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The Union Pacific Railroad: In the late 1930s, Hollywood made a movie starring Joel McCrea called "Union Pacific." As I remember it, it was basically a story of Buffalo Bill shooting American Bison for the Union Pacific (UP) Railroad soon after the first transcontinental trains began operating between the east and California in 1869. Henry Tatnall, of Wilmington and Hockessin, told me his father, born in 1852, made this trip in 1872, and it was an adventure he never forgot.

Although the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe (AT & SF), the Northern Pacific, and the Great Northern certainly made their marks as transcontinental carriers in the years to come, there was something magical about "Union Pacific." Its "Overland Limited" was a famous train before the introduction of the "City" streamliners with the coming of diesel power in the late 1930s. Edward H. Harriman, president of the railroad, and his son Averill built and promoted the ski resort of Sun Valley, Idaho, served from UP's Portland line at nearby Shoshone, Idaho. The railroad also developed lodges at Bryce Canyon, Zion National Park, and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, all easily accessible from the Los Angeles line. In the several decades when summer rail tours were popular, UP published a tour booklet in which were listed western tours of from 10 days to one month in length. UP was indeed a model for passenger railroading.

Actually, the original Union Pacific never touched Chicago or other eastern cities, nor did it reach California. A railroad line had reached Omaha before the Civil War, so, a few years after the war ended, the newly-formed Union Pacific began building west from there. Shortly thereafter, California interests represented by that state's "big four," C. P. Huntington, Mark Hopkins, Charles Crocker, and Leland Stanford (all of whom had mansions on San Francisco's Nob Hill), formed the Central Pacific Railroad, and construction of a rail line pushed eastward from Sacramento. It is well documented that the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific met at Promontory Point, Utah, and the Golden Spike was driven there to make the connection on May 10, 1869. For the next 25 years at least, the action and growth in California was around the Bay Area; southern California came later.

I don't have an accurate account of which came first, but the growth of railroads in the United States was phenomenal during the last 30 years of the 19th century. The Southern Pacific (SP), soon becoming a huge railroad with a main line extending from New Orleans to Portland, Oregon through the major California cities, took over the Central Pacific with SP owning the railroad to its junction with UP at Ogden. UP built its own railroad from Ogden to Los Angeles, passing through Salt Lake City and the southern Utah parks. It also built a lengthy extension from the Overland Route in Wyoming across southern Idaho to the Columbia River and on to Portland.

Featuring good meals at Harvey Houses along its route, the AT & SF, extended its railroad to nearly 2,200 miles from Chicago to Los Angeles. The Northern Pacific was built from Duluth on Lake Superior to Tacoma on Puget Sound in 1888 (later the "main line" in the east started at St. Paul). Great Northern followed suit with Jim Hill's railroad connecting St. Paul with Seattle. There were other ways a rail traveler could go on name trains from Chicago to the west coast, such as the Exposition Flyer on a combination of the Burlington, the Denver and Rio Grande Western, and the Western Pacific, and the Gold Coast Limited, which used the Rock Island to Tucumcari, New Mexico, and the Southern Pacific through El Paso on the New Orleans line.

The "Chief" on the Santa Fe gave the most competition to Union Pacific on the Chicago-Los Angeles run. With the coming of diesel streamliners in the late 1930s, a new era of long-distance railroading began. The Santa Fe's "Super Chief" (an all first-class train) and its "El Capitan" (a reserved-seat all-coach train) each advertised a schedule of under 40 hours for the 2,200-mile run. These trains were matched by Union Pacific, whose "City" streamliners also made history. The "City of San Francisco" ran from Chicago to Oakland in less than 40 hours, as did the "City of Los Angeles" to the destination of that name. The "City of Portland" competed with the "Empire Builder" of the Great Northern, the "North Coast Limited" of the Northern Pacific, and the "Olympian Hiawatha" of the Milwaukee Road for service to the Pacific Northwest. UP, however, had no rails east of Council Bluffs (Omaha), and used Chicago and Northwestern tracks on the eastern section of the run. Replacing the Exposition Flyer on its three railroads was possibly the most famous of all the western trains, the "California Zephyr," which provided unmatched

scenery of the Rockies and the Sierras viewed from its several dome cars, but this train took about 46 hours from Chicago to Oakland over the Burlington, Rio Grande, and Western Pacific.

“City” trains on the UP also had shorter runs like the “City of Denver” (Chicago to Denver), where competition was from the “Denver Zephyr” on the Burlington and the Rock Island’s “Rocky Mountain Rocket.” Railroads’ names were kept in front of the public through their big-name long-distance passenger trains, but profitability was often from the freight business, and in this UP had few rivals. All the big railroads in this country have long since merged, and the Union Pacific-Southern Pacific merger has been highly successful, but not for its passenger service. Union Pacific is still a magical name.