

This month's theme:
Trains



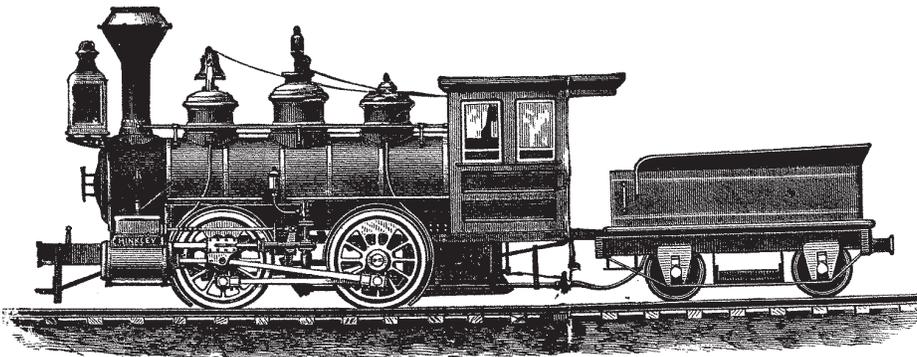
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The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society's Junior Historian Program

PROSPECTOR

Dec/Jan, 2009



The Union Pacific Railroad

Before there were trains, planes, and automobiles, people relied on horses and boats for transportation. Travel was much slower in those days and most people didn't go much farther than their own hometown. When railroads began to be built in North America in the mid-1800's, things began to change. People could travel more easily beyond their towns, and somebody in Virginia could eat a fresh peach from Georgia in just a matter of days. Eventually, when cross-country tracks were built, people could travel from coast to coast

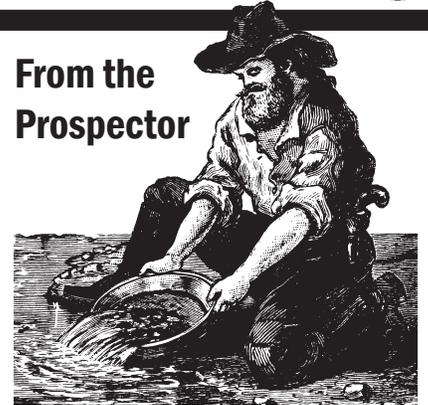
in a week rather than months.

Today, trains have become less important than they were in the 1800's, but they are still useful. Many of you may have grown up near a railroad and never even given it a second thought. Did you know that trains played an important role in Idaho? This is the story of one railroad, the Union Pacific, and its impact on our state.

In 1848, gold was discovered in California and many people began moving out west. Trade and travel became very important, and people began dreaming of a railroad to connect the two parts of the country. The plan was that two railroad

Continued on next page

From the Prospector



Howdy Prospectors!

I hope everyone had a great holiday. The mule and I just got back from vacation. We wanted to go south for a bit and warm our old bones. The problem is, my mule doesn't fit in an airplane seat. In fact, every time we got to the airport it's hard to even get the critter past the security checkpoint. So do you know what we did? We traveled the old fashioned way, by train. I sat up in the passenger car and my mule hung out in a cargo car designed to carry animals.

Have you ever traveled by train? Nowadays most people travel by airplane or car, but there was a time in the recent past that almost all long distance travel was by train. That's what this issue is about. Enjoy the story of the railroad in Idaho. ♦

Union Pacific Continued

lines, the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific, would build towards each other and eventually connect.

The Central Pacific Railroad began in Sacramento, California in 1862 and built eastward, and the Union Pacific Railroad began in Chicago, Illinois in 1863 and built westward. Both railroads built rapidly toward each other, and on May 10, 1869, the tracks were joined together with a golden spike at Promontory Point in Utah.

Before too long, the Union Pacific began to have money problems, and so for the next ten years it halted the creation of new rail lines. After the railroad was able to get back on its feet, it began to build into Oregon and Idaho, where it would begin shipping those states' natural resources to other parts of the country. In 1881, the Union Pacific built a line called the Oregon Short Line that began in Granger, Wyoming, and followed the Snake River into Idaho.

Idaho Territory had a very small population at that time. The railroad offered a quicker way to travel to the area and people began using trains to settle in Idaho, which would soon become a state in 1890. Northern Idaho, which had rich mining resources, was able to begin shipping out their minerals, and this helped business. The Boise Depot, a well-known landmark in Boise,

became home to a branch of the Oregon Short Line.

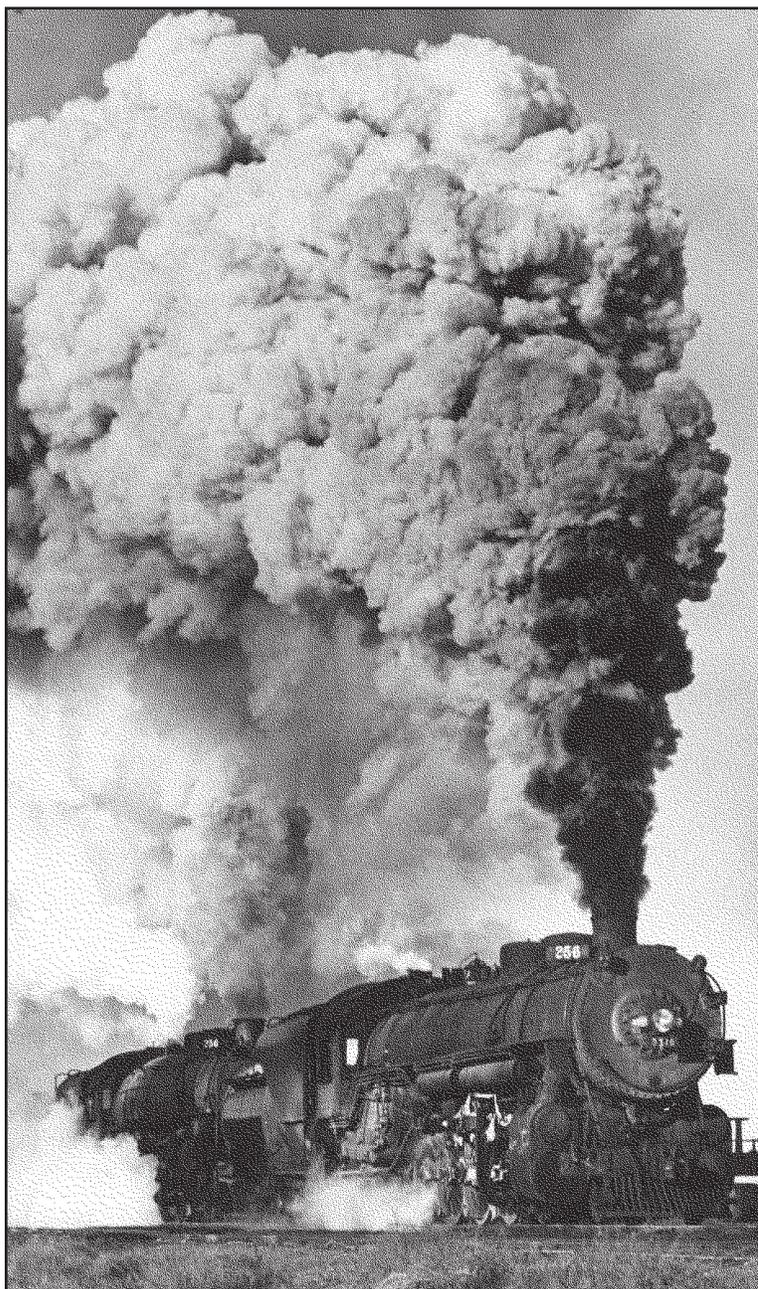
The railroad also continued to build branches into Southern Idaho, which provided many railroad jobs and increased the population. South

the Union Pacific's shipping business. Today, railroad hubs are still active in places like Pocatello and Preston in southeastern Idaho. If you enjoy skiing, then you may also be interested to know that in 1936,

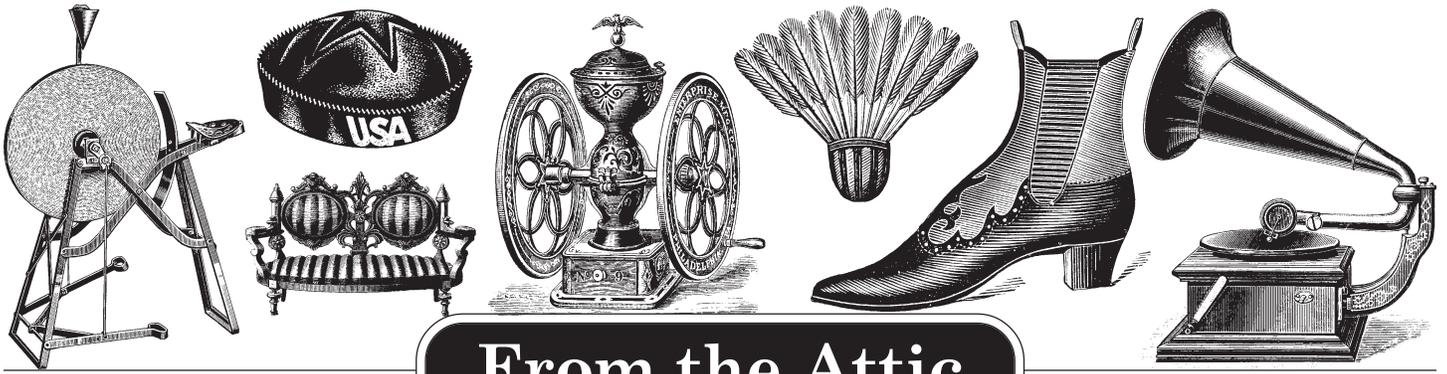
the Union Pacific Railroad created Sun Valley, a world-famous ski resort in central Idaho in an attempt to increase business.

Idaho's "famous potatoes" couldn't have become famous if it weren't for the Union Pacific in Idaho. This railroad transformed shipping and provided many jobs in the cities it stopped in. This allowed populations to grow and cities to flourish. In many towns in Idaho, you can still see the yellow and red locomotives of the Union Pacific chugging by. Perhaps someone you know even helped to lay these tracks. The next time you come to a train crossing, stop and think about how the Union Pacific helped Idaho grow and allowed people to settle in this wonderful state.

by Gracie Bingham



Idaho now has one of the larger populations in the state. This region is known for its agriculture and livestock, which helped contribute to



From the Attic

Train Crashes

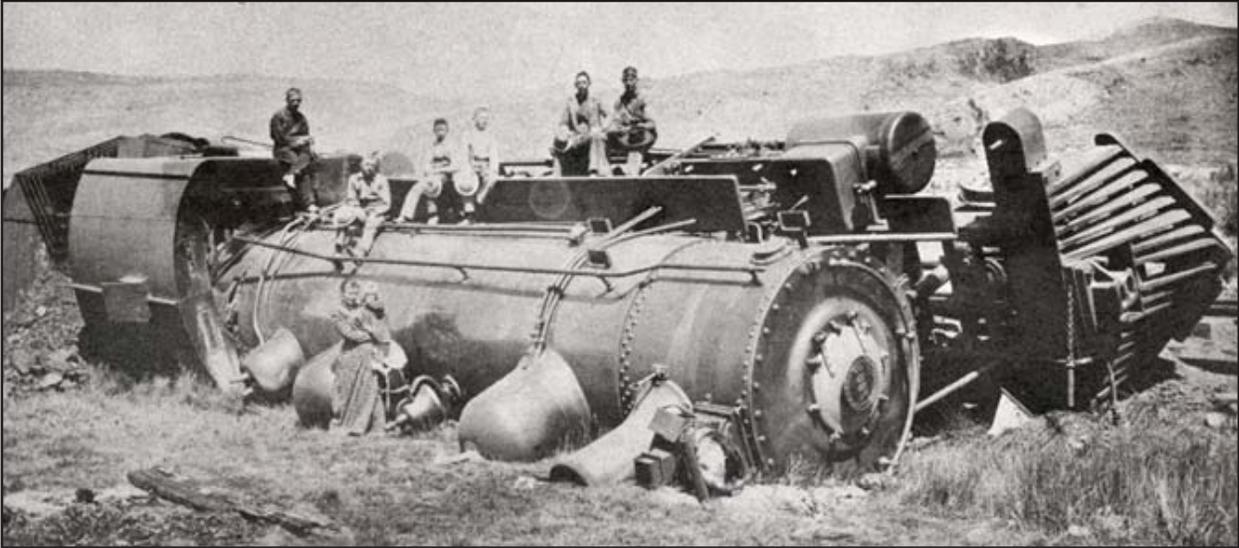
Train travel in the late 1800's could occasionally be dangerous. Flooded rivers could wash away wooden bridges. Snow or rockslide could block tracks. Giant steam engines could malfunction and pose dangers for the engineers and passengers. There are many tales of train wrecks in Idaho, but one of the scariest happened early in the morning of May 27th, 1897 at American Falls.

The American Falls station was in a small valley between two hills. On that morning, a freight train was approaching the top of the hill ready to descend to the station. Suddenly, the man in charge of the train's

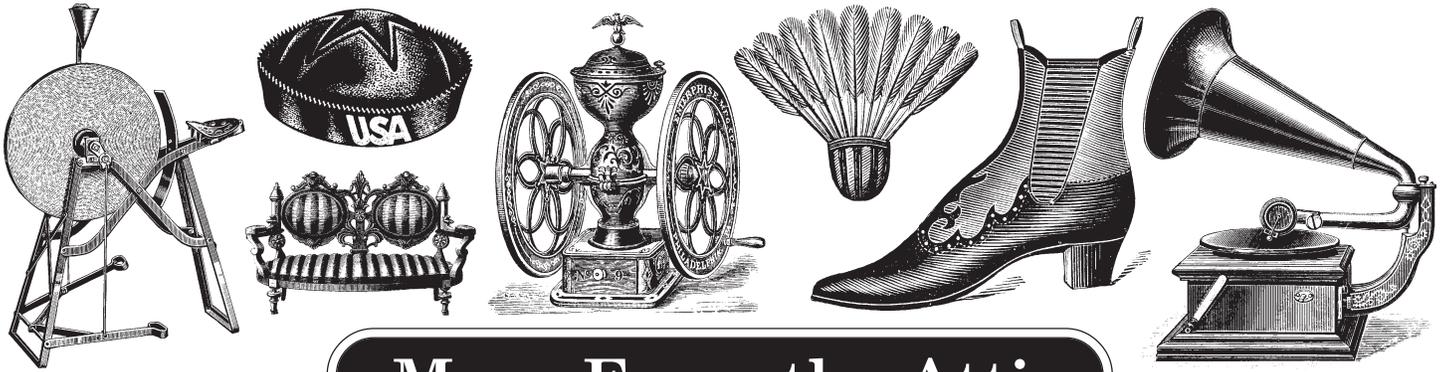
brakes realized that they weren't working properly. If the train couldn't slow down, it couldn't switch over to a second safe track that ran harmlessly beside the station. The engineer tried to get the men to use emergency hand brakes, but it was already too late. The train had missed the safe track and had started down the hill. Normally the hand brakes could stop a big train. Unfortunately, this one was carrying a load of heavy logs. The great weight of the train and the steep hill made the hand brakes useless. The train was out of control and headed towards the station at sixty miles per hour.

Down in the station was a second train full of passengers on the same track. When the engineer of the passenger train saw the freight train coming, he jumped into action and tried to back his train out of the way. But the freight train was moving too fast. The two trains collided in a spectacular explosion of metal and wood. Both engines were destroyed and nine people died in the crash.

Fortunately, a message was quickly sent to Pocatello and another train full of doctors and medical supplies arrived later to help the wounded. It took months, though to rebuild the station and repair the track. ♦



A train crash near Montpelier



More From the Attic

Pullman Cars

Early railroad travel could be a very uncomfortable experience. Seats were hard wood and passengers felt every bump and sway of the train. Long trips were even worse. Only a few trains had sleeping accommodations and even those were only wooden shelves stuck one atop another. In the mid-1800's an inventor and businessman named George Pullman, realized that passengers were fed up with current conditions and would be willing to pay for more comfortable travel. The Pullman train car was born.

Pullman cars were a shocking

change from the typical railway car. Pullman installed wide, cushioned seats, intricate woodwork, and even artwork on his train cars. As his business took off cars became even

more elaborate. Sleepers had comfortable beds. Dining cars had elaborate table-settings and food to match the fanciest restaurants.

Service was provided by porters, waiters, and maids who waited on the passengers every need. Staying in a Pullman car was like riding in a hotel on wheels.

Pullman made a fortune and train travel was changed forever. By the early 1900's most cross-country railroad passenger trains offered passengers the choice of luxury accommodations. ♦



A fancy placesetting from a Union Pacific dining car



The Fun Page

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R	P	O	T	A	T	O	E	S	S	T	A	W	X	B	W	X	W	A	Z

Help the conductor find these hidden words

Agriculture
Boise Depot
California
Idaho
Mining
Oregon Short Line

Pocatello
Population
Potatoes
Promontory Point
Railroad

Shipping
Sun Valley
Union Pacific
Wyoming



Solution on Page 7

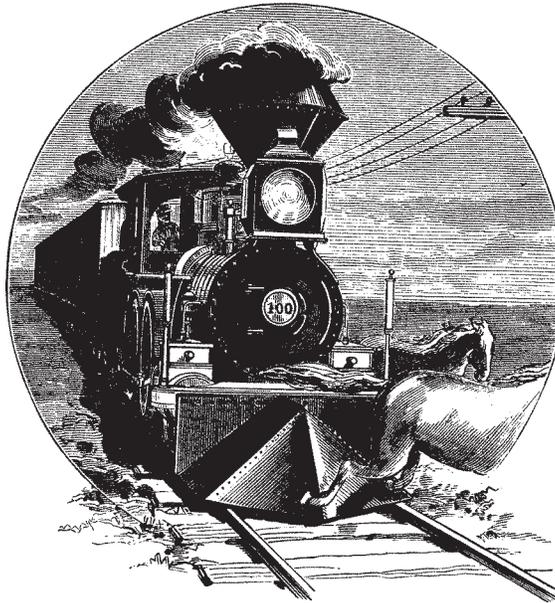


Next Month's Activities

Well, we've told you all we know about Idaho railroads; now it's your turn. This month you can pick from one of the activities listed below or make up your own railroad project and send it to our Prospector Headquarters. We'll take some of your best work and print it in next month's magazine. Remember to include your name, the town and school where you are from, and the name of your Prospector Club. We can't wait to see what you come up with!

The Perfect Ride: In the late 1800's The Pullman Company made luxury train cars for railroad passengers. The cars featured soft cushions, beds, and even art work. Riding in a Pullman car was like riding in a hotel on wheels. The Pullman cars of 100 years ago are long gone, but now it's time to build on their memory. Can you create a luxury train car for our modern times? Draw us the perfect train car for traveling across the country. Does it have a hot tub? A restaurant? Room for your pet poodle? We can't wait to see what you come up with.

Idaho Railroads: Union Pacific was the main railroad in southern Idaho, but there were many other companies throughout the state. Depending on where you live you might also have



heard of The Northern Pacific, The Salmon River Railroad Company, or the Minidoka and Southwestern Railroad. Do a little research and tell us about the railroad near your home town. Give us a short report and, if you have time, snap a few pictures of your local railway line.

Eyewitness at the Crash: Train travel in the late 1800's could sometimes be dangerous. Faulty equipment or natural hazards like landslides or floods could cause trains to derail and crash. Imagine what it would be like to witness one of these train wrecks. Pretend you live in the late 1800's and experience a terrifying rail crash. Maybe you are a farmer or rancher who watched the engine derail from a nearby field. Maybe you are a conductor or engineer on the train itself. Give us your eyewitness account of what you saw and heard during and after the crash. We await the exciting story.

Send in your work by March 11th to:

Prospector Club/Lucky Noah
Idaho State Historical Museum
610 North Julia Davis Drive
Boise, ID 83702
Or email it to us at
Kurt.zwolfer@ishs.idaho.gov

