

# Railroad world abounds with interesting stories

Last week, a retired railroad employee stopped me and thanked me for the rail stories I occasionally write. That surprised me. New things occur daily in the railroad world. Each one of these would make a tantalizing story. Some of my favorite authors, in fact, write about nothing else but railroads. So much goes on in railroad-ing that I could do the same.

For instance, U.S. railroads average three derailments every day. That's 1,000 or more a year. People tend to doubt this, yet it's factual.

In early April this year, Union Pacific (UP) alone had three of them in less than 24 hours. While each made local news, you didn't hear much about them as no one got hurt.

One occurred on the Great Plains many miles from any town.



Walt Mack

Cleaning up 11 or 12 loads of grain took a couple of days. The event made the nearest weekly newspaper but nothing more except the required reports to various agencies.

Another happened in a Texas terminal yard and took most of a day to correct.

The third took place in California on a single-track main through mountains and over canyons. To fix it took several days of around-the-clock effort. To keep things moving during the reconstruction, trains

were rerouted many miles which caused late arrivals of a day or two. It made the national news yet directly affected few of us.

The U.S. has more miles of usable rails than any other nation. Most world railroads are owned by the state. Some are leased to private firms who keep them as required by the lease. But government agencies run most of such rails.

U.S. freight lines are owned by private firms with stockholders who expect dividends. American passenger railroads, on the other hand, have public ownership but rarely own the rails they run on.

One of my sons, an authority on Japan and its geography, notes that Japanese rails are owned by the state. Since they have no need to show a profit, the state can and does dictate their operation. He told me that once

when the high-speed rail left a station about 20 seconds late, the government ran a two-page newspaper apology the next day. That's hard to even imagine.

The rail empire that competes most closely with UP is the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF). These two Class I giants operate from Chicago to the Pacific Ocean and south to the Gulf. Both roads have major yards and other facilities in the greater Kansas City area. Employees and retirees from both firms live in Leavenworth, city and county.

The Canadian Pacific Kansas City (CPKC) resulted from a recent Class I road pairing. It is the single rail line that connects Canada, the U.S. and Mexico. If President Donald Trump's decrees derail U.S. trade with either country, the CPKC

could end up hauling freight between our neighbors over rails within and across the U.S. Sounds interesting to me.

At Eagle Pass, Texas, UP trains stopped on the bridge across the Rio Grande to exchange crews and power with Ferromex, the largest freight line in Mexico. As this operation took at least 40 minutes, vandalism and organized theft became problems during each exchange.

In an instance where reason prevailed, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CPB) decided that trained and certified Mexican crews could bring freights seven miles into the U.S. to the UP terminal. These crews get the same CPB and other certifications as UP crews get before they are allowed to work it. Their credentials are inspected each trip.

Meanwhile, the BNSF has grown into a rail

enterprise worthy of recognition as an empire. When the line says it's a consolidation of 390 or more railroad companies, it isn't kidding. I decided to check out this claim and found it true. Railroads were the first conveyances in history that could outrun a horse in sustained speed on land. Anyone with some cash wanted in on the action.

The BNSF began in 1849 as the Aurora Branch Line which chugged its way from Batavia, Illinois, to Turner Junction (now West Chicago). There it connected to the Galena and Chicago Union RR established the previous year which became the UP. The two lines have since served the nation west of Chicago. And have done it well.

*Walt Mack is a lifelong historian and lives in Leavenworth.*

## Employee Continued from A1



Tim Urban grills hamburgers Thursday outside of the Leavenworth County Courthouse. The hamburgers were being cooked for a county employee appreciation day. The event was paid for with donations. Urban is an employee of the county's GIS Department. *John Richmeier*

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**GUEST SPEAKER**

Kathryn West, national chair for the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution, America 250! Committee, was the guest speaker for Kiwanis Club of Leavenworth weekly luncheon. *Cindy Henry*

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