





# The Feather River Route

## (a brief history)

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A competitive rail route across the California Sierras was the dream of a young Scotch surveyor, Arthur W. Keddie, in the late 1860s. While exploring for a new mountain wagon road through the valley of the Feather River — so named because of the floating feathers from wild pigeons — Keddie found a potential rail route of low grade which crossed the mountains via Beckwourth Pass, a crossing more than 2000 feet lower than Donner Pass to the south. Efforts to utilize this favorable route failed until the beginning of the twentieth century, largely because of the opposition of the Central Pacific.

E. H. Harriman, who controlled the Union Pacific, gained control of the

Southern Pacific (formerly Central Pacific) after C. P. Huntington died in 1900. In 1901 George Gould added the Denver and Rio Grande to the other rail properties inherited from his father, financier Jay Gould. The Gould system now stretched from Buffalo, New York, to Ogden, Utah, and southwest from Chicago to El Paso and New Orleans. Harriman closed the Utah Gateway to his rival and the Denver and Rio Grande had no western connection to the Pacific Coast. Gould was thus forced to seek a way to extend his own line.

Keddie found financial support for

# the early days

his rail route from Walter J. Bartnett, and late in 1902 they incorporated a railroad company which basically followed Keddie's original line of survey. Finding George Gould interested in such a western line, the Keddie group made a profitable capitulation to the larger financial interests, and on March 3, 1903, a new transcontinental line, the Western Pacific Railway Company, was organized in San Francisco with Bartnett as president. Bartnett later sold the Alameda & San Joaquin Railroad, a coal line that started operations in 1896 from Stockton west to Tesla. The section between Carbona and Ortega was later relaid with heavier rail and is part of the present main line.

Gould was the dominant figure in the new line, but managed to avoid any public connection with the venture until the spring of 1905. Surveyors and engineers, working in secrecy, completed surveys and profiles for the new road. At the direction of Gould, \$50 million in Western Pacific bonds were underwritten by the Rio Grande with the stipulation that a 1% compensated grade and curves of 10 degrees be the maximum throughout the line. Edward T. Jeffery, president of the Denver and Rio Grande, became president of the Western Pacific in early summer 1905 with Bartnett be-

wages. The ethnic conglomeration of the work forces represented all types from all places. The Western Pacific became known as "the Wobbly Pacific" (a reference to the I.W.W. members in the construction gangs) by locals along the route.

The Southern Pacific made every effort to block the Western Pacific from obtaining a waterfront terminal on the San Francisco Bay at Oakland. Since the older road had, for years, held a tight legal grip and control over all the Oakland waterfront, they felt quite secure against the newcomer. The SP forces were caught off guard early in January 1906 when, under the leadership of Bartnett, 200 Western Pacific workers, supported by thirty guards carrying shotguns and carbines, quickly built a crude mile of track on top of a rock quay or retaining wall earlier constructed by the government to keep silt out of the inner harbor at Oakland. Despite the legal efforts of Harriman and the Southern Pacific, the Western Pacific coup prevailed.

The 1906 earthquake didn't help matters, creating faults and causing slides at cuts on the new line in the Niles Canyon area. By late 1907 nine thousand men were building the railroad.

The last spike was driven by Leo-

coming vice president. Construction began in the fall of the same year.

The mountainous terrain in California and the desert conditions in Nevada compounded the problems of locating and constructing a line in a region already remote and inaccessible. But at the same time much of the line was constructed with equipment and machines far more efficient than used by the earlier transcontinentals. Large steam shovels made the cuts and fills and track was laid with the newest equipment. Virgil C. Bogue, chief engineer of the Gould railroads, became vice-president and chief engineer of the Western Pacific and headed up the project.

Labor was scarce in the remote areas, even when top wages were offered, but after the depression of 1907, more workers were available at lower

nardo diTomasso, a track foreman, on November 1, 1909, as track gangs from east and west met on a steel bridge across Spanish Creek high in the mountains. There were no ceremonies for this engineering triumph. A new transcontinental rail route, with a low-level line through the Sierras, had been achieved. The finished road crossed the Sierras at an elevation of 5,000 feet, had few sharp curves, and boasted a maximum grade of not over one per cent. Throughout the line there was 41 steel bridges and 44 tunnels built to the best contemporary standards.

Through freight service was inaugurated on December 1, 1909, although local freight service began in 1908 between Salt Lake City and a Nevada Northern Railroad connection at Shafter, Nevada.



1. George Gould

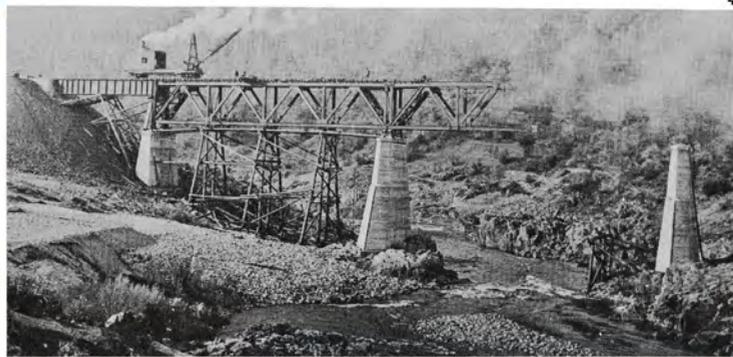
2. The Edward T. Jeffery, named for WP's second president, was launched at Oakland harbor on July 19, 1913, and ran between San Francisco and WP's mole at Oakland during World War I. Returned from the Railroad Administration after the war, she was painted white and renamed the Feather River and ran until 1932.

3. Track Foreman Leonardo di Tomasso (right) pounded in the last spike at Spanish Creek bridge on November 1, 1909 to complete the joining of Western Pacific's main line track.

4. The Feather River flood of March 1907 delayed completion of Bridge No. 212.36 crossing the Middle Fork 7½ miles east of Oroville until the end of that year. This bridge is now under water due to construction of the Oroville Dam.

5. Never before had the arrival of a first passenger train received the tumultuous welcome as did Western Pacific's first passenger train as it arrived in Oakland, Calif. on August 22, 1910.







1. Tidewater Southern's "747" hauls a 40-car train on Modesto's 9th Street.

2. Tidewater Southern Electric Interurban in front of Stockton Hotel on Weber St.

3. A Sacramento Northern Railway F-7 diesel engine.



# acquisition and expansion

In August of 1910 passenger service was begun on the line, much to the joy of the 68-year-old Arthur Keddie, as he and many others at towns along the line welcomed the first train.

Traffic agreements were signed with the Pacific Steamship Company, the Santa Fe, and a Japanese navigation company which immediately gave access to all coastal cities and the Orient.

Gould furnished the Western Pacific a staff of excellent officers to begin its career, but the high cost of building the road — double the \$39 million estimated — nearly ruined the Rio Grande's credit and prevented the construction of feeder lines and many spur tracks. Freight and passenger traffic did not meet expectations. The construction costs of the new road had been extremely high and the lack of traffic brought financial hardship to the D&RG and the rest of the Gould rail empire.

On June 18, 1916, the property was sold at foreclosure. Assuming operation of the line was The Western Pacific Railroad Company, formed a few weeks earlier by the bond holders. The president of the new Western Pacific was Charles M. Levey, who had been second vice president of the original company.

Freight and passenger service started to climb. Branch lines were bought or built. In 1916 the company purchased the Boca and Loyalton Railroad, a Sierra shortline which became the Loyalton Branch. A subsidiary line, the Deep Creek Railroad, opened in March 1917, running from Wendover south to Gold Hill, Utah, to serve the gold mining country (closed in July 1939). The Indian Valley Railroad was opened in June 1917. This road was controlled jointly by the WP and the Engles Copper Mining Company and ran from Paxton to Engles (closed October 1938).

The Tidewater Southern Railway

was also acquired in 1917. An electric interurban, the TS commenced operations between Stockton and Modesto in 1912 and expanded into Turlock in 1916. After the WP purchase, branch lines were constructed to Hilmar in 1917 and into Manteca in 1918. Interurban passenger service ended in 1932 and electrical operations ended in 1948. It is a significant feeder for the WP, serving an important manufacturing, farming and wine-producing area.

The company obtained the southern section of the Nevada-California-Oregon Railway, a narrow gauge line, running from Reno to the Western Pacific main line. This line was standard-gauged and partly relocated to open the Reno Branch on February 3, 1918. Construction also began on the San Jose Branch which, due to wartime delays, did not open until September 1, 1921.

The Sacramento Northern Railway was purchased in 1921. Construction

of the Sacramento Northern began in October of 1905 from Chico to Oroville (originally named Northern Electric). Early in 1907, freight service began between Marysville and Sacramento. The Northern Electric was renamed the Sacramento Northern in 1918. The portion of the system between Oakland and Sacramento was built by the Oakland and Antioch (Eastern was later added to the name). The OA&E went into receivership and was reorganized in 1920 as the San Francisco-Sacramento Railroad (Sacramento Short Line). It was purchased in February 1927 by the Western Pacific. On January 1, 1929, the two electric roads' operations were merged. Passenger service ended in June of 1941 and the last electric service ran on April 10, 1965. Now dieselized, the Sacramento Northern owns or operates on approximately 336 miles of track between Concord and Chico, California.



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# the Twenties and A.C. James...



On July 1, 1918, all American railroads passed into the hands of the U.S. Railroad Administration. William R. Scott, vice president of Southern Pacific, was appointed to manage the SP, the Western Pacific and the Santa Fe Coast Lines. Under his administration paired track operations began in Nevada, the WP's ferry and barge service on the San Francisco Bay was abolished, WP passenger trains were diverted to the SP Oakland Mole and San Francisco freight moved via Dumbarton Bridge. He was succeeded on August 31, 1919, by Colonel Edward W. Mason, a former WP employee, who later became the company's general manager and subsequently a vice president until his retirement in 1946.

On March 1, 1920, railroads were

returned to private ownership. After the war most railroads, including the Western Pacific, were in poor physical shape. After a year of negotiations, \$9 million was received from the government in damages.

The Calpine Branch in the Feather River Canyon was opened to traffic May 14, 1923, to serve a lumber mill (abandoned May, 1940).

In 1924 the paired track arrangement between Weso and Alazon in Nevada with the Southern Pacific, originally initiated during World War I, was reinstated together with agreement on joint rates and routes. Large additions to the rolling stock were also made during this period.

In 1926 Arthur Curtiss James, one of the last railroad financial giants, acquired control of the property. The son of a railroad builder, James also had large holdings in the Great North-

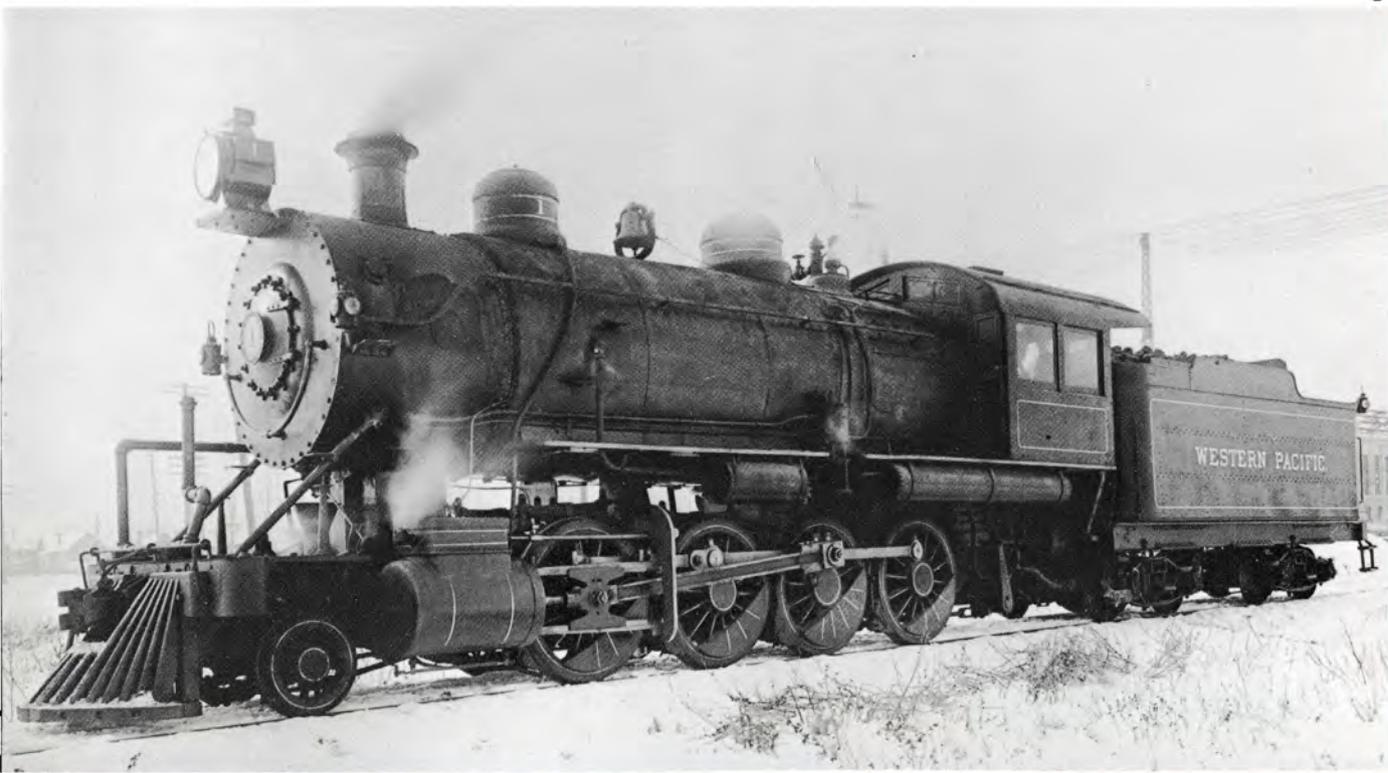
ern, Northern Pacific, Burlington and other western railroads. James became WP's chairman of the board and called from retirement Harry M. Adams — one-time Western Pacific freight agent who joined the Union Pacific and became a vice president — to serve as president. A complete renovation of the entire line was started.

Also in 1926, the Alameda Belt Line was purchased by the Western Pacific and Santa Fe from the City of Alameda.

On January 1, 1928, the Western Pacific purchased a one-third interest in the Central California Traction Company whose 53-mile main line connects Sacramento with Stockton.

The Terminus Branch, with a wharf warehouse, also opened in January of 1928 to serve the California "Delta" area growers and shippers (closed in 1964).





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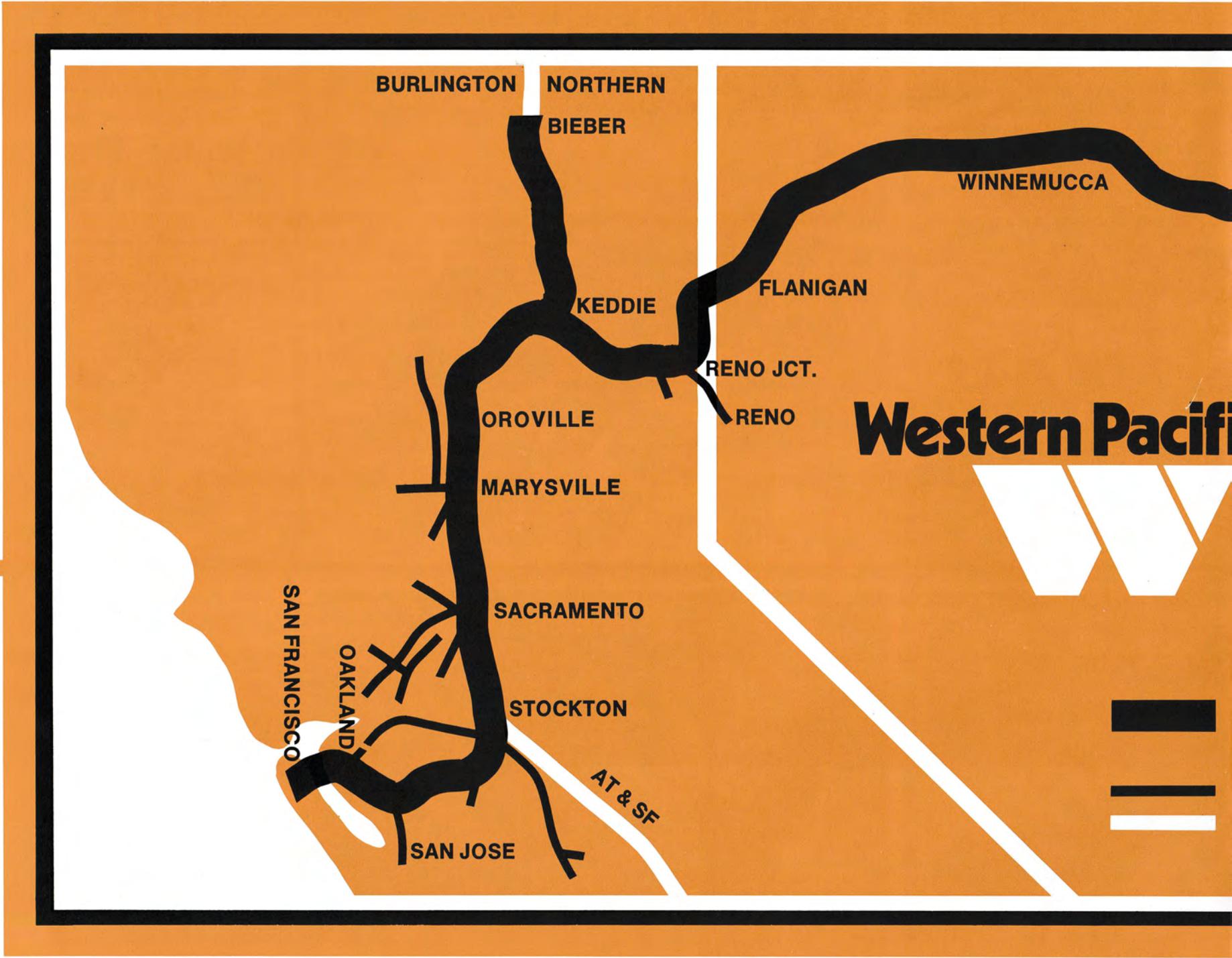
1. Film star Monte Blue in a silent film melodrama at Quincy Junction.

2. WP No. 1, first engine at Salt Lake City, December 1906.

3. Arthur Curtiss James speaking at Bieber on November 10, 1931 during the Gold Spike ceremonies which opened WP's north-south route.

4. An early stereoscopic view looking towards Goat Island (now Treasure Island) and San Francisco beyond along tracks leading to the Western Pacific Mole at Oakland.





BURLINGTON

NORTHERN

BIEBER

WINNEMUCCA

FLANIGAN

KEDDIE

RENO JCT.

RENO

OROVILLE

MARYSVILLE

**Western Pacific**

SACRAMENTO

SAN FRANCISCO

OAKLAND

STOCKTON

AT & SF

SAN JOSE





# ic Railroad



**MAIN LINE**

**BRANCH LINES**

**MAJOR CONNECTION**

**INTERCHANGE  
POINTS**

- |   | <b>WITH</b>                 | <b>FOR</b>                      |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>1. BIEBER</b> .....                          | <b>B. N.</b>                | <b>PACIFIC<br/>NORTHWEST</b>    |
| <b>2. STOCKTON</b> .....                        | <b>AT &amp; SF &amp; SP</b> | <b>SOUTHWEST</b>                |
| <b>3. SALT LAKE<br/>CITY</b> .....              | <b>UP &amp; DRGW</b>        | <b>CHICAGO /<br/>EAST COAST</b> |
| <b>4. SAN<br/>FRANCISCO /<br/>OAKLAND</b> ..... | <b>SP &amp; AT &amp; SF</b> | <b>BAY AREA</b>                 |

# the thirties and the war

During this period plans for the Inside Gateway were put into operation. Western Pacific built 112 miles north out of Keddie connecting with the Great Northern's 88-mile extension south from Klamath Falls, Oregon, at Bieber, California. This was a most important project, making Western Pacific a north and south carrier through its connection with the Santa Fe at Stockton. On November 10, 1931, Arthur Curtiss James drove the final spike of Oroville gold at Bieber to open the line.

As the Great Depression advanced, traffic fell off. One after another of the Nation's railroads went into bankruptcy. The Western Pacific defaulted on its bond interest in 1935 and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation requested a plan for reorganization. RFC funds were provided to help carry out a three-year rehabilitation program. The program included replacing 85-pound rail in the Feather River Canyon with 112-pound rail and the

purchase of ten mountain-type engines from the Florida East Coast Railroad, eliminating the use of helper engines. Faster through-schedules to the east were established.

The outbreak of the Second World War found the Western Pacific in excellent shape to handle the vastly increased freight and passenger business. More than 700 miles of new rail had been laid on the main line. The first freight diesel operations started in 1939. Among the 150 locomotives were seventeen heavy mallets capable of 5400 horsepower. Shops and terminal facilities were in first-class condition.

In December 1942 Western Pacific and the Santa Fe purchased The Oakland Terminal Railway from the Key System. This line added various industrial tracks in Oakland and Emeryville.

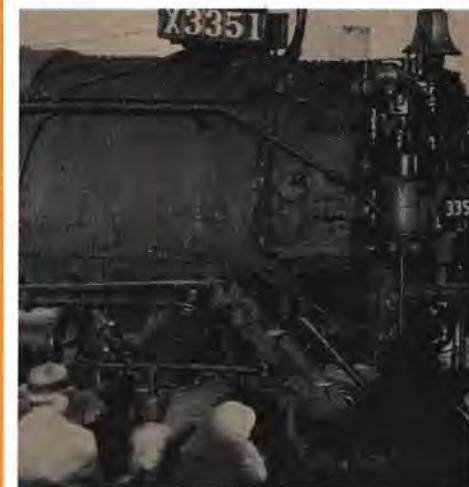
At the end of 1944 the reorganization plan was finally approved and the company emerged from receivership.

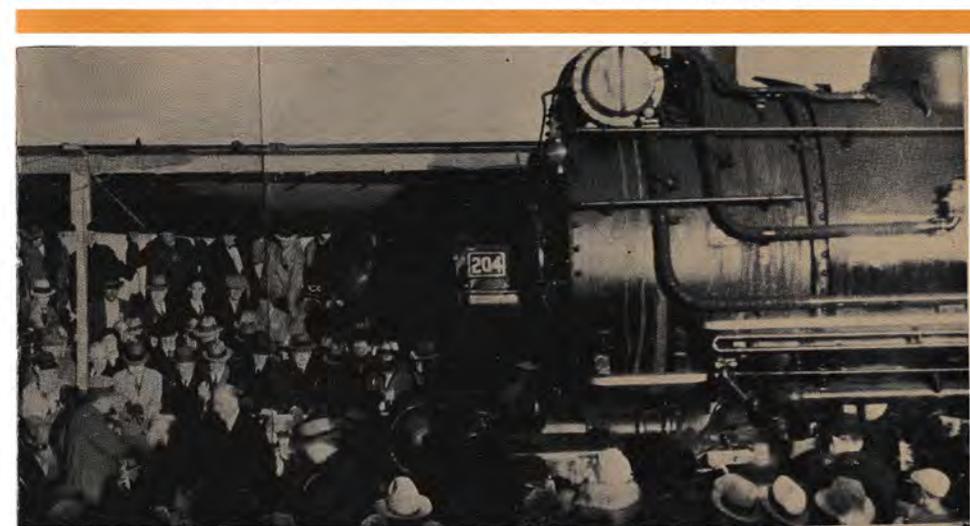
1. This articulated engine operated by WP before the days of the diesel was among the most powerful steam power in the world.

2. Great Northern's No. 3351 and WP's No. 204 met at Bieber on a freezing November 10, 1931 to dedicate completion of the north-south Inside Gateway. WP President Harry Adams and Great Northern President Ralph Budd shook hands from the engines' pilots.

3. A track gang lays rail during construction of the Bieber line north of Crescent Mills in September 1931.

4. Western Pacific ran many grain specials in the depression years much like this "Prosperity Special" at Carlin, Nevada in 1933.





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# takeover attempt fails

The California Zephyr, jointly owned and operated by Western Pacific, Denver & Rio Grande Western, and Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroads, went into service on March 20, 1949. The diesel-powered, ultra-modern streamliner with its vista-dome cars provided excellent food, accommodations and service. Its schedules were designed for scenic viewing on its transcontinental run between Oakland and Chicago. The Western Pacific was forced to follow the national trend toward passenger train reduction. On March 22, 1970, the final run of No. 18 eastbound and No. 17 westbound brought a nostalgic ending to the Railroad's passenger service.

During this period of industrial growth in the west, Western Pacific launched a program of modernization and plant improvement. In the Feather River Canyon, a new Tunnel 15, 3,000 feet long with a reinforced concrete lining, was opened in the spring of 1957. Heavier rail was laid, new ballast placed, and a traffic controlled signal system installed to improve

train operations. Modern freight cars were purchased and maintenance-of-way equipment was fully mechanized. The railroad took delivery in July 1957 of a 375-foot, 27-car capacity, self-propelled diesel car ferry, the M/V "Las Plumas" for operation on San Francisco Bay, replacing three tugs and barges.

On October 12, 1960, the Southern Pacific announced the purchase of 10% of WP's stock and its intention to seek control of the property. A long legal battle began that would not finish until a decision was issued by the Interstate Commerce Commission on February 3, 1965, in favor of Western Pacific remaining an independently-owned, competitive railroad.

In 1962, the State of California began construction of the Oroville dam as a part of its Feather River Water Project. This required the relocation of WP's main line. The new 23-mile long track shortened the original main line by four miles.

As a result of successful litigation by the Company's legal department, a favorable ruling was received in the

"Northwest Rate Case" on April 1, 1967. New tariffs guaranteed rate equality on the Bieber route between California and Pacific Northwest points.

On July 1, 1967, WP became a member-owner of the Fruit Growers Express Company, enabling the Company to provide a dependable supply of refrigeration equipment, particularly "piggyback" type equipment and mechanical refrigerator cars.

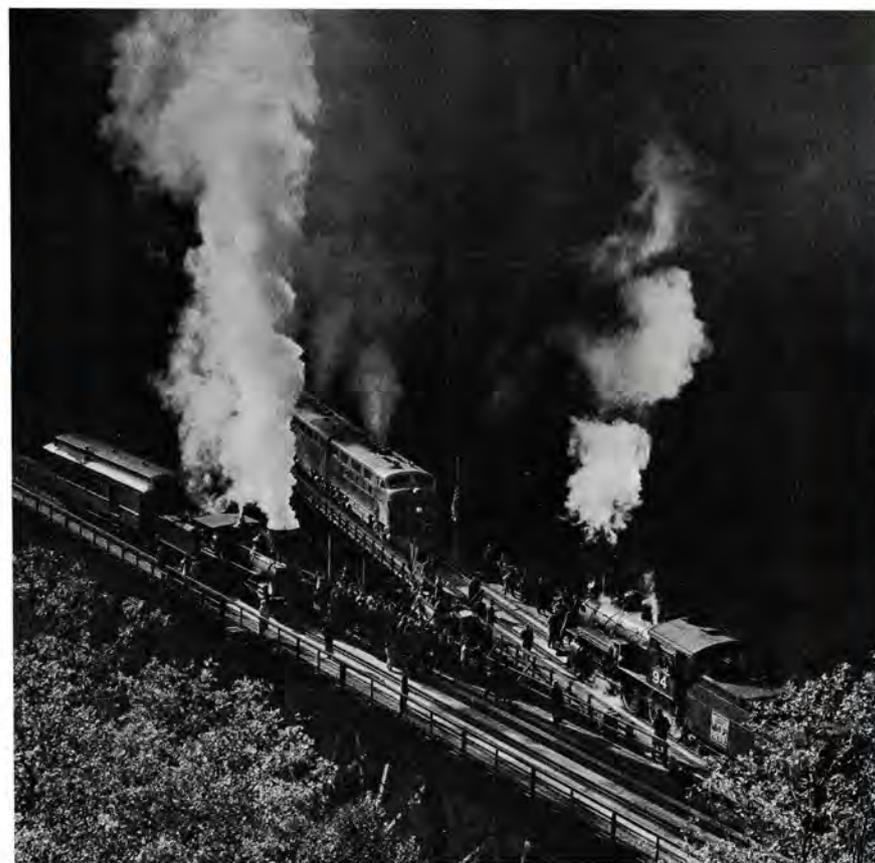
A new locomotive maintenance shop was built at Stockton and began operations during the summer of 1969.

1. The "Ruby Jubilee" on November 1, 1949 celebrated the 40th anniversary of the driving of the last spike on Spanish Creek Bridge. Engines of four decades met for the occasion.

2. Since August 1957 freight cars have been carried across San Francisco Bay between Oakland and San Francisco aboard Western Pacific's self propelled diesel M/V "Las Plumas."

3. Four F-7 "workhorses" pull tonnage freight past west switch at Two Rivers on a winter day.

4. Screen star Eleanor Parker christens the famed California Zephyr the day before it went into service on March 20, 1949. The actress was assisted by Harry A. Mitchell, president, and Goodwin Knight, California's lieutenant governor.



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# Southern Pacific Seeking Control Of Western Pacific

Official Says Subsidiary Ac-  
quired Nearly 10% of  
Western Road's Common  
Application Filed With ICC

A WALL STREET JOURNAL News Roundup

Southern Pacific Co. moved to acquire control of the Western Pacific Railroad and form a massive affiliated rail network in the West.

D. J. Russell, Southern Pacific president, disclosed in San Francisco that a Southern Pacific subsidiary already has acquired nearly 10% of Western Pacific stock. He said Southern Pacific also has applied to the Interstate Commerce Commission in Washington for permission to acquire control of Western Pacific through purchase of additional shares.



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# a modern railroad

Alfred E. Perlman became president on December 1, 1970. He was president of the New York Central Railroad from 1954 until its merger with the Pennsylvania in 1968, becoming president of the merged companies. Prior to that time he was responsible for successfully rebuilding the Denver and Rio Grande Western. Under his leadership, the Western Pacific was returned to a profitable position in a period of four months, and turned in a net profit for 1971 of \$3.9 million following two successive years of losses.

Western Pacific today is an important rail carrier operating 1,246 miles of main line and 472 miles of branch line tracks. The main line extends eastward from Oakland and joins the

Denver & Rio Grande Western and Union Pacific railroads at Salt Lake City, forming through transcontinental freight service by connection with other carriers. The line between Bieber and Stockton forms the middle segment of a three-carrier, through-freight service by connecting Southern California and the Southwest with the Pacific Northwest. The company owns choice industrial parks and land in California, Nevada and Utah which are utilized to encourage industries to locate near Western Pacific tracks.

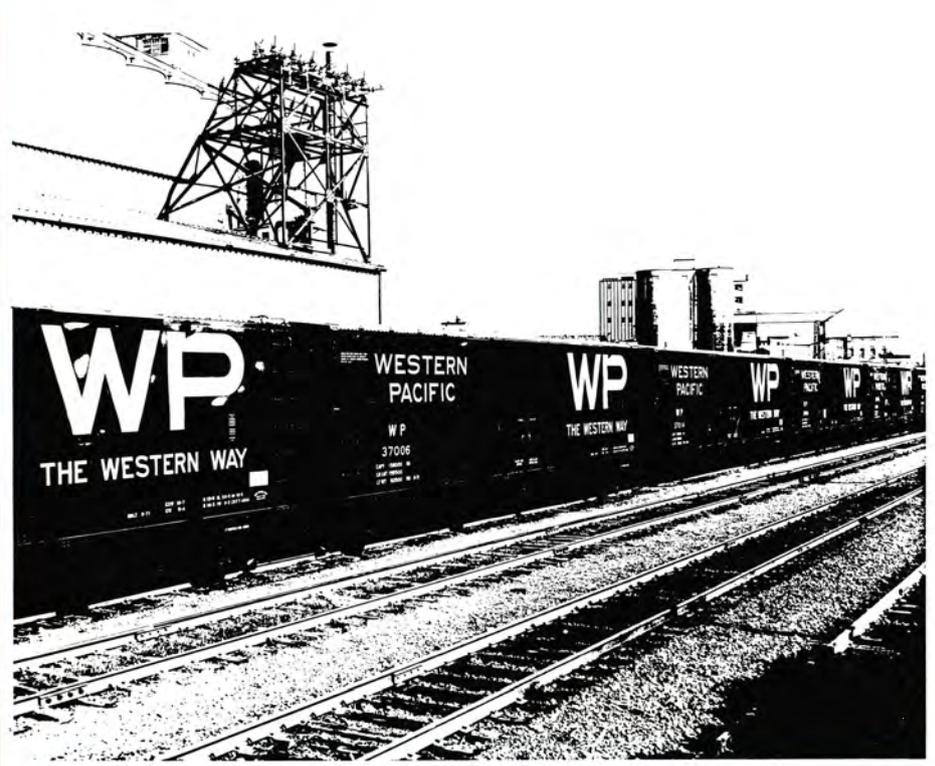
Today, Western Pacific's 3,200 employees, with all types of skills, crafts and professions, are working together for the future growth of the West's independent, competitive railroad.

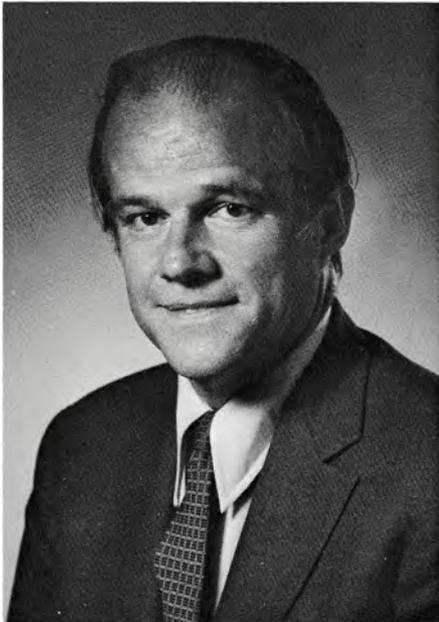
1. Western Pacific Railroad chairman of the board, Alfred E. Perlman.

2. An eastbound freight swings across lower deck of the West Branch bridge over the Feather River's west branch. U.S. Highway 40-A crosses on upper deck.

3. WP's LeTourneau side porter is used for transfer of containers and trailers to and from rail flat cars in the Oakland yard.







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1. *Western Pacific Transport Company, a truck line subsidiary began operations in the spring of 1973.*

2. *Robert G. Flannery was elected president of The Western Pacific Railroad Company on January 1, 1973.*

TEXT — John K. Kelly    RESEARCH — Lee Sherwood  
DESIGN — John R. Signor    PHOTOS — Western Pacific



# Western Pacific Railroad

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