

WP 701 "CLOVER PLOT" - Doug Morgan

For many years, the Feather River Rail Society has desired to add a complete and unaltered heavyweight sleeping car with Western Pacific Railroad heritage to the museum collection. This would be consistent with its Mission Statement. The FRRS has the former Pullman sleeping car "Sunburst Rose" but it has been heavily altered for maintenance of way service and it isn't WP equipment in the truest sense.

What the FRRS really wanted was the WP 701, "Clover Plot", the only surviving Pullman-built, WP-owned heavyweight sleeping car. Although it only operated on the WP for a few years, it is a complete and unaltered example of classic Pullman sleeper. For years the Clover Plot was owned by another railroad museum that did not want to part with it. Fortunately, with the passage of time, circumstances can change.

The "Clover Plot" was an unremarkable heavyweight sleeping car in that it was much like any other in the vast armada of the Pullman Company's far-flung fleet. It, like its sister cars, was created to cruise the rails through every corner of the United States. It did this for 29 years (1920-1949), serving its owner well. Like the Pullman Company, every part of the "Clover Plot" was a reflection of the old adage; "Everything has a place and everything in its place". Everything about a Pullman car was well thought through to a high degree, no matter if the car was used by kings or commoners. The "Plot" exemplified this tradition; comfortable travel in gracious surroundings.

The "Clover Plot" was not lavish but it did reflect the design of the times. There were always the little touches that were the reminders a different age, such as the open sections which required separate men's and women's ends of the car (restrooms). In these rooms personal hygiene was observed with the admonishment in writing over the dental cuspidors "To avoid congestion, passengers are requested not to smoke in this room in the morning until other passengers have made their toilet".

There is a big question as to where the car served for 29 years under Pullman ownership and operation. Unlike the passenger cars of certain trains such as the *California Zephyr*, which operated within the confines of specific railroad corridors, Pullman cars went everywhere. This makes tracking their whereabouts very difficult, at least from the

historian's point of view. The "Clover Plot" was one of the many. Therefore, little is known about where it was or what great adventures it brought to its passengers. Nevertheless, it is known that it rolled with the best trains in the land. These trains would have included the WP's own *Scenic Limited* and the later *Exposition Flyer*, so it's possible that the "Clover Plot's" association with the Feather River Route began long before ownership changed.

The "Clover Plot" was out shopped new in 1920 at the Pullman Calumet City shops as an all steel standard sleeping car, Lot 4590 or 4565, using Pullmans' 2410F floor plan of the 12 section and 1 drawing room configuration. It was named "Rampur" and was one of three cars built at that time using the two lot numbers.

As was its custom, the Pullman Company often shopped their cars many times during the life of the car and often made improvements and updates. In 1940, the "Rampur" was shopped, modernized and received a different floor plan configuration to an 8 section 5 bedroom with two of the four rooms being doubles. It also received Pullman mechanical air conditioning. The car may have had ice air conditioning prior to conversion but this has not been confirmed. Even after modernization, the car still spoke of the same charm of the 1920's with its plush seats and brass fixtures. And it received a new name: "Clover Plot".

It is presumed it continued to see service as before, anywhere and everywhere. In 1949, it along with two other cars of the same class were sold to the WP as a part of an anti-trust settlement brokered by the US government, which forced the Pullman (Sleeping Car) Company to separate from Pullman Standard, the manufacturing company. It, along with the "Clover Town" and "Clover Villa", received numbers of 701,702 and 703 respectively.

Since the cars were received so late in the game (1949) it is doubtful that they saw much service on the WP. The *California Zephyr* was on the verge of supplanting the *Exposition Flyer*, leaving only the *Royal Gorge* to operate as a through train from Oakland to Salt Lake still equipped with heavyweight cars. By late 1950 the *Royal Gorge* handed off the ball to the new RDC's. What lay ahead for the "Clover Plot" was special trains and probable scrapping. It is rumored that the car may have been used for sleeping car space along with business cars 105, 106 and lounge 653 on board the new WP car ferry, the SS Las Plumas, as it worked its way

south from the erection docks in Portland to San Francisco Bay in 1956.

After seeing little use, WP decided the time had come to make some track space in the Oakland passenger car yard and put all three cars up for sale. Then a very peculiar thing occurred. Recently uncovered correspondence indicates that the "Clover Town" and "Clover Villa" were held for scrapping but the "Clover Plot" was nowhere to be seen. Evidently it had been leased to Pullman Company and was somewhere in the east. How long it was under lease is anybody's guess at this time. It could have been for a short period or going back for years. Also, it has been verified that the WP management felt the 701 was in sufficiently good condition that it should be offered to the highest bidder as a complete operating car.

Subsequently, the car was located and moved, probably from Chicago, for it arrived in Oakland on a freight train just ahead of number 17, the *California Zephyr*, on the 24th of August 1962. On that same date (in the evening), the car was inventoried by Pullman Company as part of a procedure observed when any and all leased equipment was turned back from lease to their owners.

One note dated September 4, 1962 from D. Laird of WP indicated "After Mr. Starki takes inventory in 701, "Clover Plot", does Pullman intend to release the car for retirement?"

In late August, a special train called the "Caribou Special" was scheduled to operate to Canada. Its promoters wanted to use the "Clover Plot" but were discouraged that the car would not be available in time for the special and were arranging to use another similar car. It is believed that with the arrival of the 701 (in the nick of time), the "Plot" took its rightful place in the consist of the special.

All three cars were put up for sale in late 1962, with the winning bids announced in December for the "Villa" and "Town". The winning bidder for the "Clover Plot" was announced on February 15, 1962 as the Fred Botsford Company, of San Francisco and Tracy, CA. By March, arrangements had been made to move the car to Carbona where Botsford had a yard that dismantled freight cars. Arrangements

were made to move the car to Oroville for reasons unknown but this never materialized and the car remained at Carbona. Somewhere along the line, sometime between 1963 and 1968, Fred Botsford passed away and his son, Harry, stepped into the picture.

In an interesting turn of events, Tom Phair, a gift shop owner in Orinda, CA enters the history of the "Clover Plot". Tom liked ceremonial cannons and belonged to cannoneering clubs. He stored his cannons in a former ammunition bunker at what had been the Benicia Arsenal near Benicia, CA. This was in 1968. At the same time, Sam Girdler of Solano Railcar Co. joined with Doug Morgan in the ownership of a private lounge car, formerly SP 2901 "Ferroquinologist", and they had moved the car to the Solano Railcar shops at Benicia. Somewhere along the way, they met Tom Phair.

Tom took a shine to what they had done with the "Ferroquinologist" and rode with them on at least one trip to Reno from Oakland. He became so enamored with the idea of owning and operating a passenger car that Messrs. Girdler and Morgan started to search for one for him. They knew Harry Botsford since he had visited them at Benicia on several occasions, so they mentioned their need to Harry who announced that he had a car at his place in Tracy that he would like to sell. Girdler and Morgan rounded up Tom Phair and took a trip to Tracy where they inspected the "Clover Plot" and indeed found it in good shape. The deal was struck and the car was moved to Benicia.

By the middle of 1968, plans were afoot to operate the 2901 to Ogden on the rear of the *City of San Francisco* for the reenactment of the driving of the gold spike at Promontory, Utah, scheduled for May 10, 1969. With Tom Phair's purchase of the "Clover Plot", suddenly the option of selling space in the "Plot" became real. The only thing was that the car needed a paint job as its two tone gray paint was oxidizing badly. So, since Girdler and Morgan had a railcar repair company, they decided to go ahead and repaint the car. Pullman green was selected since it would match with the 2901, which was also painted Pullman Green. At the same time large standard "Pullman" lettering was applied to the name boards along with standard WP lettering and other nomenclature.

After completing the exterior, attention was turned to the interior. It was cleaned and prepared for movement to the west Oakland passenger yard of SP. The SP spotted both cars adjacent to the Pullman Company building. Everybody in the Pullman shops came running and after taking one look at the "Clover Plot", they promptly adopted the car. In 1969, the sun was setting on the old Pullman Company and, not too many months later, the employees were out of work after long years of loyal service. They all knew in April of '69 that this was to be their swan song and they jumped into the project with unbridled enthusiasm.

They perused the "Clover Plot", pointing out unacceptable flaws and calling on all to pitch in to make things right. Windows were removed and cleaned. Fresh linens emblazoned with the Pullman Company logo were hustled aboard the car. The mattresses were removed and aired, brass fixtures were polished, doors were adjusted and light fixtures were cleaned and tested. The air conditioning was recharged and put through its paces, returning it to top condition.

Finally, all the beds were made up with the proper Pullman style and adorned with Pullman blankets. The crowning touch was the addition of a retired Pullman porter who had 40 years experience with the company. His knowledge of the operation of Pullman cars was immense. Everything was perfect.

The two cars left west Oakland for Ogden behind the *City of San Francisco* on May 8th and arrived on the 9th. Both cars worked well together, the "Clover Plot" assigned to day and night usage and the 2901 for lounging. Passengers on board were the who's who of historians from San Francisco and the Bay Area and all were members of the California Historical Society who took great delight in sleeping in the upper and lower berths. For most it would be the last time since almost all sleeping cars in the late nineteen sixties were bedroom, roomette or drawing rooms. Only in Canada could you still experience the Pullman berth.

After the big trip to Promontory, Tom Phair operated the car on one or two more day trips to Reno but the "Plot" was soon to be banished

from the SP due to age and non roller bearing wheels. Tom moved the car to the Sierra Railroad where it was used occasionally on special day trains. While on the Sierra, vandals broke into the car and caused heavy damage. The roof started to leak, causing even more problems.

Later, the car was sold to the Golden Gate Railroad Museum where the battle continued with the leaking roof. As of this writing, thanks to the efforts of the GGRM volunteers, the roof seems to be holding.

In 2005, GGRM learned the Navy was canceling their lease at the Hunters Point Shipyard. As chronicled elsewhere in this issue, the Pacific Locomotive Association and the FRRS were asked to assist in what became a massive undertaking to help GGRM relocate their collection. In a highly unusual move, the FRRS convinced the UP that it should be allowed to operate a special "hospital train" to move many pieces of vintage railroad equipment from Hunters Point in San Francisco to Niles Canyon and Portola. In thanks for the assistance of the FRRS, GGRM agreed to donate the "Clover Plot" to the FRRS.

The "Clover Plot" is now at home in Portola after the flawless move from the Bay Area. Now, the work really begins. The "Clover Plot" is very complete but the interior is highly damaged due to vandalism and the incessant water leaks. Rust streaks that have stained its walls and water leaks and mildew have destroyed all of the upholstery and carpeting. The wooden window frames are rotten and falling apart and some light fixtures are missing as well. However, there is still much left to be admired and with enough money and a lot of elbow grease, the car can once again be the thing of pride it once was for the Pullman Company. Already a team is being assembled to lead the restoration charge.

The "Clover Plot" has a bright future in the collection of the FRRS since it represents one of the cars that operated over the WP system on such trains as the *Exposition Flyer*. Although it did not see much service under the ownership flag of the WP it is still a reminder of kinder and gentler times when the cushions of the steam cars were the only way to go.