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My Life On Mountain Railroads

William Gould

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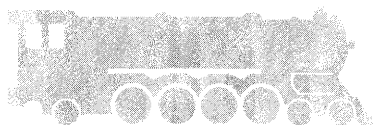
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The author in his later years as a diesel engineer for the Utah Railway. Photo from the W. J. G. Gould collection.

years a much better job than the one I left on the Rio Grande. Instead of being gone from home anywhere from ten hours to ten days or two weeks on a freight trip, as we were on the Rio Grande, on the Utah we were seldom gone more than twenty-four or thirty hours on a mainline trip. And those new engines were marvels compared to the Rio Grande power, which was held together, as we used to say, with bailing wire. For every year of the depression the Utah operated in the black while the Rio Grande was in receivership.

We had a wonderful railway through its prime years. In the fall and winter the boomers came from all over the western country. All were headed for the Utah. They were assured of good work up until the latter part of the following February. It was, I believe, the boomers' last stand.



Epilogue

This ends my father's writings of his life. Time ran out for him before he could conclude the recording of his Utah Railway experiences. On Monday, September 4, 1961 (Labor Day), he and my mother were picnicking at the Saratoga Resort on Utah Lake with their daughter, my sister Elaine, and her family. Here he suffered a heart attack which he did not disclose to any member of the family. At the end of the day he drove my mother home, all the while in great pain. Later that night, or more correctly, early the next morning, he was admitted to the Utah Valley Hospital at Provo as a cardiac case.

For a time he seemed to improve. Then on Saturday, September 23, 1961, while discussing with my brother John the prospects of returning home in the coming week, he fell asleep. His sleep appeared to be peaceful. At approximately 6:30 P.M. he groaned audibly several times but did not waken. A nurse was summoned, but it was then too late. He had already passed to his next great experience.

For his sake I do not mourn. In its own peculiar way life had been rich and full for him and had little else to offer. He was overdue for new experiences and growth elsewhere. But for my personal loss I do mourn. I loved this man beyond the usual love of a son for his father. He did much for me, and I did too little for him. In his life I found much excitement and interest which vicariously enriched my own. Much of this is recorded in his writings. This is my legacy and my heritage. For this I am truly grateful.



Gilbert Gould, in retirement, instructs his grandson Wayne in the anatomy of a steam locomotive. Photo from the W. J. G. Gould collection.

I tend to believe that his death was timely. By 1961, the year of his passing, the sights, the sounds, the smells of steam railroading had all but disappeared from the American scene. The sound of the steam whistle's mournful call across a nocturnal landscape had faded and died away forever, leaving the manufacturers of air horns for the diesel locomotive scrambling to try to duplicate it.

The institution of railroading was also changing. Like in much of corporate America, the infiltration of lawyers and Ivy League MBAs into the ranks of management was dehumanizing the corporate structure. The feeling of “family” was disappearing. The worship of the so-called bottom line was supplanting the dedication to service in the common need and in the public trust. No longer did anyone care about such things as on time arrivals and departures or the compulsion to get the train over the road. The railroad culture of earlier days was all but gone.

In the inevitable and necessary march of progress the diesel locomotive has done much to bring efficiency to American railroading. Its limitless power and immense flexibility of operation were highly prized in an industry undergoing renaissance. No one knew this more than my father who ran them in the late afternoon of his career. But these wonderful new machines also deprived the work force of their former pride in the demanding skills required to move trains over the rails by steam.

Almost anyone who could read electrical instruments, particularly the main power ammeter, could move cars with a diesel locomotive. It was no longer necessary to feel in the seat of one’s pants the behavior of the train all the way back to the caboose. The fraternity of those who could finely tune the reciprocating steam machine to perform these tasks was no longer in vogue or needed. They were fading over the horizon with the sailor before the mast.

A remnant of this culture existed only in the minds of those who had lived through the high noon of steam railroadin’. And the dwindling ranks of veterans of those glory years could only gather to relive them in tale and legend. For ...

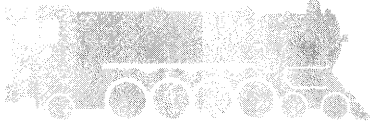
*... Each had a run that he made one day,
When it took real nerve and a lot more skill,
To make the time or climb the hill,
Than it does today, or ever will ...!*

(Anon).

So it was indeed time for the mournful call of a steam whistle to sound a requiem for this man who had lived through it all and loved every moment of it.

I can hear it yet!

WILLIAM R. GOULD
LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA



Index

- Adams (fireman), 126, 127
Altus, Utah, 64, 128
American Fork, Utah, 54, 55, 78, 80, 116,
117, 136, 148–51
Anderson, John, 25
Anderson, Pie Book (engineer), 44
Atwood (section boss), 205, 206
- Back lead, 43
Bad order cars, 235
Bailey, Ben (engineer), 113–15
Baker (engineer), 182, 183, 185
Baker valve gears, 117
Bar, Jappy (engineer), 112
Bartlett (fireman, engineer), 123, 124
Bartleships, 199
Baxter, Al (rotary operator), 164
Bayrell, Lew (conductor), 228
Benjamin, Doc (doctor), 50, 51
Bennett (master mechanic), 69, 162, 176
Bible, Charlie (fireman), 120, 121
Big hole, 85, **135**, 152, 235
Big holing, **233**
Bingham, Utah, 8, 40, 82, 89, 112, 113,
118, 119, 130, 138, 139, 148, 161,
175, 193, 194, 238
Blow the dome, 60, **119**, 127
- Blow up, **60**, 139, 141, 183
Blower, **42**, 60, 122, 141, 166
Board, 13, 19, 20, 24, 25, 37, 49, 56–58,
63, 66–68, 84, 89, 91, 93, 97, 111, 120,
126, 134, 135, 152, 158, 161, 162,
164, 169, 178, 181, 183, 193, 207,
226, 238
Boiler head, 19, 47, 59, 60, 137
Boomers, 21, 27, 55, 81, 82, 110, 130,
151, 162, 173, 175, 176, 210, 219
Boucher, Bill (engineer), 90, 157–61, 176
Brake, xi, xii, 4, 10, 11, 17, 19, 20, 46, 53,
58, 70, 76, 86, 90, 96–99, 122, 130,
135, 150–53, 155–58, 160, 163, 174–
77, 208–10, 214, 219, 226, 233–35
Brown, Hugh “Brownie” (brakeman), 212,
216, 219
Brown, Mr. (storekeeper), 41, 42
Brown, Rass (fireman), 187, 188
Brownies, 113, 115, 133, 229, **230**
Burke, Tommy (rear brakeman), 228, 229,
237
Burnham, Utah, 76, 77, 143
- Caboose bounce, **52**, 116, 199, 212, 213,
219
Call book, 57, 176

- Call room, 50, 68, 76, 194, 195, 238
 Callers, 57, 66, 99, 176, 188
 Campbell, Art (engineer), 80, 96, 97, 118, 119, 135, 136, 142, 143, 168, 169, 204, 205
 Car droppers, **xi**
 Carbon County, Utah, iv, v, 45, 237
 Carter, Dick (engineer), 120, 121
 Carter, Mickey (brakeman), 212, 213
 Castilla, Utah, 147
 Castle Gate, Utah, x, xiii, 45, 72, 73, 162, 163, 223, 230, 236
 Cedar Fort, Utah, 1, 3, 24–27
 Chancellor, Art (engineer), 133
 Christler (fireman), 186
 Clark, Harry (fireman, engineer), 120, 220, 221
 Claypool, Tom (newspaperboy), 32
 Coal drag, 93, 149, 214, 228
 Coal Oil Johnny (storehouse clerk), 41, 42
 Cobbly, John (engineer), 70, 71
 Coffery, Mickey (fireman), 137
 Cogwheel, **2**, 3
 Cold Springs, Utah, 135
 Colton, Utah, 53, 59, 74, 92, 94, 99, 100, 109, 167–69, 179, 199–201, 211, 213
 Combs, Lew (conductor), 154, 155
 Connely (conductor), 28
 Conners, “Old Head”, 44, 55, 118
 Consist, 18, 165, 200
 Consolidation, 52, 61, 63, 78, 146
 Cook, Barnsey (friend), 26
 Cook, W. B. (road foreman), 143
 Coombs, Johnny (conductor), 131, 132
 Cowcatcher, 26, 160
 Cowen, Pokey (engineer), 44, 57, 58, 59, 60–62, 64, 174
 Cramer, Bert (engineer), 81
 Cramer, Bert, 81
 Crosbie, Bob (engineer), 195, 198, 230, 234
 Crown sheet, **95**,
 Cuprum, Utah, 113–15, 119, 138, 140, 191–94
 Daily, Jim (engineer), 72–74
 Daley (engineer), 166, 167
 Davis, Bobby (brakeman), 154, 155
 Dead line, **38**, 49, 76, 77
 Deadhead, 56, 63, 66, 74, 94, 120, 126, 137, 208, 228
 Deadly split, 12
 Dean, O. S. (engineer), 84, 85
 Deerman, Frank (engineer), 195
 Delany (engineer), 110, 111
 DeLong, Palmer (engineer), 116, 117
 Denver, Colorado, 77, 125, 167, 168, 223, 224, 239
 Derailing spur, 18, 158, 159
 Devenish, Tim (fireman), 218–20
 Dick lead, **58**
 Dickerson (engineer), 126, 127
 Dog, 10, 11, 25, 33, 56, 63, 129, 147, 179
 Dog catching, **56**, 63, 99, 179
 Double heading, 12, 35, 125, 126, 135
 Double track, 140
 Doubling the hill, **55**, 117, 148
 Drag, 50, 92, 93, 96, 98, 108, 121, 133, 145, 149, 153, 162, 164, 165, 175, 199, 214, 217, 220, 228, 232
 Dutchtown, Utah, 11
 Dyet, Curley (engineer), 63–66, 68, 165
 Dynamiter, 233
 Dynamiting, 182, 233, 235
 Eleven hundred, 55, 72, 95, 99, 100, 113–15, 133, 142, 147, 156, 168, 186, 189, 207, 228
 Eureka, Utah, 11–15, 17, 20, 21, 24, 116, 165, 167, 225
 Extra board, 49, 63, 66, 126, 134, 135, 164, 181, 183, 193
 Extra east, 51, 176
 Extra west, 67, 187
 Fairfield, Utah, 1–3, 5, 26, 27
 Fairview, Utah, 184, 185
 Fay, Pat (fireman), 238
 Fire door, 22, 35, 52, 60, 61, 73, 101, 102, 111, 143, 208
 Fire ring, 55, 121, 143
 Fireclay, Utah, 71
 Firedoor, 59, 73, 74, 88, 141, 143, 150, 201
 Fisher (engineer), 56
 Fisher Brewery, 70