

Yankee Hill Historical Society

www.YankeeHillHistory.com

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P.O. Box 4031, Yankee Hill, Ca 95965

Yankee Hill Dispatch

The Yankee Hill Dispatch is normally published once per year. There was no Dispatch published in 2016 due to the effort required to create our new virtual museum website. During that same period, we did extensive research for a three part series to be published in 2017 on the Western Pacific Railroad and its association with the Big Bend area and the town of Pulga.

This first issue in 2017 contains an article by Jim Lekas of McMinnville Oregon entitled "The Last Train From David". Jim contacted us a year ago after he read our 2014 article on Big Bend.. As a young man, Jim (with his father) visited a friend who lived at David on the opposite side of the river from Big Bend each summer from 1948 until 1962. Jim became a railroad enthusiast watching the trains pass Intake, David, Isaiah and Blinzig each summer. His last visit was in 1990. By then the train tracks were all gone and many of the places were underwater. His well documented photo collection of railroad activities along the Feather River as well as his pictures of David number in the hundreds. Here is his story of his summers at David. He provides insight into an area that very few people know about and his love for the trains that passed through each summer at David.

As an added treat, we have put a slide show on the YHHS webpage of Jim's pictures showing the trains and tunnels in the 1950s, 60s and the same locations in the 1970s and 1990 after the tracks were all gone and nature reclaimed the land. The slide show is in the theater on the website at www.yankeehillhistory.com.

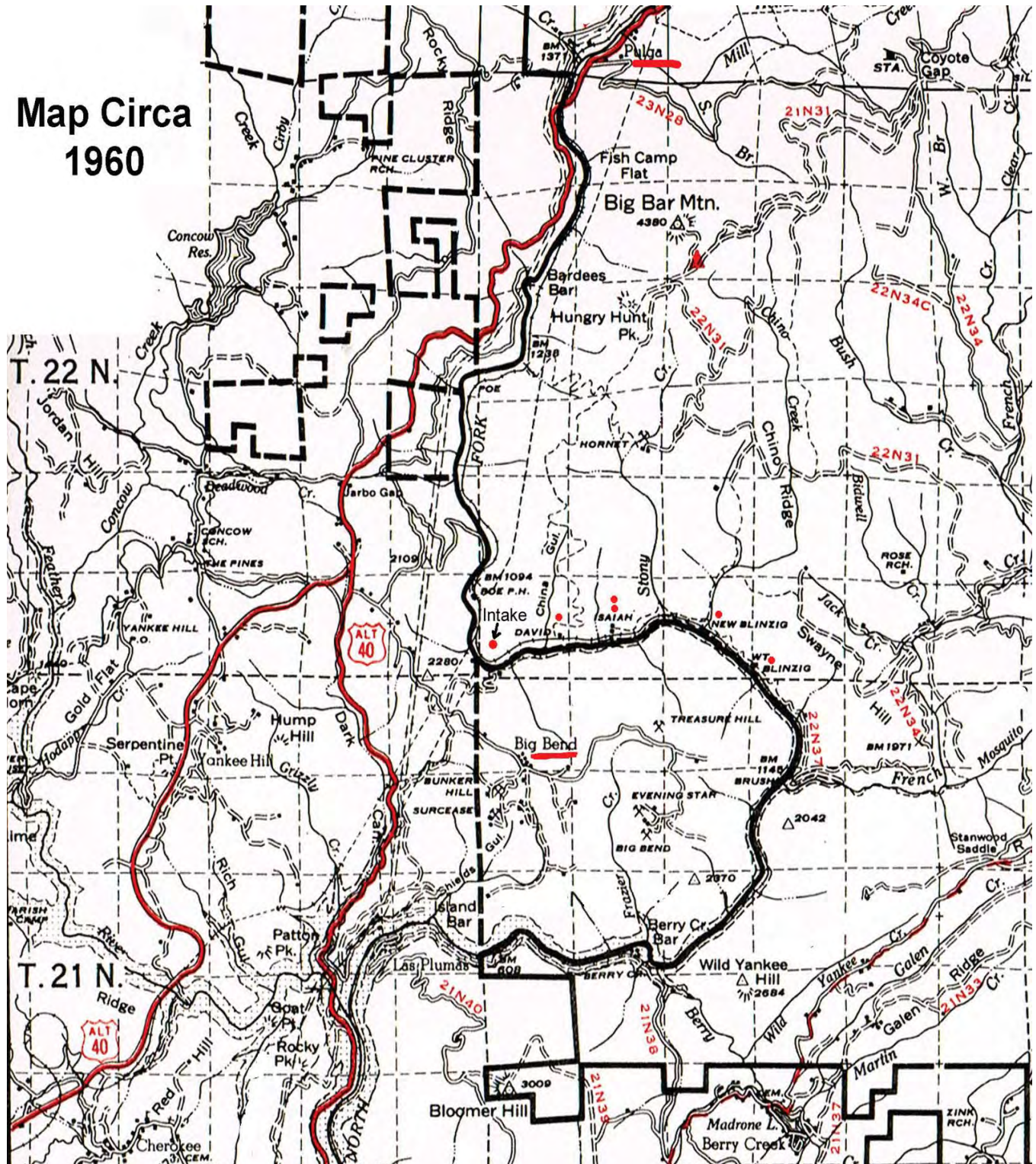
Part two of the story, a history of the Western Pacific Railroad and its association with Intake, David, Isaiah, Blinzig and Las Plumas, along with Jim's pictures of others that lived in the area will be published in May 2017. A third story about the history of Pulga, also associated with the Western Pacific Railroad, features early pictures provided by Ernie Reynolds whose family lived there in the 1920's, 30's and 40's. This article will be sent out in late summer 2017. We hope these stories, researched with the help of Jim Lekas and Ernie Reynolds, will be of interest to those interested in local history and railroad enthusiasts as well.

The Last Train From David

by Jim Lekas

David, California was located at milepost 231 on the former Western Pacific. David first appeared in the timetable November 25, 1923 as a 65-car siding. David was named for David C. Charlesbois, a Roadmaster for the railroad. David siding was extended to 98 cars in 1937; abandoned by the Western Pacific in 1963 because of the Oroville Line Change and removed entirely in 1967. I came to know David in 1948 and I would like to recount some of what I saw between 1948 and 1966.

Map Circa
1960



In 1948 when I was eleven years old and knew nothing about trains or streetcars except that I liked to watch the former and ride the latter, my father, Harry Lekas and a family friend were going from San Francisco to the Feather River Canyon on the train to visit another friend, Jim Kanaris who had a cabin, and I was going along too. Naturally I was excited. This was not my first train ride, but it is the one that I can really remember.

To get to Southern Pacific's Oakland Pier, one had to take a ferry. Our boat was to leave at 6:00 p.m. Standard Time. Well, 6:00 o'clock came and went and there we sat. We had to wait until 7:00 p.m. before we could go because it was Daylight Saving Time and railroads didn't run on Daylight Saving time. At that time, the railroads used Standard time all year round. In later trips, we took an earlier boat, but at this particular time, we didn't know any better.

When the time finally came to board the ferry, we gathered our belongings, food, clothes, et al, said good bye to my mother and headed for the boat. We were on the Sacramento, a Walking Beam steamer.

When we were on our way across San Francisco Bay, I was taken to see the Walking Beam, which could be viewed through glass from the second deck. It was unlike the other Walking Beam boat, the Eureka, whose viewing area was closed off. You had to go below deck to see the Walking Beam on the Eureka.



The Eureka, a former Northwestern Pacific ferry, has been on display at Aquatic Park in San Francisco for many years. When I watched the beam going up and down, I noticed that there was water in which the beam was splashing. Until I read George Harlan's San Francisco Bay Ferryboats, I did not know that this ferry had a jet condenser in which exhaust steam is mixed with salt water and pumped over into the Bay. The condenser cooled the steam from the boilers as it was exhausted from the ship. This had to be taken care of at the end of each trip.

When the ferry arrived at Oakland Pier, we gathered our belongings again and headed for our train. My first view of our train was a big beautiful Silver Streamliner. This was Train No. 40, Western Pacific's Exposition Flyer. As we walked past the cars, a trainman or porter would ask where we were going and

someone would answer “Oroville” and they would point toward the front of the train. Eventually, we came to the end of the streamlined cars and came to a green heavyweight coach that was next to the baggage car. This time when we were asked where we were going, the answer was, “David”, and we were ushered into the car. We, no doubt, left on the advertised, on time.

I don't know what was pulling our train, but it had to be one of the three Western Pacific passenger engines three F3s 801, 802 or 803.



Western Pacific 803 now located at Portola Train Museum

The letter suffixes came in a couple of years down the road. My experience with railroads up to this point was the Southern Pacific, the Northwestern Pacific because I lived in Marin County and it was the Home Road, the Santa Fe and the New York Central, thanks to an “O” Gauge model trainset. Up to this point, I did not know there was such a railroad as the Western Pacific, let alone the Exposition Flyer Train No. 40, the train on which I was riding.

This train only stopped at regular station stops between Oakland and Oroville and east of there made flag stops and stops to drop off and pick up US Mail. We did stop at Oakland and Niles for the regular station stop after which we headed for Niles Canyon. I remember there being a Club with a swimming pool to the left of the track and nothing else. There were no houses at all anywhere. I mention this because it is so built up now that it is impossible to believe that nearly 70 years before there was nothing there. It was dark by this time and the only thing that I can remember is we were at Oroville.



Oroville Train Station circa 1910

After we left Oroville, I gathered it wouldn't be long before we got to David. I do remember the Brakeman locking the restroom door before we made a station stop and unlocking it when we left the stop.

Soon the Conductor told us that we were almost there and we should get ready to detrain. The train stopped and we got off bag and baggage and No. 40 left at 12:48 a.m. PST, if it was on time. The trainman told us the engineer had overrun our stop and we had to walk back a little way. I didn't know where we were going. I was just hoping to get there. About this time, we heard an eastbound train coming and our friend said we should not be seen by the train crew. If they saw us, they would stop, which, of course was not true. When the freight passed us, we continued walking until we came to Isaiah. Isaiah was a ½ mile south of David and there were a few people living there and they had a post office there from 1919 until



Jim Kanaris and his cabin at David

1954. Lucky for us, there were people there waiting for No. 1, the westbound Royal Gorge that was due at 2:02 a.m. PST. They told us to go back where we started and look for a flag made from a pair of BVD's. That was where the trail to the cabin began. When we got back, we found the flag and it was exactly where we had gotten off the train.

We made it up the hill to the cabin where, by this time our host had awakened. My dad and his friends visited and I went to sleep. When I awoke that first morning, the first thing I heard was bang, bang, bang of the freight cars starting on a grade. This was all new to me as I don't think I ever saw a freight train start from a stopped position. Our vacation was wonderful. I saw Western Pacific's Big Mallets 251, 253, 257 & 259 every day and I saw 256 eastward with a deadhead (empty cars) passenger train. When the Big Mallets were going up the 1% grade, one could hear them coming for several minutes before they made an appearance. The smoke shot way up into the air and then they were gone. All I had left to do was count the cars on the train. At that time, there were many refrigerator cars on the train, the loads going east and the empties going west.



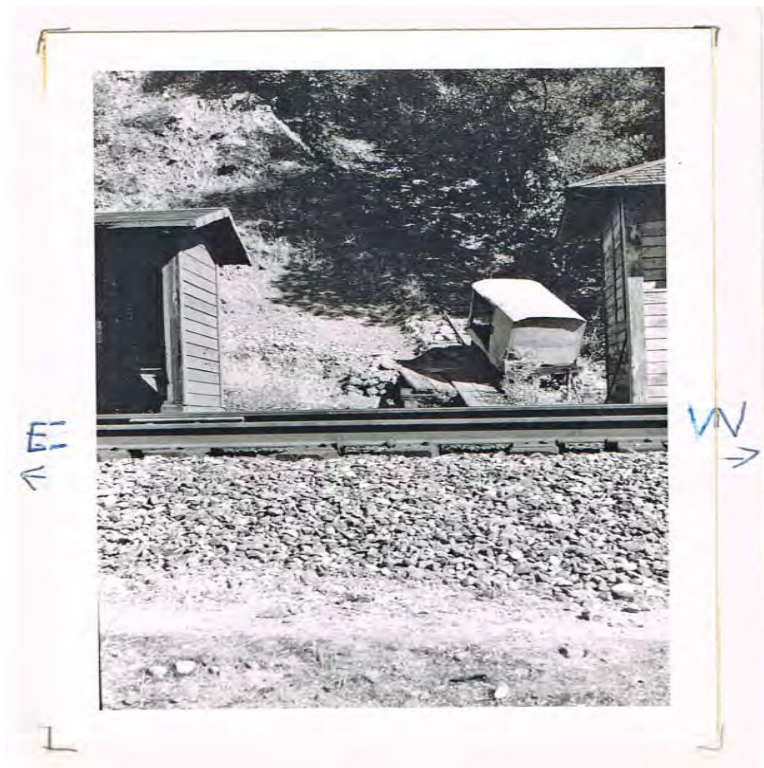
Western Pacific Mallet

I also saw the Royal Gorge train, which was soon after replaced by new Zephyrette going east in the afternoon and the Oro-Keddie Local all with steam, and some freights were pulled with green FT diesels. No. 39, the Exposition Flyer passed each day too. It was very quiet going downgrade with a diesel.

We walked to Isaiah every day to the post office to check for mail. The postmaster was a Mrs. Rice, who also had a little store where one could buy canned food. Naturally I always hoped a train would come along while we were out for our walks. This area, being Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) Territory by a dispatcher at Keddie, had signals at each end of the siding so we knew when a train was coming.



Isaiah Stop 1962, community was up the hill, see small tram car to transport goods to the community.



Isaiah stop 1957

All too soon it was time to go home. On the return, we went only to Sacramento to visit my aunt and god-mother. My dad and I left and our friend stayed longer. We flagged No. 1 with an oil lantern. The big steam engine braked its train of heavyweight cars to a halt. We got on the train and the 2-8-2 took off for Oroville.

The following summer, I was chomping at the bit to go back to David on the train. This year my dad wanted to get to Oroville in daylight so we could buy provisions, which we had shipped on the Oro-Keddie Local No. 96. Rather than ride the brand-new California Zephyr to Oroville and the Royal Gorge the rest of the way, we took the bus from San Francisco to Oroville. We got there too early and we actually saw the eastbound California Zephyr pass Oroville. We had the rest of the day to kill. It was finally time for Train No. 2, the Royal Gorge, to arrive. No. 2 had 4-8-2 No. 179 on the point when it came to town with its heavyweight train. It probably swapped it for a 2-8-2 for its trip to Portola. We got aboard and we could not find a seat, so we sat in the vestibule of the first coach and hoped the Conductor would find us, collect our tickets and stop the train at David. We got a good dose of smoke when we went through Tunnel No.4. The Conductor finally came through and assured us that he would let us off where we wanted.

1949 was the same as the previous year, except there were a lot fewer steam engines pulling the freights. Diesels pulled the California Zephyr in both directions as well as most of the freights. Steam was used on the Oro-Keddie Local and the Royal Gorge, which now ran at night and made all of the stops between Oakland and Salt Lake City. This year we also returned home on the bus.

The question of how the cabin at David came to be was told and retold over the years. Let me tell you what I remember: David was located at the top end of the Big Bend one mile from Intake. About one mile as the crow flies from Intake. There was a goat ranch on Big Bend Road where Mr. Bill Diamond raised his goats and made some terrific cheese. In 1947, some Greek men from San Francisco spent a few days at the goat ranch deer hunting. They walked five miles down a PG&E road (Pacific Gas & Electric) to Intake, crossed the river and roamed around the hills around David. They came across a spot where Indians had lived years before and had planted fruit trees. The trees were now mature and provided much shade. The place was almost level and there was plenty of water available. The men, who were of retirement age or retired, said that this would be a good place to build a cabin. Thus, the idea was born. They went to Oroville and ordered the lumber needed and had it shipped on the Oro-Keddie Local. When it was delivered, they carried it up the hill and built a one-room cabin about 8 x 8 with a lean to on one side made with corrugated metal sides and roof.

In late 1947, one of the founders had gone out early in the morning and shot a deer. He was seen by the Section Gang on their way to work sitting on a rock with a deer around his neck. When they were heading for the Section House that afternoon and when they passed the same spot, the man and the deer were still there. He had had a heart attack and died on the spot. The sheriff was notified and he came and took the body away.

At the same time or shortly thereafter, the other cabin dweller, a man named Mike was told by his doctor to take it easy and don't eat too much. He didn't pay too much attention to the doctor. On his last night on earth, he ate a large plate of macaroni and that was all. He died that night and the sheriff was called again.

In the spring of 1948, our friend Jim took over the cabin, which was on PG&E land. We had a permit to "squat". He lived at David from March until November when he went back to San Francisco for the winter. The first winter he went back to San Francisco, he left the cabin fully stocked and ready for spring. The



Jim Kanaris 1951

next spring, he got back in the middle of the night and went to bed. In the morning, he went outside and built a fire and went in to get something to eat. Imagine his shock when he found the place picked clean. He told us everything was gone; the guy had even scraped the sugar bowl. He went to Isaiah and got some food until his order from Oroville arrived. From that time on, he hid only enough food behind the firewall inside the cabin until his order from Oroville was delivered. He later found out it was Martin Tunney who broke into the cabin and stole his provisions. We called the place The Greek Village.



Cook Stove, Clothesline and Table at the David Cabin

In 1950, our plans were postponed because of a railroad strike on the WP. We left on the first number 2 when the strike was settled. The first two times we rode the train, each was long. We were surprised to see a two-car train waiting at Oakland Pier. It was a Heavyweight Baggage Car and a Heavyweight Coach. My dad and I took an early boat, so we had plenty of time before the train left. The power was not on the train when we got on but when it did arrive, it was steam. The one coach was full and I wondered why they didn't use two coaches for the trip. When we got to South Sacramento, we picked up another car, which I thought was a coach, but it was placed in front of the Baggage Car. I later found out the car was a Railway Post Office (RPO) that ran from South Sacramento to Winnemucca, Nevada dropping off and picking up closed pouches of mail at remote locations.

One incident on the 1950 trip was a passenger was carrying a shopping bag with a bottle of wine in it. Somehow, he hit the steel part of the coach seat and the bottle broke and there was a puddle of wine in the aisle. We watched the wine go up and down the aisle depending on the grade. No idea when or who cleaned up the mess.

Another incident is we had a shower at David. A ¼ inch pipe was cut into a ditch from the spring where we got our water. When you wanted a shower, you removed a plug and there was your water. We then stand under the water and wash off. An alternative to the shower was to heat water on the stove, put it in a tub and take a warm bath. One summer afternoon I was under the cold water when I heard a new train horn. There was no possible way for me to see what was going by. Drat! Later I found out it was the brand-new Budd Car, probably No. 376.

September 15, 1950, the Royal Gorge was replaced by the Zephyrette. We rode the Budd Car from Oakland Pier to David and back to Sacramento in 1951; 1952 found me getting my first California Zephyr ride. I traveled from Oakland to Sacramento and stayed with my aunt and godmother for a few days. I was picked up and driven to near the end of a PG&E Road that led to the Intake Dam. From this point, we walked into the camp site. On this route, we would pass Ransom Clark's cabin before we got to the river where we crossed on planks laid on the top of the many boulders in the river. The 1953 trip on No. 2 was interesting in that we had several empty Pullman cars being deadheaded to Salt Lake City. On this train, the Western Pacific only used two units to pull the empty cars and the Zephyrette. I remember the crew saying that the Zephyr weighed less than this train and it had more power so we ran late that night. 1954, 1955 and 1956 were round trips to and from San Francisco.



Starting in 1954, the schedule of No. 2 called for the departure of the ferry from San Francisco to be 4:30 p.m. instead of 7:30 p.m. This ferry was shared with the passengers of Southern Pacific's Streamliner, the City of San Francisco. Train No. 102 left at the same time as WP No. 2. It must have been quite a sight to see the Budd Car and the Alcos running next to one another until the Alcos turned left to head for Oakland's 16th Street station.



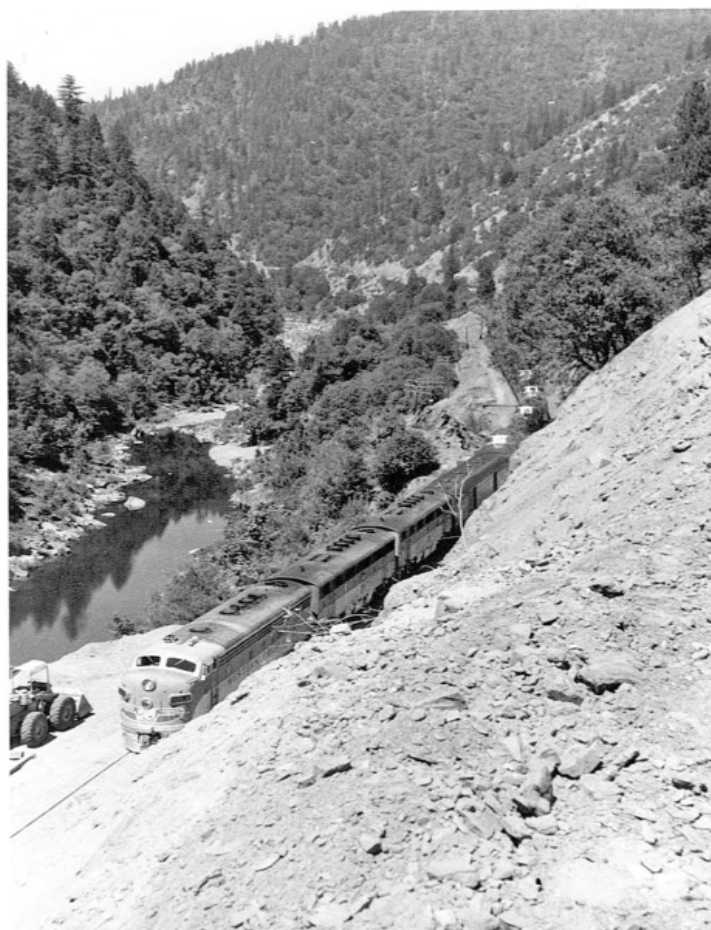
WP Alcos Engine

Photo by Mike Mucklin ©2011 Feather River Rail Society



WP Budd Car

Photo by Michael Mucklin
©2012 Feather River Rail Society



August 1957, California Zephyr Photo by Jim Lekas

In 1957, there were four of us on Train No. 2., also included on this trip was a Nevada Northern fan trip. The car next to the Budd Car was one of the Western Pacific's Lounge Cars in the 651, 652 or 653 series and there was coffee available if one could climb between the cars, which was easy. The westbound Zephyrette, No. 1 had this trip returning on the next trip.

1958 found us moving from Marin County to Lodi, California, which is near Stockton. That same year our friend Jim Kanaris died at David. By this time, I was working and could not drop everything and go with my dad. On occasion, he took the train from Thornton by himself and stayed awhile and came home. One weekend in 1959, a co-worker and I rode the Zephyrette from Thornton to David and back.

In late 1959, I received a letter from the President of the United States that started out with the word "Greeting". Yes, I was drafted into the Army.

On April 22, 1960, the WP petitioned the ICC to discontinue the Zephyrettes citing losses. Neither my mom or dad drove an automobile so there was no way for them to get to or from David other than by train. On the morning of October 1, 1960, the two of them flagged the last train from David. I still have the cash receipt for their trip home.



My parents Harry and Eugenia Lekas at the cabin at David 1958

David was on the Old Line of the WP and when the Oroville Line Change was completed in October, 1962, the WP gave up the track from Oroville to Intake in favor of the shorter New Line. The Old Line was used by the Feather River Railway from Land to Intake, where it interchanged cars with the WP.

Trains numbered 1 & 2 both ran at night starting in 1949 with the inauguration of the California Zephyr. So it was a rare treat to see No. 1 in daylight. The first time must have been in 1952 or 1953 when the train went by with 2 FTs pulling a Baggage Car, the Budd Car and another heavyweight car. The second time was in August 1955 when it ran 9 hours late.

There were some missed picture opportunities that I still think about: I should have pictures of the "make up" California Zephyr. This was the day after No. 17 derailed near Hayward on some soft track that had just been resurfaced. I also watched Santa Fe F units going past during the Tehachapi Earthquake detour, but I neglected to use my camera. I can only remember on occasion that a freight train was in the siding for a meet with the California Zephyr going in the same direction for a run-around-meet. Probably the ultimate picture would be in 1950 when the westbound California Zephyr hit a slide near Gerlach and steam

power was used from Portola to Oakland and back to Oroville the following day where it was refueled and serviced for another trip.

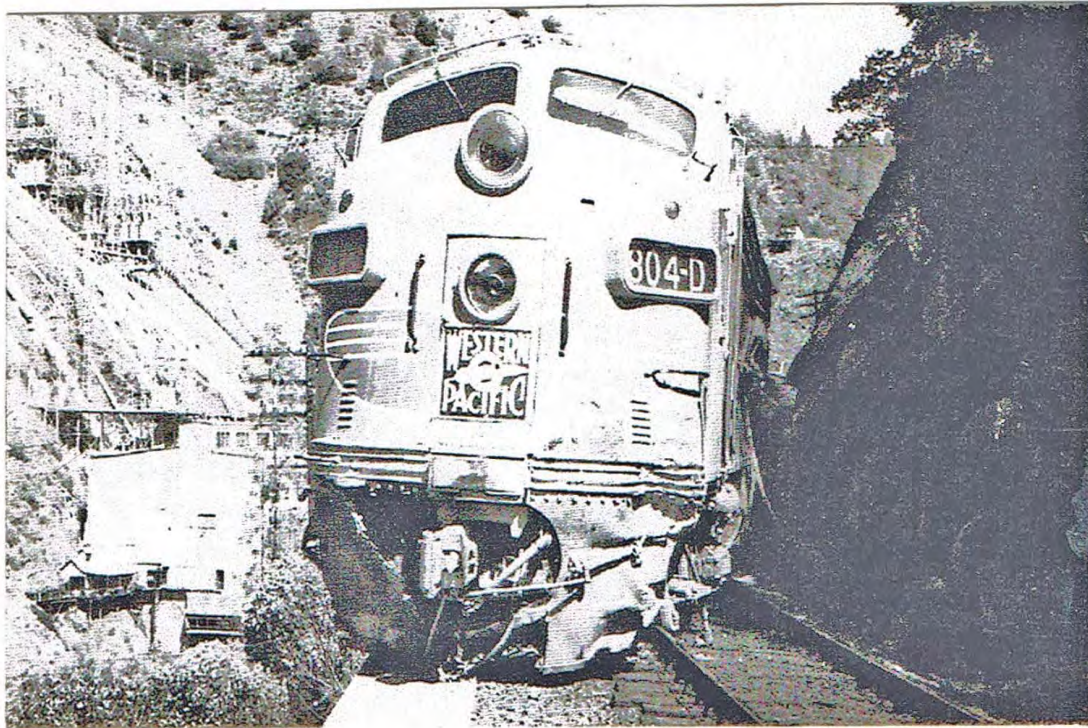
In 1957, the eastbound California Zephyr was hit by a slide near Blinzig (Mile Post 229.1). This spot is now the top of the Oroville Lake. If the lake is full, the old right of way disappears from view. There is, however, a road from Berry Creek that cuts in to the old ROW at this point and one can drive as far as the first washout but no further than Stoney Creek where the trail and right-of-way have all been washed away.



Feather River Canyon August 17, 1957
Milepost 229.1 Scene of slide three months earlier



Train at Blinzig, Mile Post 229.1 Sect 29
Train 805-A, 6-8-1961



Train Hit a Rock at Las Plumas, Derailed the Engine 3-10-1960

Sometime in the 1950's George Moak turned his cows loose into the Feather River Canyon to graze. Jim Kanaris was afraid that if they got into the garden they would never leave because of all the greens in the garden, so he strung barb wire around the area. The cows were on or near the railroad track, but they, as far as I know never came up the hill to Jim's place. The last time I was there in 1990, the barb wire was all that was left at the cabin site.



Jim Lekas At David In July 1990

Yankee Hill Historical Society

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Messilla Valley School House built in 1856

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Comments:

YHHS Happenings

Yankee Hill Historical Society Web Page: You can visit our web page at www.yankeehillhistory.com. The web page has something for everyone, a Theater, a Book Store, past Newsletters and extensive on-line Archives for those who choose to do their own research. **The new on-line Book Store is OPEN!** You can pay by check or use PayPal A major update of the information on the webpage will be made in late March. Stop by and enjoy!

April 22nd Fundraiser Tea, Sandwiches and a Presentation! The event will be held Saturday, Apr 22, 2017 from 11 a.m.to 1:30 at the Old Schoolhouse. Food will be served at your table by volunteers. The presentation will be on important women in the area's history. Tickets are \$20 and include a ticket to a raffle for a door prize. Seating is limited, **To make reservations call Marji Corey at (530) 534-3045.** The funds raised will help repair damage from the rain to the bathroom at the old school house. HOPE TO SEE YOU THERE!

Have a friend that might be interested in joining the Yankee Hill Historical Society, we've included a membership form just for them!

Officers and Contact Information

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