

We Get Emails...

- Paul Finnegan



On Sunday, November 7th, we received an email sent from the website to info@wplives.org from Luke in Iowa:

I am a graphic designer from central Iowa and I regularly feature well-designed logos on social media to educate my followers on the principles of effective logo design.



I have recently been doing some research on North American railroad logos of the past. One of my favorite logos is the last Western Pacific Railroad logo (I believe it was in use from 1979-1983, please see attached image).

To the best of my knowledge this logo wasn't significantly used by the railroad.

I have been having trouble finding information on this logo such as who designed it or any historical information about it.

If your organization would be able to provide any information on this logo it would be greatly appreciated.

Eugene Vicknair forwarded it to our Historical/Department. Kerry Cochran used the Google Custom Search Engine on our WP Mileposts web page to find an article about the WP Logo and emailed Luke:

Dear Luke

Here is an excerpt from one of the Western Pacific Railroad's magazine the "MILEPOSTS" (a company publication A SIGN OF THE TIMES FOR WESTERN PACIFIC Western Pacific Railroad Company "THE FEATHER RIVER ROUTE") September/October 1979.

Western Pacific Railroad Company has adopted a new insignia or "logo" that combines a modern look reflecting the company's status as a modern transportation company with a return to the railroad's historical roots as "The Feather River Route."

From the time of its founding in 1903, Western Pacific Railroad has been closely identified with the Feather River, whose North Fork, Middle Fork and East Branch the railroad variously crosses and follows for 114 miles. While Western Pacific's mainline was soon to stretch to close to 1,200 miles, or roughly the same amount of mainline track that the railroad operates today, the identification of the railroad with just one portion of its line was natural.

Many a 19th Century engineer and entrepreneur had dreamed of building a railroad through the Feather River Canyon as an approach to the Beckwourth Pass, a pass that offers a substantially easier crossing of the Sierra Nevada than does Donner Pass. Those dreams remained just dreams until the Western Pacific began construction and, in 1909, commenced freight service through the Feather River Canyon between the San Francisco Bay area and Salt Lake City.

The slogan, "The Feather River Route," came to be emblazoned on the company herald created in 1913 by Western Pacific employee Charles F. Craig for then president C. M. Levey. While Western Pacific has continued to use the historical herald in numerous applications-and while the company will continue to use the historical herald on such items as service awards to veteran employees-the complexity of the herald has resulted over the years in the substitution of a number of different insignia or logos for the historic herald.

Roger G. Meldahl, Western Pacific's Senior Vice President Marketing, says of the new logo, "We sought

a new corporate symbol, in part, to reflect the fact that we had undergone a major change in our corporate structure this year when the railroad returned to its former status as an independent, publicly-owned, San Francisco-based company.

While we were seeking a fresh, modern look for our corporate logo, one that was in keeping with a modern transportation company such as ours, we also have a more than sentimental attachment to our historical beginnings," he continues.

"When we selected Marc Gobe and Associates of San Francisco to design the new symbol, we instructed Mr. Gobe to develop a logo that gave a modern appearance to our historical symbol, the feather. We're more than pleased with what he accomplished," Meldahl says.

The new logo-which will generally appear with, at least, the words, "Western Pacific"-will replace all corporate signs that have revolved around the initials "WP."

Conversion to the new sign will be a gradual process. The sign will begin to appear on Western Pacific stationery and business cards this month. Conversion of stationery, as well as forms, will be phased in as existing stocks of those items are exhausted.

The first new pieces of Western Pacific rolling stock to bear the new logo are 100 boxcars delivered in October by their builder, FMC. Existing equipment will receive the new sign when undergoing scheduled repairs that include repainting. The use of decals on trucks will speed the conversion of Western Pacific highway vehicles to the new sign. All new equipment acquired in the future will bear the new logo.

A short manual covering the uses of the new logo is now in preparation and will soon be distributed to all Western Pacific offices.

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I hope this answers your questions, if not please do not hesitate to contact us.

Regards

Kerry Cochran

General Superintendent/Archive Manager

FRRS/WPRM

Eugene also sent a couple photos to Luke of WP equipment displaying the new WP logo.

Luke replied to our emails:

Hi Kerry,

Yes! this was even more information than I was expecting. I really appreciate your time in finding this. Thanks also to Eugene for the information he provided.

It's always nice to find out who was behind some of the greatest logos ever designed. It's also great to have folks like you keeping this history alive.

You guys have been very helpful.

Thank you,

- Luke

This is another example of how we are executing the FRRS' Mission Statement:

"The Feather River Rail Society is dedicated to the preservation, interpretation and education of the public as to the history and people of the Western Pacific Railroad."



R. W. Stumbo, Jr., Western Pacific's Senior Vice President-Finance inspecting new WP logo as it appears on 100 new boxcars recently delivered to the railroad in 1979 by their builder, FMC.

- FRRS Archives