REFERENCE SHEET NO. 260

DATE: March 1998

GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Founded 1973

Memories from Robert H. Shober

as related to and transcribed by Martin Evoy, and others of my friends

A Boy with Swedish Parental Roots Grows Up Surrounded by the Great Northern Railway

The Great Northern Railway Historical Society and others have asked me to make some comments about life as a railroader or some such thing. Speaking in Minneapolis, Minnesota, I take this as an opportunity to present my own thoughts of looking back after some forty-five years of railroading. These are some of the remembrances which I hold most dear.

I retired from BN in 1981, as Regional Vice President and General Manager and now it is 1998. I am very proud to say that I worked on the Great Northern Railroad for most of my career and the BN for the closing chapter. To better understand my background, I should mention that both of my grandfathers worked for the Eastern Minnesota Railway, a predecessor of the Great Northern Railway. This was back in the 1890's. My grandfather, Sven Johnson Shober, was the first section foreman at Hazel, South Dakota. He had emigrated from Smoland, Sweden in 1883. My Dad came over a year later, at which time

he was thirteen years old. My Dad, John Shober, went to work on the section for his father at Hazel, South Dakota at that tender age.

In the meantime, my other grandfather, August Holm, worked in the roundhouse at Hinckley, Minnesota. He was working there prior to the great Hinckley fire which occurred on September 1, 1894. He had a number of visits with James J. Hill in those days, and he certainly was very impressed by our great leader.

Back to the Shober side. Let me simply say that when my Dad was young, he had been impressed with the older people in Sweden who insisted that young people would get into trouble with the trolls under the various bridges in Sweden if they didn't behave themselves. My Dad said that when he was about ten or eleven years old, he peddled bakery goods through the various farmlands, and whenever he encountered a bridge, he said, "I'd simply shut my eyes and run as fast as I could over the bridge. Never once did a troll get me."

It was odd to him that the first day of working on the section at Hazel, South Dakota, he was told by his father and some other section men, that they were to go to work that day scalping the weeds under a wooden trestle, which was really more like an equalizer **(refer to Note 1 at end of this story)** but was high enough so one had to go underneath it with a scythe. My Dad was absolutely petrified! He said, "I just can't go under there!" His father and the older men said, "What's the matter with you?" He said, "Well, I am not going to go under that bridge, for I will have to contend with the trolls."

Well, my Dad wasn't always that naive, but he said that it was quite an accomplishment to learn the art of railroading when you had only gone to school about five years over in Sweden and none at all here in the States

Fortunately, because his Dad was the foreman, he could at least converse with him in Swedish, and ultimately he did learn how to read and write. My heart always went out for my Dad when it was time to make the material sheets and the time rolls out when he

became a District Roadmaster because he had to learn the art of administration, which was a far cry from his true capabilities. Never-the-less, he learned and became quite adequate at it.

I also remember my Dad telling me that one day, after he had been in the States three or four or five years, and he himself was made an assistant section foreman **(refer to Note 2 at end of this story)** he decided to join the Masons. At that time, on the Great Northern Railway, most of the higher-ups, as my Dad always referred to the officers, were predominantly Catholic. A Swedish Lutheran boy, like himself, had to be careful. So when he came home one evening and told his Dad and Mother that he had joined the Masons, my grandfather said, "Now you will never get ahead on the Great Northern." Well my Dad said that his father (my grandfather), then went to the woodbox, took a big, heavy stick, and hit my father over the right ear. In so doing, he broke the ear drum; my father could never, ever hear again from his right ear.

Years passed, of course, and Mary Hill, who was a devout Catholic, did so much good in the communities in Minnesota, particularly in St. Paul. Jim Hill, himself, wasn't particularly active in the Catholic Church. Never-the-less, his influence all over Minnesota, to start with, and ultimately all across the whole United States, was certainly very clearly evident.

Those, of course, were days of long ago; such things as discrimination and the like were rarely talked about. Later on in my career, I was called upon, actually after I retired, to give evidence in court as to our discrimination on the Burlington Northern against some minorities, both black and women. It was very difficult to do this, because I felt so strongly that the railroads had been the only friend, the only genuine employer of the black people, as long as I could remember. I had some very dear, dear friends who were black who worked with me on the private cars or business cars or who worked in other jobs on the railroad, and they were capable, loyal, great railroad people. (**Refer to Note 3 at end of this story)** Yet in the eyes of current day people, we were found to have discriminated against these people, not in not hiring them, but rather in not promoting some of our black people. I really, genuinely felt bad when we lost that suit and we were ordered to pay sixty million dollars to the people who were the claimants. I genuinely felt that if anyone had a friend in the turn of the century and up through the 1930's. or 40's, it was the railroad who had befriended the black people.

I chuckle a bit when I think of the days when we lived in the section house. I was too young. We moved shortly after I was born to our own house. I think I was two years old when we moved. My mother, bless her soul, knew all about railroading because my Dad's office was upstairs in the section house. In those days, of course, there was nothing but coal smoke and cinders around the yard, and every section man and other railroad people would enter our house. Even though she had a big rug out in the front to wipe their feet, the men tracked in so much oil and cinders and dirt that my mother was forever scrubbing the steps and the house itself. They, of course, had to walk through our living room, which was a sanctuary as far as my mother was concerned.

We weren't allowed by my father to pick up the coal, which everybody else in town was doing. There was a lot of coal moving. Oddly, the coal moved from the eastern coal mines to places like Superior, Wisconsin, on a boat, and then transloaded for the south and the west by rail. That is just the reverse, of course, of what is happening now, when the coal from Colorado and Montana, and the like, moves east to the ports of Duluth and Superior, and then is transloaded to a boat going east. Tempus fugit, I guess. So it is hard to figure out the vagaries of time as it effects railroad logistics.

Whatever the case, we, in our house, were told not to pick up the coal because my Dad felt that that was stealing something of the Company.

Incidentally, my Dad had such utter regard for the infallibility of the Great Northern Railway and particularly James J. Hill, that I can recall now that after he had retired in 1941 or 1942, he settled out in a farm that he and his father owned fifty, sixty, or seventy years down at Hinckley, Minnesota. I was in college and had just been drafted into the army and was home on a furlough and went out to the granary on his farm, and he said, "I want to ask you something - where in Hell did you find this No.2 scoop shovel that's got GN Railway markings? " Well I said. "Gees, I can hardly remember. I guess that I did keep the thing for my own use. When you moved down here it showed up." Remember, I was twenty-two years old by then. He said, "Let's go out to the swamp out here, and you take the shovel, and you throw it right in the middle of the water standing out there, because we are not going to be ever found having stolen anything from the Great Northern. At the same time he said. "I also found what I believe you

must have brought home- a padlock with GN marked on it, a Sleighmaker. “I had to admit that I thought 1 had. So that is the way that middle management looked at the railroad and at their leadership, with complete and utter respect.

Another incident that 1 can think back on in amazement is one day after my Dad had retired and I was home. He was taking a bath. As he was wiping himself off, 1 happened to look at him. and I noticed an indentation on his right thigh of some size. I asked him where he got such a mark. He said, "That is from my early days as a laborer at Hazel. South Dakota." 1 asked him what caused it. He said, "In those days, while we had pretty light. sixty pound rail, I was the youngest on the crew: we had no such things as rail tongs, and certainly not any crane. Everything was moved by hand. Whenever we were few in numbers on the section, two men would lift one end of the rail up, and because 1 was the youngest guy, I would put my right leg under the rail, and they would lay the rail on that leg and then use my leg as a fulcrum, shoving down so that the other person on the far end of the rail wouldn't have to lift it from the ground up to that level." He said that that went on for a couple of years before they finally started getting rail tongs.

Also, I get kind of a funny feeling when I recall that for the first time I noticed a big scar across his abdomen. I asked him what happened. He said, "Well, a few years later on I became the steel gang foreman, laying rail at Melrose, Minnesota, with one hundred men from Sicily." These Sicilians were hard workers, and of course they were emigrants and ultimately would go back to Sicily. There was an interpreter, and my Dad worked through him totally. They were in operation on this line at that time. After a few weeks of relaying new rail, the Sicilians decided that they were going to strike for higher wages. A big Sicilian came up to my father, just before a train was due, and waved all the men to stop and step aside off of the right-of-way. The Sicilian interpreter said, "The men want more money and better food, or we no work." My Dad said that in those days all the supervisors in the Maintenance of-Way and the Mechanical Department often carried side arms. He brandished the revolver and told the interpreter to tell the leader. "No way! You can quit if you want, but you cannot strike."

Some way or other, they went back to work that day. That night, my Dad was in the lobby of the Melrose Hotel, playing poker around a table. He had his jacket draped over the back of the

chair, when one of the Sicilian guys jumped out from behind my Dad's position, with a big knife in his hand. and stabbed my father in the stomach. My father had been a wrestler, taking people on at county fairs and the like. He was stocky and strong, rather short. He was able to grab the attacker, picked him up, and it is verified that my father' threw 'the man through the front, plate glass window, and had to pay for its replacement. He was taken care of by a doctor immediately: and he said that, "1 didn't even miss one day's work!" Pretty good lesson for those of us who later on were trying to make a decent safety record and get people back to work within the three days time limit before it became reportable.

There were, of course, numerous difficulties in the path to ultimate career completion. The 1922 strike was a miserable one, and much hard feelings arose from it. It was initiated by the Shop Craft unions on September 1, 1922. It was particularly rough on the eastern roads, lesser so in the west and midwest. but still very serious.

The unions struck to defeat the intent of the carriers to reduce wages. The strike never was settled. The carriers. through injunction procedures, denied employment to any employee who failed to report by a certain date. Those who of necessity. came back to work by that date were accepted. The vast majority, however, never did again work for the carriers.

Much animosity developed between employees who never went on strike and those who ultimately returned after striking. The newly hired employees, of course, were not as skilled as their predecessors. Thus. some general deterioration of mechanical equipment became painfully obvious during the mid-twenties.

My Dad was a Roadmaster during all this and said it was the worst period of railroading. He said all supervisors carried side arms. So it is quite obvious that not all had been sunny on the Big G.N.

In spite of all this, the love and admiration for James J. Hill was evident by all the people employed by the railway. I'm sure that many of the Hill family have added much to the security and welfare of the veterans of the GN.

Speaking of talent and loyalty, typical of this was a mechanic named George Lange. George lived 200 feet from the Sandstone roundhouse. He had no hours that I knew. He just worked all the time. He'd work if there was illness. He'd work in anyone's absence. He'd work in 40 degree below zero weather, and he'd wake up at night and hear the puffing of a yard engine, and he would put on his clothes and check up on things. That is the way it all went in small stations all across the Great Northern. Incidentally, Old George's granddaughter is the actress, Jessica Lange. Our little town produced many rails, some who I worked for, such as Oscar Carlson, Herb Johnson, and other worthy names.

As long as we are talking about my background, I might also mention a little about my grandfather, Sven Johnson, who came from Sweden. When he got to Ellis Island, one of the interrogators said, "Mr. Johnson, why don't you change your name? Every other Swede around here is called Johnson." My grandfather really didn't know what to do but decided, well, I will call myself Sjoberg. In Swedish, Sjo is pronounced "Ver" - pretty hard to pronounce for a non-Scandinavian. "Sjo" means a lake or water. Berg" is pronounced in Swedish, "Bey". Berg sounds as though it is spelled Bey. It comes out then "Verbey" (Sjoberg).

And so the old man left Ellis Island, went to Minnesota, thence to South Dakota. The first timekeeper on what was the Eastern Minnesota, asked what his name was and how he spelled it. My Grandfather said, "Verbey". He (the timekeeper) said, "How do you say that in English?" He said, "Shober". So the man wrote down, "Shober". My grandfather thought that the railroad had enough wallop that they could call you what they wanted to, and that became my name, Shober. What it really means, and the background of it, is that my grandfather named himself after the land where he came from -Sweden. I went back to look at this place in 1986. It is a beautiful lake, and their house was on a hill. Berg means hill. Sjo means water. So Shober is the name, and it came from the Eastern Minnesota, so I must be genuine!

Well, let's skip along a little bit more. In 1936, I went to work in the summertime on the maintenance-of-way out of Sandstone, Minnesota. I learned to play the game a little sharply because my Dad knew a lot about how long people were going to be working until they were laid off every fall. Everybody was laid off eventually, except the real, oldest veterans. Therefore, I learned not to quit before they laid me off. I was able to work this pretty well through high

school and the three years that I went to the University of Minnesota. As a result, of course, when I was called into the army in January 1942, I had already accumulated five or six years service, which was tacked on to the four plus years accumulated while in the army. .

In 1946, I went to work as a laborer and clerk on the Great Northern at Sandstone, Minnesota. So many military veterans returned to the GN that I had to wait for the position that I had wanted. That waiting time included a hot, dry summer. To avoid problems under those conditions, a fire patrol was required to follow all trains. to catch any fires that would start from sparks from engines or hot metal from brake shoes. I followed three or four trains a day in this manner, and during those movements I ran an M-16 motor car. Proudly, I never got struck by any oncoming trains, nor did I ever run into the rear of a train I was following. Sadly, I never discovered any fires that would have cost the Great Northern any money. It surely lacked romance.

Shortly thereafter, I became a Claims Agent up at Superior, Wisconsin for about a year, working for a very demanding but excellent teacher, Jim Walker. He taught me a lot about the seriousness of personal injuries that result in the handling of claims

There are two types of Claims Agents. One estimates physical damage done to freight, and the other handles personal injuries to both employees and the public. I was the latter. Whenever there was an employee or passenger injured, we would call on the person and secure a written statement as to the details. I would carry a portable typewriter and type out the statement according to the person's verbal account. Then I would read the statement, including the ending which stated the person gave the statement of his own free will and it was true and accurate.

Many of the employees, especially those working in gangs, could neither read nor write, and we'd have to use Interpreters. Most of these types were very suspicious of giving a statement. Also, when it came to employees, the Operating Department was always cognizant of their safety record. Any absence from work for more than 3 days was considered "reportable" to the Interstate Commerce Commission. As such, the Superintendents, Trainmasters and the like always wanted the Claims Agent to limit the amount of money paid if there was any liability on the part of the Company. Then they had a better chance of talking the injured employee back to work before it ever became "reportable".

In his activity, a typical claims agent might be called to the scene of a crossing accident involving a motorist and a train. Rarely did a motorist win the battle at a railroad crossing. We'd measure skid marks, location of the locomotive in car lengths from the point of impact, take photographs, and record statements from witnesses and employees. (Many of the photographs that appear in the GOAT were taken for such occasions and are credited to Claims Files.) Sometimes law suits evolved. The claims agent played an important role, as the case depended on his careful handling of the investigation.

In 1947, there was a bad accident at Coleraine, Minnesota. The engineer- I recall his name as Steve Miller- was buried under his locomotive and about 10 dumped-over ore cars. Leonard Karl was the Traveling Engineer (his son is a retired VP Marketing for BN.), Don Manion the Range Trainmaster, and I was Claims Agent.

It was a ghastly, rainy night when we pulled old Steve out from under the hot boiler water, mud, blood, and iron ore. The Coroner removed his billfold, counted out two or three dollars. and gave the billfold to Leonard for him to hold in -safe-keeping-.

About three or four months passed when the Coroner called me and said, -I gave one of you his billfold. There is an estate hearing next Monday." I called Leonard, and he said, “Did he give

that to me?" I said, "Yes", and Leonard said. I'll have to find it. I guess that I forgot all about it. - I drove over to Leonard's house, and he triumphantly displayed the wallet.

We drove to the hearing, and the Coroner presented the wallet to the judge, describing the wallet as containing $3 and. a social security card, and his railroad pass. The judge scrutinized the wallet and then pulled out 20 one hundred dollar bills. The Coroner, Leonard, and I could hardly believe we had been so careless, but there was $2,000 the family had not expected.

So the life of a Claims Agent was never dull. I looked for other opportunities because I was really an operating man, and only those with law degrees got to the top in the Claims Department.

At the same time, I met C.O. Hooker, who appointed me to become an Assistant Trainmaster up at Cass Lake, Minnesota. We were changing from coal to oil in all of our locomotives. It was winter, about minus 40 degrees (F) and with strong winds, all of the oil transported and stored in tank cars was frozen solid. I was able to reduce, to some extent, the delay occasioned in changing the fuels simply because we had the help of a dear friend of mine, Leonard Karl. He was a mechanical man from Kelly Lake who came over and showed me how to shoot steam into the cars within the confines of the roundhouse. Using steam lines from locomotives attached to probes into the cars we got the stuff into liquid form. The liquid fuel used by the Great Northern was California Bunker C oil, that later came from Montana and other oil producing states. It was used in the west first and came east about 1949. The Great Northern originally had a 10,000 barrel! storage tank of its own at Interbay (Seattle Terminal adjacent to Puget Sound). A petroleum company, perhaps Tidewater Oil Company, would bring the oil by water. The oil company and the GN jointly used the connections from boat to tank. The oil was purchased outright by the railway who then placed the oil in storage. Distribution was made to terminals in Great Northern owned tank cars, with capacities of 8,000 or 10,000 gallons. Ultimately, larger storage facilities were constructed at Mukilteo (near Everett, Washington) with expanded docking facilities.

As the conversion expanded to the east end, storage facilities were constructed at all major stations. Also, the tank cars were doubled in carrying capacity - 100 ton cars

The matter of playing the market for the lowest cost was an art in itself. I recall when I was Superintendent of the Cascade Division, some tall juggling of equipment, facilities, price, market availability and service requirements was handled by Harold Breed of the Purchasing Department, Bob Grinde of the System Transportation group, and Walter Jones the Division Chief Dispatcher.

Speaking of oil, I recall that earlier on I had a low point come during steaming operation at Cass Lake to unfreeze oil. My boss Mr. C.O. Hooker, Superintendent at Superior, called me (and I had only been on the job about five days) that an ICC inspector was coming to Cass Lake, and to take care of him, and be sure that he got everything that he needed, and that he was handled properly. The next morning, when the ICC inspector arrived, I told him, "Well, let's go and get a bite to eat", and we did that. He wanted to go down to the roundhouse. We were still steaming the tank cars of frozen oil, and as I opened the door to the roundhouse, a cloud of steam immediately enveloped us. The ICC inspector preceded me, and because of the dense steam lost his bearings and promptly fell into the open pit of the roundhouse tracks, breaking his right leg. I had never had such a time trying to placate Mr. Hooker as I did that day when I reported the matter to him. So that is the way we learn as we go.

After a while, I was made Trainmaster in Seattle, Washington, at Interbay, which was a very busy job. I didn't have too much experience, but I had some wonderful help **(refer to Note 4 at end of this story).** In case you don't know what the job of Trainmaster involves, here is a quick description.

The Trainmaster is in charge of the safe, efficient operation of the train movements and the operating personnel involved. He first must know the myriad of safety rules thoroughly. Also, he must understand the labor rules that demand rigid compliance with the negotiated agreements between the carrier and the representatives of the Unions. Any variation of bulletins, assign-ments, pay differences, and the Extra Board protections and demands are all in continuous dispute. This calls for these trainmasters to be both hands-on operators but also good

administrators and human resource people. They hold formal and informal investigations involving rule violations. They are caught in the middle, trying to represent management and at the same time, respecting not only the Union's contract but the individual's rights as well. A trainmaster has long days and short nights. Most division superintendents came from the trainmaster ranks.

After about eight months on the Trainmaster job, I moved to Grand Forks, North Dakota as Division Superintendent. I guess that I was thirty-four years old, and in that day and age they weren't setting up people to be superintendents 'til they were about fifty. So I felt quite honored frankly, and thought maybe I had quite a good start on everybody.

While on the subject of Trainmasters, I reminded myself of another unusual event related to me while I was Trainmaster at Superior in the late forties. My Assistant Trainmaster was Bill Andrews. This was on the old Mesabi Division of the Great Northern.

Bill told me that when he was trainmaster at St. Cloud. Minnesota, in the late thirties, he was in charge of the switchmen and road crews operating out of there. They were hard up for help, and they were hiring men. One day a likely prospect appeared named Smith, and he wanted to go switching. He had no railroad experience whatever. But Bill was desperate, gave him a book of rules. and hired him immediately. Bill soon received so many reports from senior staff members who came into the office to comment on how they had never seen any man catch on to his job so quickly. On top of this he was unusually strong physically, and he was most helpful to all his fellow employees.

So Bill decided he had better make sure to hold on to this man, and decided to promote him to yard foreman in 'spite of only two months service. He called his home number, and was somewhat surprised to be told that he (Smith) had left town. No word was received, but on the fifth day Bill was surprised to receive a visit from three FBI agents. They asked if he knew of a man named Smith working here. After the yes answer, they said did we know who he really was. Andrews said he had no idea. "Well, for your information" the FBI told Bill, "Mr. Smith is none other than the number one fugitive in America-Baby Face Nelson and we are hot on his

trail, and expect to catch him very soon". So it is perhaps obvious that all railroad men are not necessarily law abiding citizens!

Well, they moved me back to Seattle within a year, and I ran the Cascade Division. Oddly enough, I stayed in that same job for eleven and one half years before being promoted to General Manager on the east end of the railway. So you have to learn to be patient. I must say, that that experience in the Cascade Mountains, and the coast with the growing cities like Vancouver, British Columbia, Seattle, Portland, and those similar types of cities made for an ideal work place. It was interesting everyday. I still recall with nostalgia, the good feeling of high railing in a track car or auto with trusted friends through the Cascade Mountains on a cool, crisp, early morning. The Cascade Division provided many wonderful moments.

I feel that being a Division Superintendent was the epitome of my career. Everyday was different. interesting. and. yes, demanding, challenging, maddening, but broadly satisfying, and a whole host of other adjectives. You start out with your ego, I guess, because before a wheel turns on that division, it must carry the authorization of that singular person who is Superintendent. There may be 40 or 50 thousand employees on that road. They have a brilliant Chief Executive Officer or President. They may have 20 Vice Presidents and a few General Managers and a whole battery of Lawyers, but only the Division Superintendent's initials on a train order gives it authority to move. That's some authority and responsibility to hold! In my case, they'd end issuing a train order by writing "Complete RHS". I was sufficiently impressed to take it all very seriously!

Then the variation of subjects to deal with was amazing. It might all start out with a call from the Chief Dispatcher that we just had a slide on the Coast Line, and the main line was blocked, necessitating setting up detours over competing lines. Out in Seattle, those calls seemed to come after midnight at least a couple of times a month. Mostly the concern was sufficient to demand your presence at the office or at the scene. Call out the wrecker (150 ton derrick); order crews, food, cranes, etc. Likely, 2 or 3 Division Officers would pick me up at home. We'd take off, grumbling that in the next world we were not going to work for a railroad. Maybe we'd head toward a bridge that had shifted from over-taxed mountain streams, or a

derailed train at Quincy on an 8 degree curve. We'd stop for coffee, trade drivers, get the scoop on our rail auto radios, and drive like hell through the night.

Sure enough, No. 402 had the engine and 18 cars off on the curve. We were there before the derrick; we surveyed the damage, and planned our strategy. Some four hours later, we had rerailed all but the locomotive. Had good luck so far. Went to the Quincy depot to tell the General Superintendent of Transportation to let the Western Star, No. 27, come on west on our regular route. I was sure we'd be cleared by then. When I got back to the curve, sure enough, all cars and locomotive were back on track. I told them to bring the head end into Quincy (the damaged cars) and then come back for the balance of the train.

Everything was Go, and we went to the kitchen car for a meal, fully aware we had done our job masterfully and to St. Paul's satisfaction. We always bought good food for our wrecking crew - steaks usually - and we were enjoying the moment immensely. We even saw the light engine's return movement with the back-up light brightly illuminating the track.

Suddenly, a large impact! More than a coupling! We all jumped up and ran to the front end. You can envision our dejection when we saw what had happened. The light engine crew lost track of their train, or misjudged how close the balance of their train was, and crashed into the cars, derailing four cars and the locomotive.

I about died, because I had told St. Paul to let No. 27 leave Spokane on the regular route. By now, it had departed Spokane and would likely be delayed a few hours at Quincy. I still feel ashamed about bawling out the engineer for running into his own train. The forces were rallied, and we cleared the line as No. 27 arrived in Quincy. Talk about ups and downs!

There were so many good days and so many bad days! It seemed never to be just a normal day! One day you would show children how dangerous it was on a railroad. Another day you would have to call on an employee's wife to tell her that her mate had been wounded or killed in an accident. The next day might bring a monthly meeting of one of the 20 some unions involved in the railroad. Maybe a day later it would find me holding an informal or formal

investigation to determine cause or responsible person involved in an accident or rule violation. Maybe the next day was the end of the month, so we held review of the performance with Division officers, which could take most of the day. Then the marketing or traffic representatives always wanted the Superintendent to have lunch with them and some shipper. Usually the marketing man paid for the lunch, so we didn't object!

Then the word would come to meet John Budd at Spokane and escort him around the Division. No one was more interested in the physical condition of the entire railroad than John Budd. He seemed to have memorized every mile of the road. I'd bone up on the profile of the particular line we'd be traveling over. I'd know each 8° and 10° curve for sure. with the super elevation required for the maximum speed. Sure as shooting, he would never ask questions I was prepared for, but rather would shift into bird recognition. history of the area, anything I'd not brushed up on.

John Budd was a magnificent man, a true statesman for the industry. and a good friend to all of us officers who worked for him. He was an engineering graduate of Yale University- So was John Robson, Vice President of Operations. When the Worlds Fair came to Seattle, the two of them came out and wanted to see how they built the Space Needle, the construction of which was under way. In their own highly technical manners, they were extremely interested. They were asking each other about stresses, strains and such engineering topics, none of which I understood.

About an hour after I left their conversational group they were ready to leave, and I rejoined them. Mr. Jerrow, General Manager, who was also with us, looked at me when John Budd asked, "What's next on the agenda?" I said, "I don't know anything to contribute about building a Space Needle like you two engineers, but what do you know about artificial insemination?" Jerrow just shook his head when I said, "Let's go out to Carnation Farms. I'd like you to see current day high tech ways of maintaining the top breed of milk cattle." They were both so stunned that they agreed, and away we went as I drove them to the Carnation operation.

I had known the Superintendent at Carnation Farms, and he readily gave them a demonstration of their specialty. We also had our picture taken with the world's record milk-producing Holstein. Years later, Mr. Budd would tell others about my diversionary tactics when things got over my head.

However, there is another episode in my career involving Mr. Budd, and which he never commented on to others. Earlier I had referred to the difficulties with steam operations and equipment when the weather turned sour. In 1969, by which time I was a general manager, reporting to John Robson, a record cold of all time hit one night. We had men with long experience as our Minneapolis Terminal work crew. We worked all night, in particular on the west bound Empire Builder, and we could just barely keep ahead of the problems. And the Willmar line was having problems requiring traffic diversions.

So we eventually sent the Builder off via St. Cloud. But St. Cloud called in saying that the weather was the worst they had ever seen, and the train is freezing up. Now these were old heads, experienced men, telling me this. I know that we are going to lose this train. I'm in Minneapolis in the Dispatchers office, together with Dick Tausch. Dick says to me that I'm the General Manager, and that he fears we are in terrible, serious trouble. I said I knew that darn well we were, or words to that effect! Dick said we should split the train and get it out of the weather, and would I back him up? To which I replied" we got to protect the train---the paint and everything else will come off, both outside and inside and we've got people on the train to look after -etc.etc.".

OK, I said, lets do it. We cut the Empire Builder into three sections, and we moved them into the warm air of the St. Cloud Shops. Finally, after an hour or two we had the train thawed out, the cars switched back into train formation, then sent back out on its diverted way west.

So later on in the morning John Budd came roaring into my office, later followed by John Robson. Dick Tausch was with me. Mr. Budd said" who in the "uu" ever put the Empire Builder into the St. Cloud shops". I said "I did", (even if it was Dick's idea), "and here is why".
Now Mr. Budd became really mad, saying" I have never, ever, heard of such a dumb thing". By now I'm so scared of John Budd that I don't really know what I'm doing, but I did know that I

did the best I could in the circumstances. Fortunately John Robson entered the conversation and asked what the matter was (although I had earlier told him). So I told Mr. Robson that Mr. Budd was very upset because we had put the Builder in the St.Paul Shops last night. John (Robson - that is) turned to Mr. Budd and said "Well. I know one thing. I was in bed at that time. and I presume. Mr. Budd, you were also comfortably in bed. However. there is one good thing, Bob Shober, as the General Manager, was down here at 2 o'clock in the morning doing his job". With that, Mr. Budd stormed out of my office. And you know I never heard another thing about the affair from Mr. Budd~

Yes, there were lots of fun moments too, to make up for the worrying ones. A good life!

In 1969, I became General Manager of the Eastern District of the Great Northern, from Bainville, Montana to the east. This was a lot of fun, and I really enjoyed that job. However, I look back at it now, and think that there is no 'better job, no more satisfying job, no more involved job, than being a railroad Division Superintendent. Particularly in the 1950's. and '60 did we have an awful lot of individual strength on the job. I always prided myself in being strong enough to make up my own mind. Therefore, I didn't wait for St. Paul to give the charmed answer on everything. That job, as I look back certainly exceeded being a General Manager or being a Vice President. That's the guts of the whole railroad game, and having good Division Superintendents, I think, is the best assurance that the railroad is going to run well.

Let me tell you about not waiting for that "charmed answer" or rather not accepting it.

One cold, rainy morning in the early '60 s. I received a radio call at home from a representative of Morrison-Knudson, Jimmy Morrison, who was working on a line relocation project at Index, Washington. He said that the mountain streams were all overflowing in that area. In the midst of our conversation, he said, "My god, the Index bridge is shifting before my eyes!" We stopped all train movements, and the Division officers all drove to Index in the rail auto. We couldn't believe the damage to the bridge. Of course this was our main line.

I advised St. Paul immediately. Mr. Budd, Mr. Robson. the Chief Engineer, and some bridge consultants from New York flew out and joined us by late afternoon. After a few hours, they declared a one or two month loss of transcontinental traffic while the bridge was rebuilt. We

were all totally dismayed at this word from some of the country's best engineers. Then they left us to ourselves and returned to St. Paul and New York. This was a serious financial set back for the Great Northern for it to be out of main line business for a month or two. So they left in a dark mood.

I still recall the next half hour as though it was yesterday. A real hard rain made the rest of us run for cover in a nearby shanty. Someone lit a wood stove. In the group was Henri Ferryman, Division Asst. Superintendent Maintenance, Howard Melton, Master Carpenter of the Building and Bridge (B&B), two bridge foremen, and three old time 1st. Class Carpenters. They had all been privy to the experts' discussions and realized the severity of the matter. We were all commiserating when one of the old timers, whose name I am ashamed to say I can't recall, but who was spitting tobacco juice and looked like a drowned rat, spoke in broken Scandinavian accent to Howard Melton, something like, "Who the hell are all the Big Shots, and who in our group believes they know more than we do about Cascade bridge repairs? Ain't it just like any other job but just tougher?" Then the other old timer, a carpenter said, "You damned right, Howard. Give us the equipment we need and enough help from Morrison-Knudson, and we'll get her back on line in a week or ten days."

Howard said, "Well, I don't know about that fast, but there is no use of our waiting around. I'll go back to the office, and with Henri's help, we'll be starting to be organized by morning."

Henri Ferryman and Howard Melton burned the candle all night long, meeting also with Jim Morrison. By morning they had a full crew at the site. It was decided to send a diver down to examine the damage. He found that the center pier was undercut, and also tilting, and the diver could move freely under the pier. The void was filled with over a thousand sacks of grout, and large and small granite blocks. The tilted pier wasn't straightened, but sheets of steel and poured concrete were added to rebuild the pier back on an even keel. The work took only seven days, and the main line was soon back in service.. Talk about being proud of our people. All consultant studies and time was terminated, and we received plaudits from our bosses.

This is an example of why great care must be given local forces to keep intact some degree of decentralization, so as to assure the inalienable right of a man to demonstrate his talent or skills,

no matter what level is involved. Those two carpenters weren't very smooth, hadn't any education. but they had the know-how. They had the guts. They believed, and their action prompted the rest of us to wake up to the challenge

About mid '60's, we started all of our merger studies. I guess that it was a bit earlier than that, really. It was close to ten years of studying and rejection by the ICC, wherein we attempted to merge the SP&S, the Great Northern, the Burlington, and the Northern Pacific. All this time was most frustrating because we were called out for inspection trips, for meetings; we were always thinking ahead to the day when we would merge and how we would run things. It certainly was a shame that it took ten years to accomplish. As I look back, it would have been tough for any of the individual roads to have made it alone. There is a nice mix. The natural resources, the timber, and the oil, and the like on the Northern Pacific, and the gradient and the engineering, the well laid out line of the Great Northern, and the nice mix on the Burlington of good structure and good market place, make it an ideal combination.

So many of us were worried, of course, about the politics, and the personal relationship with new bosses as we moved into the merger on March second of 1970. However, it all went better than one might have thought. John Budd was a statesman and headed up the original company for a year or two, and then retired. Then Louis Menk, president of the Northern Pacific and previously of the Burlington Route, became our CEO. Mr. Menk had worked on the hearings over the years, hence was most knowledgeable. Subsequently, Norman Lorentzsen and Tom Lamphier were very good to me. Norman Lorentzsen came to the Burlington Northern from the Northern Pacific. He was the son of a section foreman, and came up the ranks as a brakeman and conductor. He became a trainman and Superintendent as a young man. Then he was General Manager of the NP at Seattle prior to becoming Vice President of Operation in St. Paul. He was the first VPO of the Burlington Northern. Norman continued the strong pattern of our leadership. He was a true operating man with respect for all the employees and Middle Management. He carried on well for John Budd. Lou Menk, and Bob Downing.

So did Tom Lamphier, who had about as sharp a brain as I've seen. When the rest of us overlooked the importance of the computer age, Tom certainly didn't and became a real pioneer

in the new way of railroading. He had solid engineering education and practical, on-the-job, field engineering experience. He ran a division. Hence he had a great mixture of intelligence and practically. We were lucky to have him, and regret his recent passing.

I would have to say that I have talked with Bob Downing for the purpose of creating a dialogue similar to this monologue, because here I believe was the real wheel horse. The man who knew more about mergers than anybody else was Bob Downing. He headed up the merger study, so had great and broad understanding of the complex issues, and Mr. Budd and Mr. Menk both admired him. Here was a fellow that never lost track of the fact that he learned from the bottom up. His old shoe style of management went over awfully good with a lot of people who were on the borderline of being frustrated with a new system. Mostly, however, it was intelligence, his knowledge that was invaluable to the CEOs. Bob himself became the Chief Operating Officer and the President, and I must say that my hat is tipped to him as the greatest of all our leaders, who did more in the long run for the merger, and the subsequent success of it, than anyone else.

I suppose that I best start winding up this visit to memory lane, and simply reflect a bit on that near half century of my railroading. There were good days, and there were bad days. There were good people, and of course, there were a few bad apples here and there, but it is just like a cross section of anything in life. The only thing different, I guess, was that there seemed to be a rapport among all of us who took pride in being railroad people. The personal commitment so many of the men and women made really had a big influence on the ultimate success of the Great Northern Railway; I am sure that the same went for all of the employees of the other roads that ultimately made up the successful Burlington Northern, and now the Burlington Northern Santa Fe.

So I believe first I wouldn't really have changed an awful lot. I guess as a young officer I wish that someone had taught me more about the financial end of transportation. I guess I would have even strengthened my belief in decentralization. I would have worked harder to get a better understanding with the Union membership. We've gone a long way in labor relations; and one wouldn't want either side to win, so to speak. What one wants is an understanding and respect

and a good, healthy attitude to represent the men, in the case of the Union and to make a good showing for the shareholders, as far as the Management is concerned. But it is not a one way street, that's all that I know.

Getting back to my old man again, I can simply tell you that he was the first Treasurer of the Maintenance-of-Way Union on the Great Northern Railway, when he was a section foreman. Such meetings were "verboten" in those turn of the century days, and the local chairman and stewards would meet after midnight at various section houses along the line. including our own house. They were a proud and a rough lot. My Dad ultimately became a representative of Management as a Roadmaster. He never forgot the people that helped him. I know, as I found out early as a Superintendent, my first job as a Superintendent in North Dakota, I was told by one of the Union heads, “You'll never get a time slip or claim from me for allegedly not living up to our negotiated scheduled rules." I asked him, "Why?" and he said, "Because the head of the Maintenance-of-Way Union, Mr. Voglund, has passed the word out that we are not to touch you." They were honoring my Dad's honesty, and for that, I was always appreciative. What more help could a son get from his father than that type of inherited respect?

So, somewhere or other, we've got to pave the way to even better understanding of the common needs of both parties. I guess I would also have tried to spend a little more time reading the history of each of these lines. What a wonderful education it would have been when I was starting out as a Superintendent, for instance. to have known the contents of Albro Martin's book *"James J. Hill and the Opening of the West",* or even more so, his current book, *"Railroads Triumphant."* Every operating officer should read that book no matter what railroad he works for. I know they'd have gained an awful, awful lot. I know that during the merger I would have put more emphasis on the need to provide greater help and money where needed.

I was never asked to do anything unethical in all these years of railroading, or unlawful either. I always appreciated that. Much of that, of course, stemmed from my utter regard for our leader, John Budd.

As far as my individual bosses are concerned, I am amazed how helpful all of them were to me in making it possible for a guy from a small town, off of the section at Sandstone,

Minnesota, to someday be on the tail end of an Empire Builder, on a cold, clear, crisp night, going about seventy miles an hour and looking at the signals as they flash from red to yellow to green. Especially late at night, to sit there, on a business car, all alone on the rear end of that train, looking at the speedometer and the air pressure and get the good feeling that all is well. Not too many people have been favored with the chance to sample the goodness, the romance, the adventure of speeding across that line of trackage that was your total responsibility.

I guess too, that when I think back on all of the investigations we had, we had way too many, and there were way too many formal investigations for minor matters. There should have been far fewer investigations and more severe penalties, when necessary. There should have been better training in management concepts, such as re-engineering an organization to include such approaches as the team approach, which is currently in vogue in management circles.

I guess finally that I wish that I had encouraged more young kids to go railroading. It is a worthwhile effort. I think a lot of them could find a useful and a happy career in so doing.

Well, I guess that's about the end of this matter. Again, the romance, and the adventure of the moving people and things across this country has been a great experience. Sometime when you go by some of the major depots that are still in existence, like Grand Central Station or Union Station in Chicago, harken back to those days when the buildings were new. Those depots stand yet as sentinels where the paths crossed for a million private lives who life was made much better by the operation of a railroad

In addition to the many 14-15 hour days of railroading I do recall many fun and fanciful experiences which included being in charge of the train between New Westminster and Vancouver, British Columbia carrying and meeting the young Queen Elizabeth. Deep sea fishing with customers, enjoying life in a business car for many years, entertaining foreign dignitaries from Russia. Sweden and Yugoslavia, speaking about transportation to educators, business people and legislators always bringing to their attention the role the railroads played in the early development of the nation. Not forgetting of course the special efforts for World War I

and II, and the later conflicts. A proud heritage, in which I too was proud to participate during my career.

Oh, yes, before I do leave you, I simply want to say that this night in Minnesota has snow falling. Half my life it seemed was a telephone call in the middle of the night. There was some trouble out on the line. I just want all of you to know that now all I do at the end of the day is simply curl up in bed with a good book and share the whole evening with my wonderful wife, Honey, who is a good enough gal to have stuck with me, when one considers that we made nineteen moves during these fun years. So tonight, I'm just doubly appreciative that after the good life of railroading there is even a better life of retirement, with my wife, kids, siblings and, of course, the "OLD GOATS".

Thanks and goodnight.

Note 1:

In the flat land of the Midwest, particularly the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Iowa, any excess rainfall would end up as standing water on either side of the right of way, except where there were natural rivers or streams. There was no drainage, and hence the flood times brought standing water on one side or the other of the track. An equalizer was merely a small (maybe 40 or 50 feet long) timber trestle which permitted ponded water to spread on both sides of the track. As such, the built up pressure was eased, assuring less washout damage to the main track. There were hundreds of such bridges in each of these states.

Note 2:

My Dad did begin to work as a laborer on the Great Northern at age 13, and at age 21 he became the Steel Gang Foreman, which was a real man's job for sure. Like he told me many times, keep it simple, and there isn't that much to learn.

Note 3:

When I became Division Superintendent at Seattle (Cascade Division), I inherited a rather antiquated business car that had been used by Mrs. Hill upon occasion. These were old wooden cars with metal sheathing. That made no difference to me. I was only 35 years old and riding

around in such a car on the rear of either passenger or freight trains was exciting. But the best part of that was Jack White, my black cook-waiter.

After supper, he'd clean up the mess, and before calling it a night, he'd always come back to see if either Ney Jones, my secretary, or I would want a late night snack. Usually, (not always) we'd decline, and I would say, "Sit down and take it easy."

Jack would always wear a silk skull cap when readying himself for bed and black slippers. He was a big man, a handsome man. But he was getting old and was the caregiver for an incapacitated daughter who he worried about in his absence from home.

He'd slowly get settled in the easy chair across from me and let out a big sigh and say, "I love riding back here in the dark and speed through the night with the yellow, green, and red signals flashing as we go by."

I used to say, "So do I, Jack. What'll we talk about tonight?"

He'd tell me about growing up in Kansas, afraid of the dark. A single boy, he was closely watched by his parents,. He liked sports and school for a while.

It was about 1916 or 1917 in Kansas City, Kansas. Life wasn't safe for blacks in those days, and he told me how he'd meet white classmates on the street, and he'd hurry to the opposite side of the street. He had been told to stay clear of white people and be very polite, etc.

One early evening, he sneaked into some local theater to view an early movie picture – before sound. On leaving, he was spotted by young white boys. They chased him and Jack jumped over a barbed wire fence, got entangled, badly cut, and even worse, the whites caught him and beat him most severely.

When he got older and traveled as a cook, he told me of the degrading and inhumane restrictions he lived under, including riding the rear of the bus, using only the "black" section of the stations, drank only from "black" water fountains, and refrained from eating in restaurants where whites ate. He told me frankly that most black people prefer that there not be interracial marriage. He

was a good Christian man who plied his trade, learned the railway, and was a benefactor to the less fortunate in Seattle. He gave me a lot of insight into what minorities like or dislike.

He, like so many other chefs, cooks, waiters and Pullman porters played an important part on the Great Northern. As Jack would say, "I know those of us on the railroad are like the princes of labor in our world."

I was privileged to have a lot of others working with me over the next 35 years. Each was loyal, each was honest, and they were trying like the rest of us to make sure "the mail got through".

Note 4:

There were so many cases of help given to me after coming to Seattle that it is hard to pin-point them specifically. First, I am a small town, Minnesota boy. I had only worked smaller stations. Just moving my family to a metropolis like Seattle was a major problem. The physical layout, with mountains on the east, and the ocean on the west and foreign country on the north, seemed not only exciting, but nearly overwhelming. Merely driving my old Dodge down the steep hilly streets was challenging in itself. Where I could, I would have my right wheels adjacent to the curb to slow the vehicle down because the brakes weren't too hot.

Reg Whitman, later to be FRA Administrator and President of the Katy Railroad, was Division Superintendent. Neither he nor I had the formal education of our bosses or peers. We both flew off the seat of our pants, so to speak. Hence we got along well. He helped immeasurably to point the way to ultimately understanding the way they railroaded in the west. It was a lot different than railroading in the east. He gave me good advice e often. The best thing he did was to tell the General Yardmaster that this young guy needed some help to get started.

The General Yardmaster was Harold Van Dyke. For sure, he saved me from oblivion. I was the first Protestant Superintendent they had ever had out there. A number of the Catholics called on Harold one day and wondered, "How come?" Harold said, "I don't know, but I'll ask him to join you for lunch someday, and you'll be surprised what a good, Lutheran grace he can give you for no extra charge." That was only minor compared to his gentle advice and words of caution which daily sustained a green horn. Bless his soul.

To give you an idea of the type of fellow he was, let me tell you a tale. One day, Harold was working in the yard office when a long, black limousine drove up. A man in a black Hamburg hat and stylist dress coat came in and asked if a Harold Van Dyke was still around. Harold was in his office when the man entered and said, "You likely don't remember me, but I remember, you. I was 30 years old and had lost my way in life. I started drinking and was depressed. It was a dark, cold, rainy evening when I decided I would end my life by throwing myself in front of an engine in Interbay Yard.

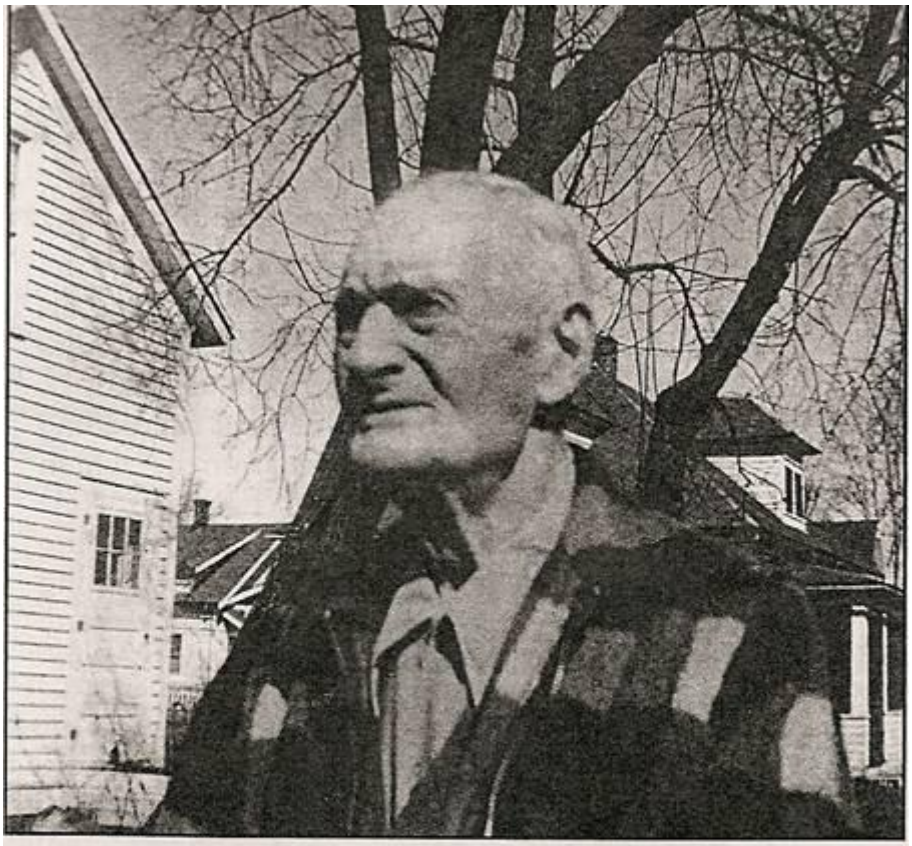
"I saw you and put the bite on you for 25 cents so I could buy a drink first. You said, 'Young man, I'm on my way for beans now. Come on with me, and I'll buy you a meal. You need that more than a drink.' You bought me the meal and left.

"I went under the Davis St. Bridge and prepared for my demise. The #2577 was nearing when the thought came to me, why did that gentleman be so good to me? I cleared out of there, and I have become unusually fortunate.

"I also became an artist. I have just finished this painting of that engine, #2577, moving through Davis St. I want you to have this painting with my thanks."

Harold treasured the painting. When he died, I learned that he asked that the painting be given to me. I hold that treasure close to my heart. In retirement, it is a warm feeling to know that there was much heart in railroading and railroaders. Unfortunately the painting does not reproduce well on the printed page. A pity, as it is a great reminder of a moment which has personal meaning to me.

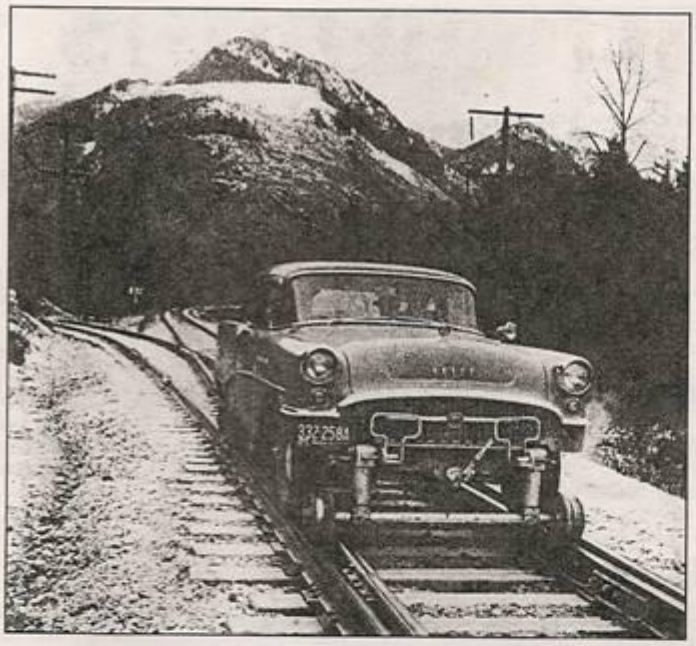
Here I am in my own personal "streamliner", on fire patrol at Sandstone, Minnesota, in 1946. The Motor Car was an M-16 Fairmont, and I had many enjoyable hours in it, performing my inspections over the line. And I was being paid for it also!



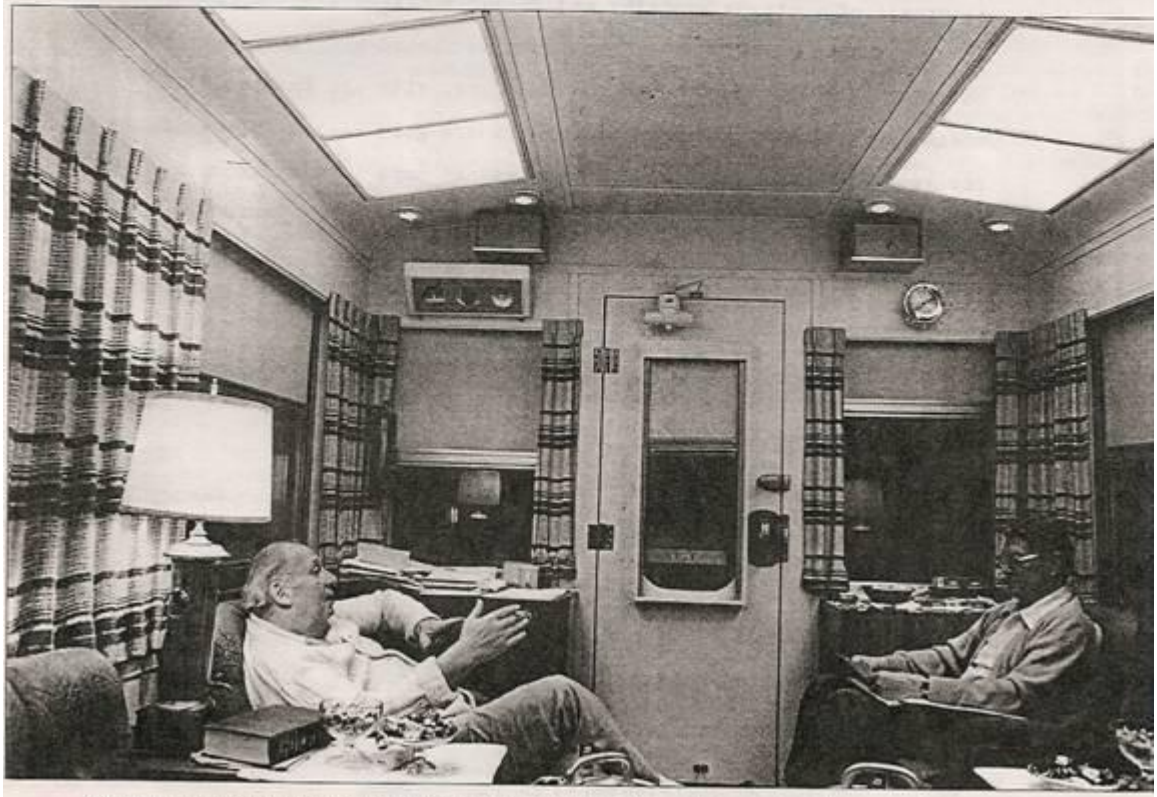
Throughout this text there have been references to my railroad heritage, and to the good and important influence on my life, and my career, from my father John Shober, Roadmaster at GNRy Sandstone, Minnesota. I treasure this photograph of him in his retirement years.

President John Budd and Henri Ferryman, Asst. Superintendent-Maintenance, Cascade Division, checking up on the completion of the Index line change in the mid-sixties.

Accidents are never pretty scenes, particularly when lives are lost as a result. This 1949 ore car train derailment caused the death of train engineer Steve Miller, buried under ore from the overturned ore cars.



Earlier [illegible] you saw a photograph of me in an M-16 Motor car–which was a somewhat Spartan vehicle. In later years comfort improved rather substantially, as evident from the newspaper photograph. These rail autos attracted much attention from motorists on nearby highways. The rail autos were regular road vehicles, with all the normal road fittings. They had manually retracted outriggers, which positioned regular small steel wheels with flanges to hold the care in position on the track and through the switches. The regular steering gear was locked while in this running mode. The Great Northern assembled and fitted these retractable car wheel assemblies in their St.Paul shops .



What better way to close my story of life on the railroad than to show a photograph of the interior of the Business Car "Red River", on which I spent many enjoyable hours on business trips– and enjoying the travelling perks due to my position! Here, Wil Hageman (Asst. Vice President Marketing) and I (at that time I was Vice President and General Manager) are enjoying the hours of darkness–if it had been daylight we would have been sitting at the seats in front of the two observation windows, watching the properties, and viewing the track as it glided beneath us. What a life!

291 EAST THIRD STREET

SAINT PAUL, MINNESOTA

September 11th., 1915.

To The Great Northern Veterans' Association:

To my great regret I find myself unable to meet with you on this anniversary as had been planned. A peremptory engagement calls me elsewhere, and I must resign the pleasure of looking into your familiar faces and clasping again your friendly hands. I can only send you my most cordial greetings on this occasion, and the assurance of a steady sympathy and friendly interest which have strengthened rather than weakened from me toward you, as I am glad to think that they have from you toward me, with the passage of these many years. Please accept my sincere good wishes and thanks for your kindness and courtesy. My earnest hope is that another year my present disappointment may be compensated by finding you again together without a missing face.

Yours faithfully

Jas. J. Hill

You know from what I have written that I have always had a high regard for James J Hill and his family and successors. Because of my Presidency of the Veterans Association of the Great Northern, one of the treasures I was gifted with is the letter dated September 11, 1915, which expresses so admirably Mr. Hills' feelings about his employees. I reproduce it here for your enjoyment. R.H.S.

The End