



Snaking through Raton Pass, a Santa Fe streamliner heads south on its way from Colorado to Raton, just across the border, in New Mexico.

PAT COPPEY

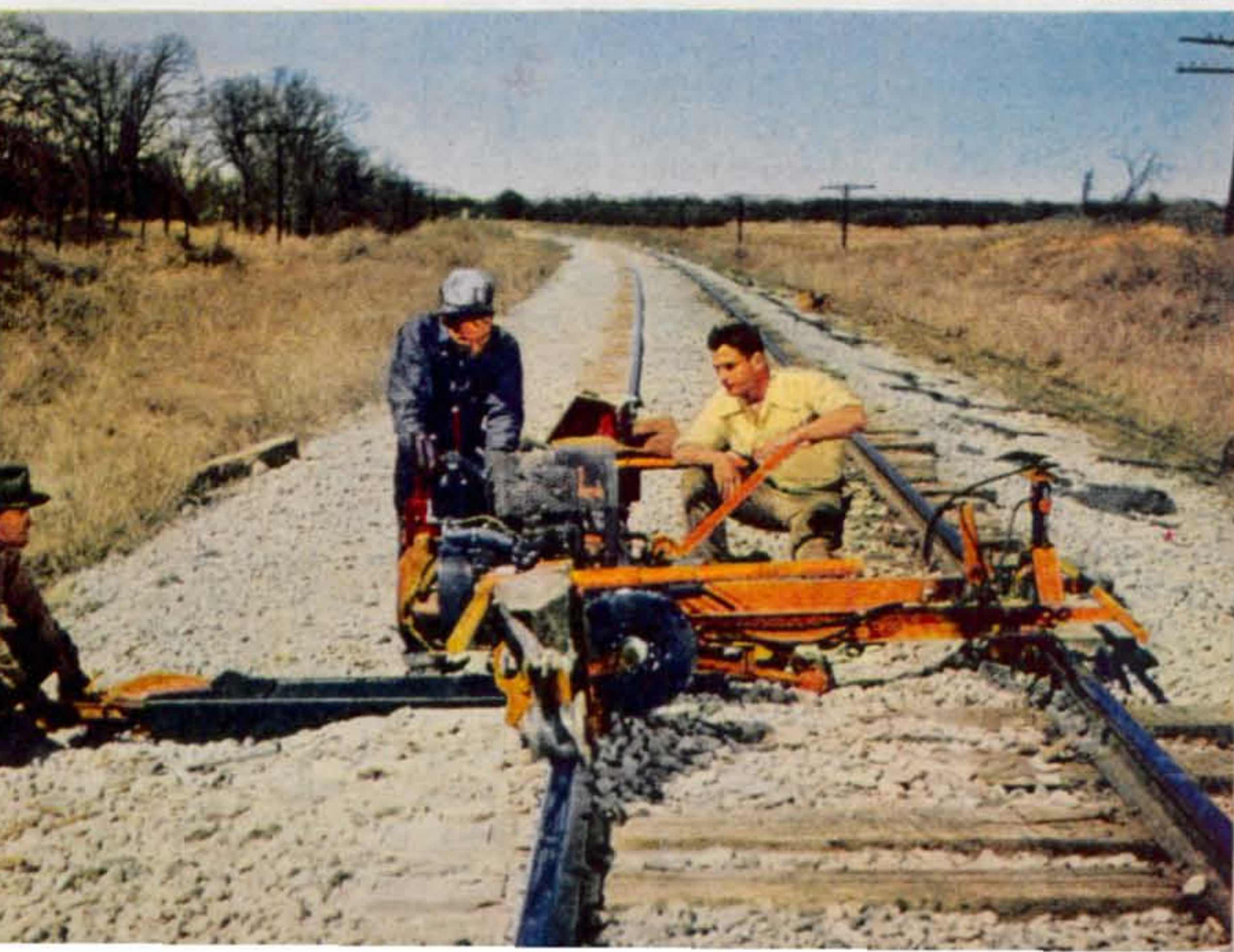
# THE RAILROAD GANG HITS TOWN

By PERCY FINCH

When one of the Santa Fe road crews sets up headquarters at a whistle stop these days, a boom happens in the middle of nowhere. The line is rebuilding 13,000 miles of track—and spreading dollars all over the prairies.

Gone are the days of the gandy dancers. Now most of the work is done by newfangled machines like this experimental tie inserter.

PAT COPPEY



This is the sort of thing that makes storekeepers believe in Santa Claus. Sales skyrocket even in the grocery stores when the railroad gang hits town on payday.

GENE LESTER







GENE LESTER

Laying track is thirsty work, and this road gang gratefully adjourns to a bar in Needles, California, after working in 125-degree heat.

**A**RT GOMEZ, owner of a men's-furnishing shop in the Southern California avocado town of Encinitas, surveyed the depleted shelves and empty clothing racks in his red-brick, modernistic store fronting Highway 101.

"We've had two Christmases this year," he remarked happily to Vern Owens, manager of the local Bank of America.

Owens agreed. "This extra Christmas-in-July business is showing up at the bank," he added. "It's all over town."

In Lawn, Texas, near Buffalo Gap, through which America's herds once crowded, Raymond L. Dodd was pleased about his drugstore. "Trade doubled in a week," he said, expertly topping a banana split. "I only wish it would last." In Lamy, New Mexico; Seligman, Arizona, and other towns throughout the West, cash registers are ringing happy chimes and whistle stops are enjoying overnight booms.

These booms, unlike many in the past, have nothing to do with oil or gold strikes. Instead, they spring from the bulging pockets of work gangs moving across the West, face-lifting the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, or, as her familiars call her, the "Santa Fee." For, in her late eighties, this respected dowager of Western communications is currently undergoing major plastic surgery.

To repair wartime ravages caused by the heaviest traffic in history and to prepare for the sleek Diesel Age in railroading—which the line has already pioneered to the extent of 1,250,000 horsepower—the road is being resurfaced, new rails laid and the track raised three inches along most of the 13,100 miles of track between Chicago and the Pacific Coast, and down through Texas to the Gulf of Mexico. As a result, millions of dollars are circulating.

From President Fred Gurley, who's generally found in the cab of a Diesel engine when he vanishes

from his office, down to the youngest waterboy, this face lifting is regarded as strictly a family affair. And despite appropriate respect for the stately dowager that the Santa Fe is, there's no denying that the operation was undertaken with a speculative eye on the svelte contour she will ultimately display when the last loose ballast has been swept from her gleaming track.

It's Gurley's boys who are doing the spending. From week to week, they move through the region where much of this country's early railroad history was made, scattering dollars in towns sedately named after early Santa Fe presidents, superintendents, district engineers, conductors, wives and even stockholders. Thus, in marked contrast to the Czarist engineers who labored on the Trans-Siberian Railway and immortalized three gay camp followers when they christened the towns of Vera, Shura and Sara, we have Peabody. (Continued on Page 157)

When her railroad-worker husband is out on a job, Mrs. B. J. McCabe's home is wherever the work train happens to stop—in this case near Becker, New Mexico.

PAT COFFEY



Since the war, over 4000 miles of Santa Fe roadbed has been resurfaced, with work progressing at the rate of about 3000 feet a day, per gang.

PAT COFFEY





## THE RAILROAD GANG HITS TOWN

(Continued from Page 43)

Kansas; Woodward, Oklahoma; Higgins, Texas; Gallaher, New Mexico; Winslow, Arizona, and Barstow, California.

The average work gang of 300 often is as large as the town traversed and, with a weekly payroll of \$13,500 it constitutes a potent, even if transient, economic factor, for the men are good cash spenders. Progressing at the rate of half a mile a day, the gangs usually stay around one town for a week or so—sometimes a little more, sometimes less. In a town like Lawn, with a population of approximately 300, one movie, two cafés, one drugstore, one filling station and a few kindred enterprises, the impact of a railroad gang is terrific.

"It's kinda lonesome since the boys left," sighed the redheaded waitress at Johnson's Shack when the gang working on the forty-four-mile stretch between Buffalo Gap and Coleman, west of Brownwood, moved on. "They're sure nice kids. Not a bit like the tough guys in the movies, fighting like crazy, throwing sticks of dynamite around and hammering the other poor guys with picks and shovels."

Unconsciously, the waitress was recording a historical fact. Railroadng in the United States has undergone a tremendous change during the last fifty years. So have railroaders. When Gen. William Tecumseh (War is Hell) Sherman led his troops to protect the Union Pacific workers from hostile Indians while our first transcontinental railroad was being constructed, that hard-bitten cavalry officer looked over the gangs and scoffed, "No particular danger need be apprehended from Indians. So many workmen are distributed along the line that they will introduce enough whisky to kill all the Indians within 300 miles of the road."

In the old days, foremen used to complain that contractors kidnaped men outside saloons and shipped them to the job in a state of inebriation. Alcoholism was so acute that no work was expected until long after payday, and the whisky barrel was offered as an incentive to production.

"When I started railroading forty-two years ago, I was a callboy in Newton, Kansas," says Arthur B. (Alphabet) Clements, superintendent of the Southern Division of the subsidiary Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway. His job then was to call engineers and conductors when it was time for them to go on duty. "Sometimes I located them in a joint," he adds, chuckling at the recollection, "and I always collected a buck apiece not to tell the boss where I found them."

Nowadays, railroad workers are almost as likely to be found ordering a



Cohan

## The Perfect Squelch

BENTON, a physical-culture fan and member of our country club, believed that his exercises were the secret of undying youth. Although he was about fifty, he took a delight in telling everyone, "You may not believe me, but I can do anything now that I could do when I was twenty."

At the club's formal fall dance, Benton bounced forth energetically on the tips of his toes and whirled all the young girls around the dance floor so vigorously that it aroused some comment. Returning to the side line during an

intermission, he overheard several people his own age discussing the recent revival of the Charleston. The pretty college girl with him remarked that she was just learning the step.

"You don't say!" Benton replied. "Why, when I was in college I was the Charleston champion." Then, with a wolfish wink, he added, "Very likely I could teach you something. Would you be willing to date me?"

"How can I, Mr. Benton?" she asked sweetly. "You've just dated yourself."

—WALLY WHITE.

The Post will pay \$100 for authentic, unpublished squelch anecdotes. Manuscripts must be typewritten. Those not acknowledged in about a month should be regarded as declined. The Post cannot undertake to return unaccepted ones.

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double malted at the local soda fountain as downing a boilermaker at the nearest bar. The shaggy itinerants who built America's railroads have given way to an entirely different breed, as workers have had to develop engineering skills to meet modern requirements. Thousands of men employed today never lay track in the old, accepted sense of the word; they operate and feed machines that perform that operation on assembly-line principles.

"We still employ what is commonly known as casual labor," says Superintendent Clements. "But it isn't casual any more, and it isn't the type of labor used when I started railroading. It's a strange thing, but even today, when this kind of job is about to start, some sort of underground spreads the news. Then the men start flocking in, not riding the rods, but in their own cars. Look at that!" He pointed at a green work train in the siding, surrounded by dozens of cars, plus a few trucks and one station wagon, in which the casuals had arrived when the job was beginning, and in which they would drive back to their homes, some of them many miles away, when the job was done.

Explaining new developments in railroad labor, Clements points out that all the men employed today have acquired some degree of technical skill. "We have an entirely new generation of labor," he says. "Youngsters like the boys from the Daniel Baker and Howard Payne colleges, here in Brownwood, and ambitious kids from the ranches. They know all about practical mechanics—they got that from tinkering with cars and tractors—and they're quick to pick up the tricks of operating modern railroad equipment. These kids always want to learn more; they may be the scientists of tomorrow."

This engineering skill is highly essential for the precision job presented by the modern track. To the ordinary passenger, who scarcely ever sees the rails, except at stations, a mile of track is the brief interval between two white markers on telegraph poles, whizzing past at intervals of less than sixty seconds.

To the men who supervise the laying of track, however, a mile is \$75,000 worth of planning, labor and material—wooden ties at the rate of 3500 per mile, hundreds of tons of steel rails and tie plates, thousands of angle bars, bolts and spikes, and carloads of ballast.

All this is highly developed engineering for modern railroad labor. The clangor of pick and shovel has almost died. Instead, you hear the roar of air compressors, powering machines. Old track is torn up and new track takes shape before your eyes. Men and machinery move along in an inexorable parade, with a sense of rhythm that reveals smoothly functioning crews.

The result is a standard-gauge track of four feet, eight and one half inches, heavier and stronger than ever before, never deviating more than one eighth of an inch on the straight and one fourth at curves. It takes a rugged, carefully engineered track to provide smooth riding for ninety-mile-an-hour limiteds like the Santa Fe Super Chief, which covers the 2227 miles from Chicago to Los Angeles in thirty-nine and three quarters hours, and to stand up under eighty-car freights that may weigh as much as 7000 tons.

Paradoxically, with all this machinery displacing hand labor, track rehabilitation now generally progresses at the rate of only 3000 feet a day, oc-

asionally hitting a mile—nothing like the old hand-work rate.

The explanation for this was given by O. H. Osborn, assistant general manager of the Gulf Lines, who had come up from Galveston to inspect the forty-four-mile, \$3,000,000 Buffalo Gap-Coleman job, which is just one section of the 4000 miles of Santa Fe track resurfaced since the war. "In the famous Union Pacific race across the continent," he said, "the track-laying record was eight miles in a single day. But in those days teams merely scraped the ground. Three or four men could lift a forty-pound rail"—rail weight is given in pounds per yard. "It would take at least a dozen to hoist our modern 132-pounder. The old ties were just

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## PROVISION

By Vada F. Carlson

No doubt the questing wild birds  
never know

That God's divine provision for  
such things

As restless wings

Includes the possibility of snow;  
That He anticipates their future  
needs

By packing seeds

Into the cupboards of the wayside  
weeds

While days are sunny and the  
nights are warm,

And there's no slightest hint of  
winter storm.

Serene, the birds fly off into the  
blue

To wing the trackless highways of  
the sky,

Till by and by

The gray days come, as gray days  
always do;

Then, quite undaunted by the  
snowy pall

That covers all,

They spy the wayside weeds, so  
gaunt and tall,

And clustering on them till the  
full heads nod,

They take provision from the  
hand of God.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

pieces of timber in comparison with the nine-foot ties we are using today. What's more, 20,000 men were employed on the Union Pacific job, and we don't use anything like that number now."

An average work gang of 300—including permanent railroad employees, like foremen, machine operators and timekeepers—requires two or three trains and at least 130 bunk, diner, recreation, shower and water-tank cars. Food for the Santa Fe workers is provided by commissary companies known as the "Three H's"—Holmes, Hanlon and Hutt—who split the entire system among them.

Board and lodging aboard the work train costs \$1.95 per diem, which is deducted from a man's pay, but casual labor on the railroad now gets \$1.16½ per hour—nearly a whole day's pay in the old days—so a man can salt away everything he earns after the first hour and forty minutes.

Though the men in these work gangs never would think of setting themselves up as examples for the rest of the world, they are living lessons in racial toler-

ance. In many "extra" gangs—so-called because major face-lifting jobs are outside routine maintenance—representatives of almost every race on earth can be found working amicably side by side. They serve under extra-gang foremen, who are generally recruited from among the section foremen. Interpreters are provided for non-English-speaking groups.

Railroad labor varies with the character of the country. In Arizona, New Mexico and California, for instance, Indians are included in the gangs. Recruited through the Indian agency at Gallup, New Mexico, the majority are Navajos, Mojaves and Zuñis, and hoary concepts of the indolent red man, based on a squaw-papoose-wigwam school of cartoon humor, seem pretty silly when you watch men from the reservation operating modern precision machinery as efficiently as most white men.

They all understand English, according to Harold Stone, who bossed Indian gangs out of San Bernardino, California. "But," he adds, "they prefer to work directly under their own chiefs, who can give orders in their own language. I guess Indian dignity makes them do this. They aren't talkative, but they are well behaved and good workers."

Railway foremen, steeped in Indian custom, say that they have to be prepared to see their men leave work and head for the reservation at a moment's notice. These departures are regular and seasonal, like those of some soldiers in Washington's Continental Army, who insisted on returning to their farms for the spring plowing. A particularly pressing reason for the Indians' homeward migration is the tribal ceremonial. Nothing will stop them from going, but if the railway gives them a pass, they always come back.

One group that shows up regularly is composed of five Navajos. Their chief, White Horse Junior, is a rollicking, swashbuckling brave who invariably goes back to his farm on the reservation for the chicken festival, afterward faithfully returning to the railroad, where he heads a gang including White Goat, Johnny Tom, Nata Yazzie and Tracey Tracey. Out of their picturesque ceremonial garb, they lose their specific identity as Indians and become simply five more workers in a track gang.

Verging on the realm of forgotten legend is an unwritten treaty that the Santa Fe is supposed to have with the Lagunas, a colorful Southern Arizona tribe of singers, dancers and poets. When rails were first laid through Laguna territory—so the story goes—an understanding was born that tribesmen always should get work, shelter and water from the railroad.

Each year the Laguna chief, with a retinue of bucks and squaws, holds a powwow with the Santa Fe superintendent, at Winslow, Arizona. Against the background of a chattering portable typewriter which is taking down the official tribal record, the Indians deliver long, mellifluous speeches. "Like a rose tree, this treaty must be watered, nourished and kept alive for all the years," one orator holds forth proudly.

As the self-appointed guardian of a number of tribes which add to tourist entertainment in the Southwest, the Santa Fe naturally finds this legend rather flattering. And though its archives unfortunately fail to disclose any record of such a treaty, the company is only too happy to live up to its alleged obligation. For one thing, the

(Continued on Page 160)



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(Continued from Page 158)

Lagunas produce not only spellbinders but good recruits for the track gangs.

The core of this mobile labor force is the railroad family, whose members spend their entire lives on wheels. Their work trains create rolling oases in the arid stretches of the West, and their children, born within the sound of roaring trains, grow up in a world of metallic rhythm.

Like the children of diplomats traveling the world, railroad juniors lack continuity in their school lives, but they actually miss few days of work and frequently graduate well ahead of their age groups. As their parents move from state to state with the work trains, one week stopping in the mountainous watershed of the Continental Divide, later moving down to the beaches of the Pacific, the children attend school, Sunday school and church wherever they happen to be. By the same token, their parents think nothing of having to shop, bank and share in community activities on a here-today-gone-tomorrow basis.

Typical of the young railroad wives is Mrs. Catharine Johnson, who accompanied her husband, Evans, when he was sent to Lawn, in charge of the rail-laying crane. With a little male ingenuity, plus considerable female house-keeping know-how, their flatcar and living space in the work train became a traveling bungalow, complete with pet Pekingese. The three-room apartment provides built-in bunks for the children—Karen, four, and Diane, fifteen months—and includes a compact let-your-head-save-your-heels kitchen. One step over and Mrs. Johnson is aboard the flatcar, with clotheslines and a chicken coop which Karen visits hourly in search of possible eggs.

The young Johnsons, both born at the home of their grandmother in Gallup, have grown up on the car. Their mother brought them home to it as soon as they were old enough to travel. "Cry at night when the trains go by?" Mrs. Johnson laughed at such naïveté. "Why, they don't even hear the trains. Both my daughters sleep like little angels."

As the only Santa Fe wife at Lawn, Mrs. Johnson naturally missed feminine companionship. But such isola-

tion, even temporary, is unusual. The wife of Guy W. Lawson, who worked out of San Bernardino on the Los Angeles-San Diego job, found a dozen other women on the work train.

"We got busy right away and started a Wednesday bridge club," she recalls. "And shopped together and went to the movies. I was sorry when the job was finished. And I've learned my lesson about living on a work train. Once upon a time, I thought I had to have a real home of my own—not just a glorified boxcar. So my husband quit his job with the railroad and tried storekeeping back in Clayton, Oklahoma. But he spent most of his time yarning with conductors and engineers off duty, so we're back on the railroad to stay."

Railroad living can be surprisingly homelike. The Harold Stones, now living in Fenner, in the heart of California's Mojave Desert, where Stone is section foreman in intervals between extra-gang jobs, converted their flatcar into a patio. Last fall, when the gang worked near San Diego, the local population took one flabbergasted look and then crowded in, unlimbering their cameras, for a closer inspection of this marvel with a picket fence, a beach umbrella, potted plants and two pretty women in slacks sunning themselves: Mrs. Stone and her daughter, Betty.

When the spectators discovered that the patio car didn't belong to the president of the road, but to an extra-gang foreman, the local males gasped. The females, taking the news in stride, concentrated instead on another feature of the train—the Stones' laundry car, which boasts an automatic washing machine, hot-water heater and revolving clotheslines.

"If they don't make a movie called Washing on the Railroad, Hollywood is missing a good bet," one woman wrote to her local newspaper.

The Stones, by the way, belong to that select group, the FFR—First Families of Railroad. Mrs. Stone's father was a section foreman; two sons, Robert and Vernon, have railroad experience, and Betty married a machine operator. During the World War II labor shortage, busy, patriotic Mrs. Stone herself ran a roundhouse sand drier.

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THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

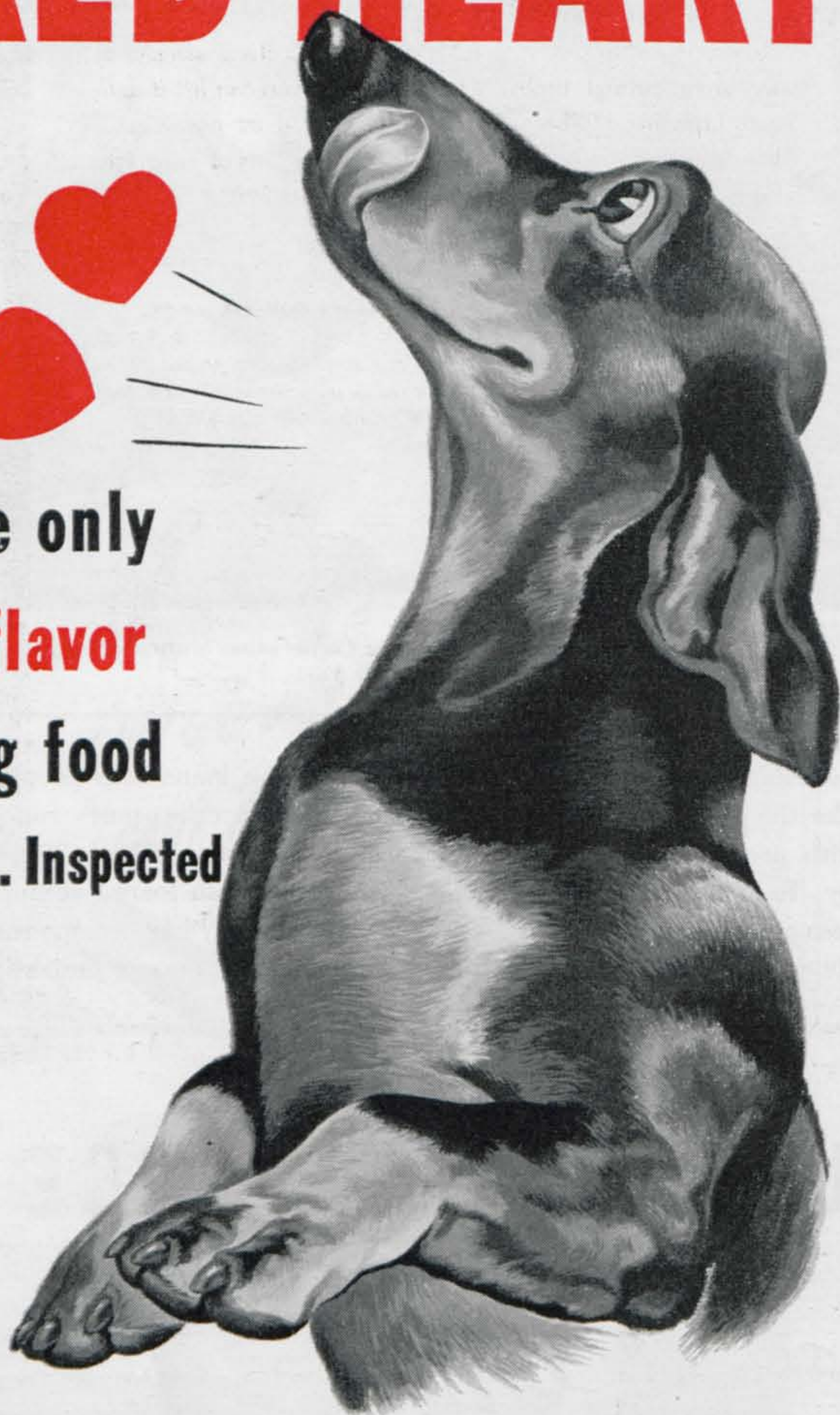




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(Continued from Page 160)

Like most railroad wives, Mrs. Stone is a good organizer. She moves the furnishings of the section house at Fenner—including piano, bookcases and rugs—into the boxcar when her husband gets an assignment, installs her washing machine in the mobile laundry and brightens up the famous patio car with shrubs and flowers.

Normally, she points out, you move along with the work train at a pleasantly leisurely tempo. But in August, 1947, when the train was at Needles, a cloudburst washed out the company ice plant and tracks thirty miles away. The forty-car work train was ordered to the scene of the disaster immediately and, to avoid losing time by switching their living cars onto a siding, the Stones simply lashed down the furniture and sent their cars along with the rest of the train. The piano was roped, the pictures stacked in the corner, vases and dishes packed and every flowerpot in the patio secured—all in thirty minutes flat. Off went the train, and not a thing was broken in the Stone cars.

Mostly, railroad life is a good deal less hectic than that, but it does keep a family on the go. During twenty-seven years of railroading, the Stones have moved bases twenty-nine times, with five years their record stay in one place. As a result, the children, who've always

been sent to the public school nearest to wherever the work train stopped, have picked up their education more or less on the fly. To their credit—and the schools'—this fact hasn't held them back.

"I remember one year when Betty went to eleven different schools," Mrs. Stone meditated, "but, though her stay varied from one week to two months, she missed only one day's work. Betty graduated from high school when she was only sixteen, which shows she couldn't have lost much time. And she made Ripley's Believe It Or Not with her record."

All in all, the Santa Fe's Rolling Stones lead a pretty good life—and the small-town merchants along the railroad continue to prosper when the work gangs roll in. During the recent Los Angeles-San Diego job, Leroy Ford Patton, owner of the general store in little Cardiff-by-the-Sea, woke up one morning to find a dream come true. Most of his regular customers come miles by car from inland ranches, straggling in all day. Suddenly he was deluged with a ready-made clientele of 300, rushing in from short range. Not fifty feet from his door, a work train had parked in the sidings during the night—and his store is the only one in miles. "I never had it so good," he said.

## MAROONED AT MIDNIGHT

(Continued from Page 28)

snow in incredible drifts. Freddie looked upon the wild and growing dimensions of the storm as a personal triumph. "Right now we're ahead of 'Forty-seven. After a nine-hour snow they had fifteen pernt eight inches; already we got sixteen pernt two. How about that?"

Well, they said; well, it was certainly something. From Murphy's, too, with its all-glass front, you could get a look at things. Harold's watch and Murphy's clock were in agreement: five o'clock. Lights burned brightly in the city. Daylight barely clung.

"How's everything, Harold?" Freddie said.

"He's leavin'," Julius said. "The boy is packed."

"The music business didn't work out, kid?" Freddie placed the coffee in front of him. "This one's on Murphy."

"We'll miss 'im, though," said Julius, and raised his coffee cup. "Well, here's to Classic City."

They drank.

"Back to your old man's hardware business?" Freddie asked.

"Where else?" Harold put more sugar in his coffee.

"You should write commercial," Julius said. "It don't pay to be an artist. Look at me."

So they looked at Julius. A man named Cyril, an independent garbageman, came in. Cyril collected fruit skins each day, from the Murphy chain and other sources. Cyril's truck at present was irretrievably stalled in snow, the last wild action of its rear wheels having turned it crisscross on the sidewalk. Cyril stood now within the wide glass front of Sunshine Gardens, thumbing his nose at the backs of three puzzled policemen.

"Let them move it," Cyril said. "It'll be there till July. 'Put a bomb under it, bud,' I told the sergeant. 'Get-cherself a reindeer,' I said. . . . Hello, Harold."

"Hello, Cyril."

His friends, and good friends they had been these thin days of the last few weeks. He had arrived many months before to besiege New York with music that had curled with joy the longest hair on the highest brows in Classic City. The difference was that in Classic City the University Glee Club and the Civic Orchestra, both amateur, had been impressed.

"You could write a song about a White Easter," Freddie said. "Like Oiving Berlin, you'd make a potful."

A girl came in. She came with the assistance of Cyril, the garbageman, who opened the door and reached out a hand. The girl had been hovering beyond the door, balanced evenly between the press of the wind and her own brave efforts to advance. She came in behind the pathetic shield of a handkerchief held to her face and what proved to be her hat clamped under one arm.

"Thank you, thank you," she said. She stood within the door, a bit overcome. A great deal of snow fell from this girl. "Oh, my!" she said. One storm shoe was missing. "Excuse me, please."

"That's all right, lady; let the stuff fall," Freddie said. "I'm gonna make a statue o' Vitamin Murphy so's I can kick 'im in the belly." He turned back to Harold. "You got to get some satisfaction, don't you?"

Harold said he supposed so. He had never seen the true flesh of this mighty and mustached man whose picture hung on the wall. A powerful fellow and a highly vitaminized one, too, from all accounts. Murphy recommended papaya juice for the vitamins A, B, C and D; orange juice for D and C; coconut juice and pineapple juice for the healthful combination, B and G.

"The guy should live in a tree," said Freddie.

"In this weather?"

"Any kind o' weather," Freddie said. "Murphy's a nut. He's a no-hat an' no-coat, pass-me-annudder-snowball madman. . . . How about a nice hot chocolate, miss?"

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