

Terrell County Memorial May, 2014 Sanderson, Texas

Museum News

Prosperity Special



Photo: oguagerr.com

In the halcyon post-World War I years of the “Roaring ‘Twenties,” long before Black Tuesday squelched the world economy, the citizens of the United States began to ride on the crest of a wave of enthusiasm and bright prospects for the future. Business was booming, orders for manufactured goods clogged the inboxes of factories across the country and a certain hope for the future gripped the population, as the world pulled out of an economic recession immediately after the war. The business climate seemed to be

blossoming, attaining ever greater heights, and there seemed to be no end in sight.

In 1921, counting on an improved business climate, the Southern Pacific Railroad placed a massive order for new locomotives with the Baldwin Locomotive Works, Eddystone, PA, in all, 50 units of the so-called 2-10-2 wheel arrangement.

These gigantic locomotives, with ten huge driving wheels, could pull tremendous loads with a fuel economy hitherto unknown. The units would be used



Prosperity Special—Twenty brand new 2-10-2 steam engines, part of a larger order of fifty for Marfa, Texas, June, 1922. The engines were being pulled by three 2-8-2 workhorse engines and trailed along on the publicity tour. This magnificent panoramic photo was produced by Duncan

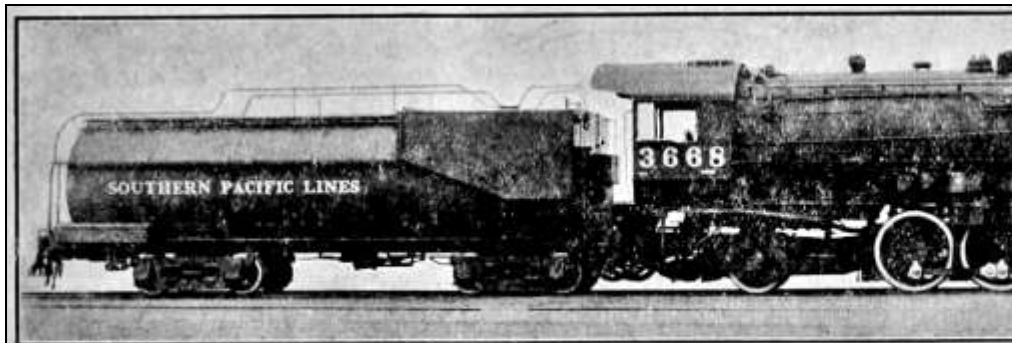
throughout the system, which ran from the West Coast to the East Coast, but the largest group of twenty engines was destined to see service in California.

In a publicity coup, it was decided to name the convoy the “*Prosperity Special*,” and make the most of the transcontinental delivery by stopping frequently for photo opportunities in towns and cities, large and small, across the planned route. The move was designed to drum up even more business and give the company a chance to toot its own horn, so to speak.

Beginning on May 26, 1922, the locomotive convoy of 20 2-10-2 locomotives, pulled by three 2-8-2 locomotives and trailed by two passenger cars with company officials, left the Eddystone, PA, plant, just outside of Philadelphia, following the tracks of the Pennsylvania

Railroad to East St. Louis, IL. Turning south onto the Cotton Belt at that point, it connected with the Texas & New Orleans at Corsicana, TX, and turned west. At El Paso it traveled the Southern Pacific Lines to Los Angeles.

As for locomotive dimensions, each engine and tender had a wheelbase of 83 feet, 8 inches and weighed in at 619,800 pounds. Locomotive engineers were understandably alarmed when the convoy came to the Pecos River Viaduct (see photo, page 1.) It was not known if the spindly-looking bridge, an engineering marvel in itself, could bear the tremendous weight of the 14 engines that spanned the chasm from bank to bank, some 8,649,200 pounds gross weight. Moving forward at a creeping pace, personnel breathed a collective sigh of relief as the bridge took the weight in stride



2-10-2 TYPE LOCOMOTIVE FOR SOUTHERN PACIFIC LINES. BALDWIN



For the Southern Pacific Railroad, bound for California, take a break for a photo portrait near the Mikado-class. At the tail end are two passenger cars for railroad dignitaries who travel. Photography of Marfa, Texas.

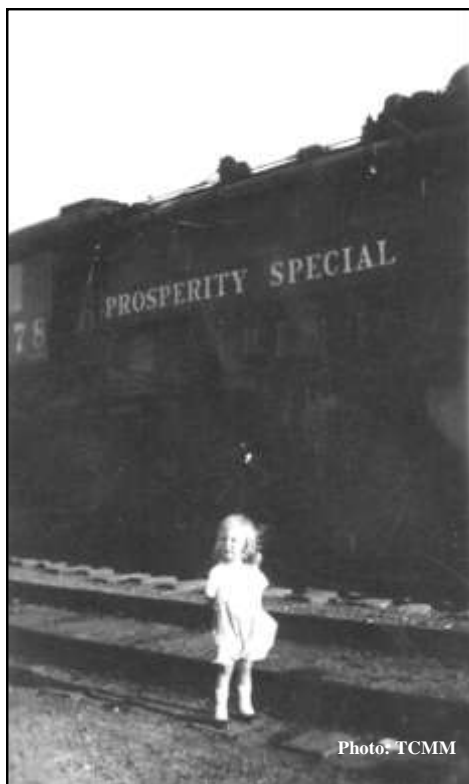
and the convoy moved on.

Tracking across the great expanse of West Texas, it arrived at Sanderson on June 24, 1922 for a short layover and photo op.

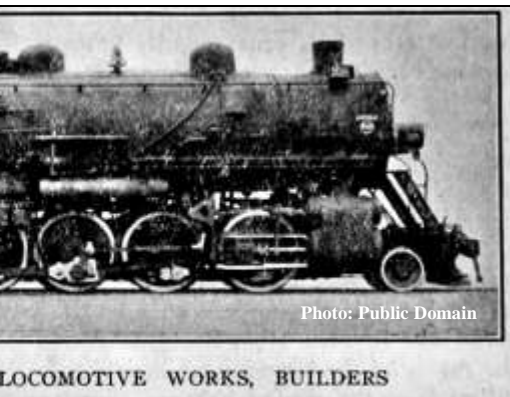
Unlike the great turnout at other spots along the route, photos taken at Sanderson show crowds to be thin. No political speeches were offered and publicity hoopla was at a minimum.

Nevertheless, those in attendance were impressed by the display of raw mechanical pulchritude. Little Mary Ferguson was posed alongside and standing on the “cowcatcher” of the lead engine, demonstrating the huge scale of the steaming behemoths.

The train rolled into Los Angeles on June 30, 1930, where it went on display for two days before huge crowds. After that viewing period the convoy was dis-



*Little Miss Mary Ferguson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. W. J. Ferguson, poses with the **Prosperity Special**, which stopped in the Sanderson rail yard for a photo op. Mr. Ferguson was the owner/operator of Ferguson Motors, the local Ford dealer-ship.*



LOCOMOTIVE WORKS, BUILDERS



The Prosperity Special arrived in Los Angeles the night of June 30, 1922, and went on display for the next two days at the Figueroa St. Switch at Exposition Park. Thousands across the country were witness to this marvel of the age and testament to man's ingenuity and manufacturing ability. Prosperity was short-lived, however, as the cold reality of Black Tuesday and the Stock Market Crash of 1929 dashed the economic hopes and dreams of many.

persed to different divisions, ready to begin a working life that, for many units, extended to the very end of steam days on the Southern Pacific in the mid-1950s.

The *Prosperity Special*, at best, was a demonstration of the proficiency of man in creating machines that were at the peak of efficiency and utility. In the infancy of the trucking industry, most of America's goods traveled by rail, and the effort to create ever more economical and useful machines to deliver those goods was a never-ending task.

At worst, the *Prosperity Special* was a publicity stunt designed to increase business and demonstrate a certain smugness in the business world, that American invention could find a solution to any problem. The coming crash of the stock market, however, proved that rampant speculation could bring down the whole house of cards in a moment's time. Unfortunately, many innocent people would be hurt in the ensuing Great Depression of the 1930s and the hope of prosperity would turn to the gloom of harsh reality.

References

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