

LEARNING FROM THE OLD TIMERS

Melvin Williams, a long-time engineer for the YV once told me about George Tucker: *“I got hired with a fellow by the name of George Tucker. He was the most perfect man in this work that I'd ever seen as an engineer. He taught me all the secrets. I was just a kid and I took his passenger train out. [The boss] wanted to know how the I done. Henry Loggins, the conductor, said “If I didn't know that he was on, I couldn't tell the difference the way he run and the way Tucker run it.” He said I even blow the whistle like him. Tucker told me “When you get the in the cab, don't get sloppy when you run her. If you just got a caboose and an engine, make it as just as good a run as if you got the President of the United States on there. If you don't do that, someday you'll get somebody on that you want to make a good run for and as much as you try, you can't do it”. That's the way I done it all the time.*

He said “You might be the engineer on the President of the United States Special.” That was too much for me, I laughed, but darn if I wasn't in 1937.”

I suspect from this comment and others that George Tucker was a kind of mentor for new hires on the railroad. If he was around, here are some of the things that he might tell you....

Rock Cars

“Them 22' cars that we got from the Great Northern are always called ‘rock cars’ on the YV, not hopper cars or anything else. They are used to haul lime rock from Emory to the Cement plant near Merced. Others might call it limestone, but here on the YV it is always lime rock. The switch into the plant is named the Rock Switch. By the way, because of their short wheelbase, always be

sure to put those rock cars on the end of a Local so that they don't string line and derail on curves. And be real careful walking between those cars because their isn't much room between them cars.”

Working the Wye

“New engineers who are still green behind the ears always want to turn a train on the wye up at Moss Canyon by heading straight into the tail of the wye. But that ain't the way you should handle it. If you do that, you are nosing that engine down onto track that ain't maintained very well. You would then also be backing the train uphill around a pretty sharp curve back onto the main. Instead, go on past the wye and back the train into the tail. Then reverse and pull back onto the main going in the opposite direction. You can then reverse again and you got your train turned around. This takes a couple more moves but you can keep from putting a engine on the ground on the tail track.”

Cylinder Cocks

“Everybody knows that water in the cylinders can blow out a cylinder head. Whenever you stop to take on water or for a few minutes for something, be sure and open the cylinder cocks. Close them again after the first few strokes have pushed the condensed water out of the cylinders.”

Use of the Bell

“You know, they changed the State law in 1937. You now gotta ring the bell as you approach an public grade crossing and keep ringing the bell until you are across the road. This law is addition to the blowing of the whistle as required by the Standard Rules. Pay attention to them whistle boards cause they will alert you to grade crossings that are

coming up.”

Log Trains

“The Company is real picky about them log trains. If you ever get running late with them, don’t try to make up lost time. You should never let a log train get over 20 mph. And be sure and set them retainers at Incline before you start downhill to Merced Falls.”

Timetable

“Pay particular attention the Timetable they gave you—there is a lot of important information in there. For example, with trains of the same class, Eastbound trains have the right over Westbound trains. Sometimes that is hard to remember. But just keep in your mind, trains headed toward Yosemite have the right over trains that are coming back! Even if an Eastbound train arrives at a meet first, it stays on the mainline and the other train takes the siding. There are some Special Rules on there too, such as the requirement to stop before crossing 16th Street in Merced.”

Derails and Switches

“It is the Conductor’s job to be sure and always leave switches lined for the main. Derails should also always be left in the open position.”

Speeds

“The Special Rules on the Timetable also lists maximum speeds for trains. I have always taught new engineers to pay real good attention to speeds. That special throttle that you use gives an easy way to tell how fast you are going. Just multiply the Speed Setting by 1.9 and you have the speed. It is that easy! The back of the Timetable also gives the speeds for various Throttle Settings. I myself never use a speed setting higher than 10 and that keeps the speed of the train down to 19 mph which

also keeps the Management happy.”

Telephones

The Company installed a telephone system in 1930. It is a party line-type system, just like at lot of you have at home. To call the Dispatcher when you arrive at a station or siding with a phone, just pick up the telephone and push the button to buzz the Dispatcher. When he comes on the line, give him your Train No. or Train Order designation, the station where you are, and the time. He will repeat them back to you to make sure that he writes them down correctly on the Train Sheet.”

Derailments

“The Old Man is really picky about derailments and handling equipment. Always call him rather than handle derailed equipment. If you continue to have problems with a particular car, set it out at the next siding and fill out a Bad Order card.”