

Some Central Pacific Consists of the Late 1870s: the Western Division

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This study, prepared for personal reference, compiles data from several Central Pacific documents showing operations on the Central Pacific's Oakland based Western Division in the latter 1870's. The material is taken from the Western Pacific file in the collection of John Signor. In what follows, source documents are identified and then reviewed.

Dispatchers Sheet Western Division Thursday October 17, 1878

This sheet chronicles train operations on a single day between Oakland Wharf and Tracy, California of Central Pacific's Western Division. Tracy is midway between Oakland and Sacramento on the original Western Pacific route.¹ The territory traversed, on the older, original line between Tracy and Oakland Wharf is approximately 71 miles in length and includes the climb over Livermore Pass with its grade of 53 feet to the mile. With the opening of the Bantas line in September 1868, the Livermore route had become a secondary – thought still busy -- line and relegated to local passenger and accommodation freight service.

On Thursday October 17, movements of nine trains eastward and nine trains westward were recorded. Odd numbers identified eastward trains: 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 31, and 33.² Westward trains, by contrast were numbered 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34 with a “second” 28 after a crew change between San Jose and Niles and a special freight from Livermore to Oakland Wharf.

For these 15 identifiable trains, only seven locomotives were utilized that day. These were Central Pacific nos. 66, 118, 102, 168, 174, 185 and 210. Locomotives and engine crews ran to Tracy or Niles, then were turned and sent back to their originating terminal with a differently numbered train. Apparently the eastern end of the division, the territory between Sacramento and Tracy dispatched from Sacramento was operated in similar fashion. Most trains were short and did not require helper service over Altamont Pass. It should also be noted that the Oakland Wharf dispatcher oversaw traffic on the short branch line between Niles Junction and San Jose.

The day's first local passenger train provides some insight into operating patterns of the time. This train, #21, powered by CP locomotive #66 with coaches only, reached Oakland depot at 7:33 am and proceeded to Niles. Here the train number was changed to #23, and freight cars added to the consist. At Tracy the locomotive was turned and the crew with their engine (now renumbered as train #30), departed westward from Tracy at

¹ By 1878 this original route over Livermore Pass had been largely supplanted by the “Bantas mainline” running connecting Oakland to Tracy by way of a recently completed water-level route through Martinez.

² Train 21 was unusual in that, following an engine crew change at Niles Junction, a train bearing the same number was used for a geographic West run and 21 connecting from Niles to San Jose and a special freight.

1:50pm. It was now as an all-freight (4 cars) but until Niles. Here, freight cars were replaced with passenger cars (one baggage and two coaches), and train renumbered as #32. The locomotive and crew that had begun the day in Oakland as no. 21, reached Oakland Wharf at 6:40 PM. Adding in transit time from the Oakland Point roundhouse to and from the end of Oakland wharf, the crew had put in a 12 hours of work.

Typical of shorter runs was the day's work of CP Engine No. 112, a locomotive assigned to the territory between its roundhouse at Niles and the joint CP/SP depot in San Jose. In a dispatcher's sheet in the Signor collection dated September 18 1878, the train pulled by this locomotive departed Niles for San Jose at 5 AM (1 baggage car, 1 coach, a few freight cars), began its return from San Jose at 7:35 arriving at Niles Junction at 8:48 AM. Passengers then transferred to train No. 28, Niles to Oakland Wharf [times not shown], while the engine proceeded on to Tracy as the morning passenger local. In the afternoon it returned to Niles carrying freight only. In both instances the same motive power was used in both passenger and freight service.

The Banta[s] line commenced operations on Sept. 2, 1878 a few weeks earlier than the train sheets. The new route avoided the steep climb over Altamont Pass and reduced travel time by approximately half an hour. That Overland trains are being run on this route is indicated by the small size of eastbound passenger consists (all of which seem to be locals) shown on the dispatcher's sheet running on the Livermore route. A listing of all eastbound passenger trains for Thursday, October 17, shows:

No. 21: no consist indicated, but runs only to Niles. Train become No. 23 from Niles to Tracy 1, composed of 1 baggage car and 2 coaches.

No. 25: 1 baggage, 1 smoker, 1 coach only to Niles.

No. 31: to Livermore 1 baggage 2 coaches

September 18, shows the same: no through express passenger trains. The one train connecting with Tracy is a mixed freight and passenger from Niles and not operating on a connecting schedule. Clearly the heavy action has been moved to Bantas.

Dispatchers Sheet Western Division Sunday, September 29, 1878

On Sunday, September 29, a number of heavier passenger trains were operated over the Livermore route. Apparently there has been some kind of break in the new Bantas line and traffic is being routed east by way of Altamont Pass. The dispatcher's sheet (with consists called out in abbreviations) provides details for the following consists:

Train 1 'The Atlantic Express' [eastbound]

Has 1 m[ail], 1 x[press], 1 bg, 1 em[igrant], 2 s, 1 sm[oker], 3 c[oac]h

Train 3

Has 1 m[ail], 1 x, 1 em[igrant], 1 s, 1 sm[oker], 1c[oac]h

Train 2 departed Tracy at 3:02 PM with 4 coaches and 4 other cars.

Train 6 inbound (consist not indicated) shows a connection with the Los Angeles train at Lathrop (this appears to be the through train from Sacramento to Oakland Wharf).

Conclusion

What is remarkable about the data reviewed is the intensity of business and the obvious effort to run the railroad in a cost-effective manner. Railroad managers, to get the job done, were clearly attempting to make the most of the motive-power and human assets they possessed.

Larry Mullaly, May 30, 2008

Courtesy Larry Mullaly.

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