off. There was no place to go or nothing exciting to do, so the dispatchers just worked and me being a young sprout, just married, was looking for a steady job and through a friend landed a job at Lakeside. I didn't know a single thing about Lakeside, in fact I couldn't find it on the map, but away we went with all our belongings in a couple of suit cases. We arrived at Ogden and found out where we were to go. We took a swing train out to Camp 10 about two or three miles out into the lake and on account of the line not being connected up beyond there, we had to take a tug, the name was the *Tiddley-Addley*—a small boat, the only one that was considered adequate to make the trip this particular day. The wind was blowing a gale and the waves were eight or ten feet high. I don't mind saying, I was plenty scared but I didn't dare admit it, because my wife was so frightened that she declared she wouldn't get on that boat under any circumstance. They were working short one man at Lakeside and I felt like I really had to make the effort to get there and when the time came for leaving, my wife crawled under the bed in the dockman's office and I had to drag her out by the heels and grab her around the waist and carry her onto the tug. The platform was just even with the top of the cabin from time to time when the waves receded and I waited my chance to hop on the right time and when I stepped over on to the cabin, I grabbed hold of the top of the exhaust stack, never realizing that it would be red hot. Well the result was, that I has a cooked left hand that gave a quite a bit of trouble for a long time. I can see that darn tug in my mind's eye everytime I think of the cut-off—it was bobbing around like a cork on a rough sea, but we finally made it to Camp 31, later called Rambo, where Superintendent Dan Ogden was waiting for me with engine 1732 to take to Lakeside. He had no idea I would show up with a wife and I don't

mind saying, he was not at all pleased. He grabbed my wife like she was a sack of wheat and tossed her up into the gang-way and we started in over the roughest piece of railway that you can imagine and it seemed like we were making fifty miles an hour, but suppose it was nearer fifteen or twenty, but we finally made it and then our troubles really began. I was about 8 or 9 p.m. dark and colder than Montana had seemed to us and no place to stay. There were bunk houses for men, certainly no place for an eighteen year old girl and they insisted on me going right to work, really before I knew what it was all about. There were several white families there then that were living in box cars and through the kindness of our friend Harvey Morley and his wife, they allowed my wife to sleep on two of their trunks, one higher than the other with a few old rugs, coats and such. I say sleep - she didn't sleep at all, because it was so very cold she darn near froze. I went to work on the third trick that night and tried my luck sleeping on the trunks during the day and it makes my back ache every time I think about the two weeks we put up with this sort of thing. We had our meals at the Officers Boarding House, which was not bad at all and finally got a car. It was an old Central Pacific Fruit Express car No. 28185 and full of bed bugs and after borrowing and building a few pieces of furniture along with the donation of a little oil cook-stove from the Commissary, we set up house-keeping and from then on we got along very well—in fact we enjoyed it. I think this is enough about our escapades and I'll give you a little history about the construction of one of the biggest railroad jobs up to 1905.

After the fill was completed out to Camp 10, which was in fairly shallow water, the pile-driving for the trestle began. First with about 40- to 50-foot piling to reach solid bottom, but as they continued West to slope gradually increased until they were using 125-foot spliced piling to reach solid bottom, so there is where the fill had to be started<sup>4</sup>. I

remember very well seeing some of the last piling driven. A 1600-pound hammer was used and one tap of the hammer would drive a pile down, anywhere from 4 to 8 feet at a clip and many times it was necessary to hook a chain around a pile and drag it up to level. On several occasions the pile would go down so far that the hammer would slip out of the slides and snap the cable and go into the lake and if I'm not mistaken they are still there, as I can't remember of ever having heard of one being retrieved.

I don't remember how many trains there were in operation out of Promontory Point, but at Lakeside we handled 27 gravel trains, 5 rock trains and two water trains until the line was connected up and after that we had a swing train that made a round trip Ogden daily to handle provisions and local service. The 27 gravel trains ran between Hogup pit and the dump, the rock trains between Lakeside and the dump and they worked 24 hours a day every day. The water trains ran between Lakeside and Montello. You see we had no fresh water on the West side and every drop had to be hauled 80 miles.

I presume you are pretty well up on what a train dispatcher has to contend with—I should have said what they used to have to contend with. Things are different now, but when I tell you we used to have to use three train sheets to handle the train movements for 24 hours, you will know we had no time to throw away and after the line was connected up and some of the through commercial trains were routed over the lake, our work was increased. However the commercial trains were interior to the work trains and were taken subject to delays and they usually had them. One East-bound fruit train with about 50 cars of oranges was moving by Rambo and the old fill began to sink and several cars of oranges went down with it until only about two or three feet of the top of the cars were above water. The engine and a few cars reached the trestle and continued on to Ogden. The rear end was

moved back to Lucin and taken over the old line, but it was over a week before the cars in the sink were fished out, but we all had plenty of oranges for a long time.

These sinks were treacherous - everything would look fine one minute and the next, down she would go. Fortunately there was only one spot on the West side where they occurred and that was just West of the trestle. Mr. March<sup>5</sup>, the Engineer in charge explained it to me quite clearly one evening while he was sort of visiting when I was working second trick. He also drew a diagram of this theory of the contour of the rock bottom and estimated that the valley would be about 1400 feet below the surface level. He had informed the Chief Engineer in San Francisco, also the consulting Engineer Mr. John D. Isaacs in Chicago and they both told him he was mistaken, but when the job was finished they had filled in just 1425 feet and that one single mile of fill cost 31 million dollars.<sup>6</sup>

There was another little incident at this particular sink that I might mention in passing and that was when U.P. engine 1610<sup>7</sup> was unloading and before Engineer Johnson and his fireman could get out of the cab, the engine was upside down in the lake and the boys got a fast unwanted bath. It took two derricks to get the 1610 back on the dump again, the regular railroad wrecking derrick and one on the old steam Promontory. I still have a picture of this operation among my souvenirs.

One day during the summer, think it was the 2804<sup>8</sup> moving 30 or 40 Roger ballast cars from Hogup to Pigeon Pit to be loaded with sand and had a meet with the water train 2006<sup>9</sup> West at Jackson. Both trains arrived about the same time, the 2804 had to take the siding and was a little slow heading in. The 2006 East had 20 cars of water out of Lucin and had picked up a car of black powder and 15 or 20 live outfit cars with about 200 men at Pigeon Pit for Lakeside. Naturally the powder should have been switched





A view of Midlake from a postcard of the period (*R&LHS collection.*)

to the rear end of the train, but sometimes people don't follow instructions and it was right behind the engine and the next car was the kitchen car. When the Engineer on the 2006 could see that the 2804 wasn't getting into the clear, he naturally applied the air, but not in time. Water is a difficult thing to stop quickly, it slushes back and forth and the 2006 being a light engine and the outfit cars not having air brakes, side swiped the 2804 and the jig was up. The collision in itself didn't amount to much, but was sufficient to upset a cook stove in the kitchen car and within a few minutes it ignited the powder and the explosion occurred that was heard at Lakeside approximately 30 or 35 miles away. There were 29 men killed instantly and many more injured seriously. It completely destroyed engine 2006, blew a hole in the sand that took five or six cars of gravel to fill, one driver was blown half a mile from the accident and the whistle was found about two miles away.

The Operator, a Mr. Taylor, was taking an order at the time and his

wife, who worked nights, was asleep in the bedroom in the depot. The depot was practically destroyed and it was a train length from the accident. A fragment of some sort shot through the bay window, striking Mr. Taylor on the jaw and took his lower jaw off and Mrs. Taylor was blown about 20 or 30 feet from her bedroom and when they found her, there was a car axle with one wheel blown off arched over her, presumed to have been blown through the bedroom.

Strange as it may seem neither Mr. nor Mrs. Taylor were killed, but naturally very seriously injured. They sued the company for two or three hundred thousand dollars and it was threshed around in the courts for a couple of years and they finally settled for \$132,000. Several of the 29 laborers that lost their lives were picked up in baskets. All of these men had been on the job quite awhile and had saved every dime they had earned and each man was supposed to have had between two and four thousand dollars in gold carried on their person in a heavy money belt. Some of the belts

were destroyed and the gold pieces scattered in the sand and I believe there was something like nineteen thousand dollars picked up by special officers during the week. You see these men were all Greeks and Austrians right from the old sod and couldn't speak or understand English and of course they wouldn't trust anyone to take their money into Ogden and deposit it in a bank. There were about 9000<sup>10</sup> laborers on the job and they all carried their money in their belts.

When the Construction Company turned the job over to the Operating Department all the Greeks and Austrians went back to their home countries. Most of the train and engine crews were off the S.P. and U.P. and went back to their former jobs. There were a few that had been hired and most of them went down to Panama as that job was just starting up and a few came down here to work on the San Pedro, Los Angeles and Salt Lake Railroad which was just opening up, among these was Engineer Edd. R. Bailey with whom I had worked on the N.P. at Livingston, Montana, Con-

ductor Everett E. Hines and myself. Both Bailey and Hines have passed away and I guess I am the only one left.

The reason I mention Bailey is that if you should happen to see any of the old timers up there, they will surely remember him as he was there from the beginning to the end and his wife kept the Commissary at Hogup. I'll mention a few other names and it is possible you may come in contact with someone who will remember them. . .

Besides Mr. W.E. Marsh, the Engineer in charge there was:  
Dan Ogden, Superintendent, later relieved by  
W.E. Bell, Superintendent  
Jimmy Hope, Master Mechanic  
J.W. Pike, Train Master  
R.A. Pierce, Train Master  
Otto Shackelford, Train Master  
Gus Bullard, Train Master  
and twelve other train masters on the entire line, but I have forgotten their names now.

Among the train dispatchers at Promontory Point, I can remember only one: C.E. Smith.

At Lakeside there was:  
Dewey Morgan, Chief and first trick for a while, then  
Harvey Morley took his place and I relieved Morley after working third trick for about three months and -  
Harry Adams relieved me on third trick and that's the way we wound up.

If this has become boresome to you, I apologize; but I'm sure you will forgive an old-timer who has been in bed six months with a heart condition, for blowing off a little steam of the yesteryear.

Yours very truly,

Fred H. Crawford,  
Glendora, California

## EPILOGUE

From a December 1993 article in *The Salt Lake Tribune*, written by Jack Fenton: "A 21-mile wooden trestle that spanned the Great Salt Lake between Promontory Point and Utah's mountain desert is coming down, a victim of the technology it led 80 years ago. Today, the original "Lucin Cutoff" is about half gone. Salvage rights were bought by T.C. Taylor of Aurora, Ill. for \$1.00.

"The Span, built across 38,256 pilings, cut almost 42 miles of steep grades and sharp curves from the transcontinental railroad's 146-mile Ogden to Lucin route, saving more than a half-day of travel time. If placed end to end, the pilings would stretch out exactly 534.986 miles, roughly a round trip between Salt Lake and Cedar City.

"The cutoff, including 11 miles of rock fill and tracks, has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1972. It even had a cluster of housing in the middle of the lake for railroad workers. T. L. Burton of Ogden, consultant to the salvage operations, said tracks already have been sold as scrap. Pilings are going to sawmills in Oregon and Cali-

fornia and to mines where they will be used as timbers. The pilings are so heavy they will not float, he said. "We don't know what will happen when they dry out. So far, pilings we pulled out and dried are holding up."

"Work began in 1991 with track removal. The rest of the structure, once described as "a fine monument" to designer William Hood, should be removed by August 1996. When it was replaced in the mid-1950s, the trestle was deteriorating and had outlived its usefulness. Turn-of-the-century rail cars were small, and the locomotives that pulled them were less powerful. "Speeds had been restricted to 20 mph," a Southern Pacific spokesperson said of the trestle.

"You could tell when a train was coming," said Vern Davis of Sacramento, who lived at Midlake, the tiny colony on the trestle, in 1939 while working as an assistant maintenance foreman. "The whole thing shook from end to end."

"Within two years the \$5 million project that was an engineering marvel of its time will disappear."

Footnotes (by Lynn D. Farrar)

1. In connection with replacing the Great Salt Lake trestle with a solid fill
2. The quarry was on the west side of the southern tip of Promontory Peninsula
3. December 1904
4. Ernie Marsh (correct spelling), longtime construction engineer for SP, who kept a diary of his various

- jobs from the 1880s on. In this instance, the greatest depth of a sink was 50 to 60 ft.
5. Entire cost of the project from Lucin (Montello) to Ogden cost \$8.9 million
6. Sparks to Ogden under SP control
7. No. 2804 was an SP TW-6 4-8-0, no. 2006 was an SP T-18 4-6-0
8. Construction records show 3000+

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