

Reflections of Travel on the WSSYPRR

The Rev. Dr. Orville E. Lanham

September 1954, March-April 1955

For Dr. Ivan Doig

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As we approached the cut near the crossing on the Ringling Martinsdale Road we noticed that the cut was full of snow! About a foot and a half. The train gradually began to loose speed as it was an uphill grade! Soon we made no progress at all! The 44 ton engine sat on the rails with the

wheels spinning! Just like a car in a snow drift! So, the decision was made to cut off the stock cars, proceed to Ringling, then return and take them back. This would mean taking only a few at a time. So, the cars were cut off and we began to make progress up the hill. About 20 minutes later we were in sight of the 4 cars left on the main line. The wind was blowing about 40 mph, snow covered the tracks. I did not realize how helpless a railroad engine or railroad car is when there is snow on the track. The flange on the wheels is seldom more than 4 inches. That is all that keeps the train on the track! With the track covered, the engine and train could easily go on "the ground" or derail. So, Blackie and the other fireman took their grain shovels, (which fortunately were standard equipment) and began to flange the track. They could only do this for about 10 minutes at a time. We then proceeded to knock the cars over the top of the grade. It took about an hour. After we knocked them through, we could then push them to Ringling, and set them out there. The goal was then to return to the 'cut' and begin the laborious trip of bringing the other cars back. When we cut out the cars the cows were really bellering.

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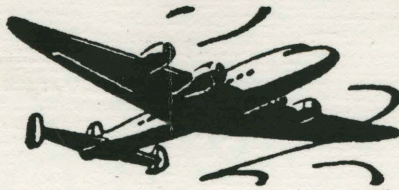
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23 December 92

Dear Ivan -

Christmas again. A note from WSS. Lots of Snow.
A Lost Hunter made National News a month ago - lost in
Park Hills Area & others.

Wishing you & Carol Peace in this Season & New
Year.

Enclosed some Grist for your House at Sky-Vol II -
Don't know what you will include. But leave Room
for the WSS & PRR - if you can.

In midst of Break. But have a new Computer.
So must wait again the Word Perfect Program. Learned it
4 years ago. But at I did not have a Computer for my
office. Used the main frame Program at our Computer Lab -
Sure beats typing on old machines.

Weather here is Cold - Partly Cloudy - 10° with
wind chill.

Peace -
Orville

PS. This is an Uncorrected Draft! Excuse Typo's!

Dear Ivan.

Thanks for the card, and news of new book. I am working at my terminal making a review of a new book on the structure and mission of the church in the modern age. Really exciting. Taking a break to get this out to you before I forget.....

Happy that my tome on the WSSYP RR generated some memories of life during your formative years...Yes, Ralph Jordan was second to Blackie Ransier... When Fred Colburn took his winter vacation, the railroad still ran.. Fred disliked the cold, and I don't blame him. He could enjoy life... help Russel in the Store, drive the truck on deliveries... or just sit by the fire...Then when spring came, like the new spring flower reborn, he could return to the railroad.As you remember when shoveling coal... it was a dirty job.The coal came in cars usually from the mines at Roundup. But it had to be shoveled in the bins, then transferred again by hand to the tender. I guess, your interests then did not project into the future when all the excitement of the environment would lead to such beautiful books about life in the West. At my age when I came to WSS, I could do things that I fantasized at a younger age. Also, there was the freedom to do that.

The new book sounds great. I am always gathering up resources in my feeble mind that might be of help to others. As you mention the Sixteen Mile area, when we were in Stanford in July, Tim had a copy of a book on the history of the Milwaukee Railroad.Some excellent photos, arranged by division. The book is published by the Kalmbach Company (Milwaukee or one of its suburbs). There is some information about experiences of the Railroad crews, especially the beauty, isolation, and good fishing. Your library can give more about title etc.

Another WSS story... Burt Hurwitz father in law was an electrician on the railroad... The father in law had worked with the Butte trolley company.. So, when the Milwaukee electrified, he was hired. He told me about making the 1st run on Train #15 from Deer Lodge to Harlow after all the electrical facilities were on line. They had to pull into a siding in the 16 mile canyon. But, there was a problem... The trolley wire in the siding was 4 inches above the pantograph that touched the wire for power.. So, How to An error would mean electrocution... So, they finally found a way to increase the height of the pantograph... Power, and movement back to the mainline.. I guess this was an example of American ingenuity.

Weather here today is extremely cold. The Alberta Clipper as they call it brought a lot of cold air...Temperature was a low for this winter.. Zero with wind chill of -Four. But it is 27 in Scottsbluff. Still have about 8" of snow on the ground. Our parish has a family at our conference center on the Platte near Fremont, Ne. Also commencement tomorrow.

Thanks again.. Did I write that Russel Edwards died in early

September? June is running the Store. Some discussion about
your cousin's Ethanol plant and pollution control permit, when
we were there. (weekend of the 20th September)

Peace...

Orville

Orville

Saw on TV Reports Rain in
Seattle. Have a former Stett
Person from here Also living there.