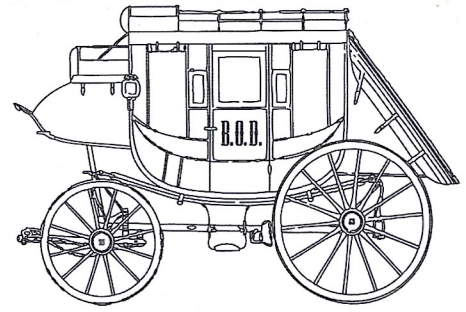


# OVERLAND DESPATCH



Volume VIII No. 4

*Remember the Smoky Hill Trail*

Summer 2016

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE UPDATE

As you will recall, the theme for this year's conference is "People of the Smoky Hill Trail." The venue will be the Memorial Union building on the campus of Fort Hays State University in Hays. Conference Chairperson Jim Gray reports that the following speakers have been lined up to present what promises to be a fascinating variety of topics.

Our banquet will be held Friday evening, October 14 and will feature the music of David "Zerf" Zerfas and the Keynote Speaker Juti Winchester who will present "Following the Trail of William F. Cody."

Saturday's programs begin with Dr. Ken Neuhauser (FHSU Geosciences Department) who will present his "Magnetometer Study at Lookout Station," then Rod Beemer and "General Custer and the Smoky Hill Trail" followed by John Vincent's "Medical Practices Along the Trail" and will end with James Drees presenting "Buffalo Bill Cody and Medicine Bill Comstock." Saturday afternoon will include a "chuck wagon" cookout at the Philip Ranch near the site of Big Creek Station.

Sunday morning programs are the "Galvanized Yankees" by Elton Beougher, "Cheyenne Culture" by Ken Weidner and "Buffalo Soldiers at Fort Hays" by Dr. James Lieker. We will have a Sunday afternoon trip as well, to the Union Pacific Cemetery at Victoria and a tour of Fort Fletcher. It's a great line-up you won't want to miss! Look for full details in our September newsletter.



## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Each Memorial Day I make a pilgrimage to my roots. Family history has always been an important part of my life. My Mother had a remarkable memory and could tell family stories, without end, covering generations. Her earliest recollections were of hearing her Grandfather tell about his Civil War experiences as a private in the 79th Ohio Volunteer Infantry. He was with Sherman's March to the Sea and thence through the Carolinas, reaching Washington, D.C. in April, 1865, to march in the Grand Review of the Armies of the Republic. She also related how, when she was a little girl, her family celebrated "Decoration Day," (now called Memorial Day). There would be speeches and patriotic songs on the Main Street of Gove City, Kansas. This would be followed by a parade that went one mile from Main Street south up the hill to the cemetery. Everyone walked, even the venerable old Civil War veterans. My Great Grandfather would have been about 80 years old. I imagine he would have been very tired when he reached the cemetery. Those stories led me to appreciate my family's history and to participate in historical associations such as the Smoky Hill Trail Association.

This past Memorial Day I trekked to three cemeteries all of which had family connections for me. I started in the Gove cemetery. The old Civil War veteran is buried there with his wife, three sons, and a daughter. As I put bouquets at each tombstone I recalled the stories of that person. I feel like I know

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**OVERLAND DESPATCH** is the official publication of the Smoky Hill Trail Association, Inc., a nonprofit, 501(c)(3), corporation chartered in the State of Kansas. Primary missions of the Association are to preserve, protect, promote, and interpret the Smoky Hill Trail for the benefit of present and future generations, and to promote awareness of the historical legacy associated with the remnants and locations that represent the historic trail and Butterfield's Overland Despatch (BOD) and its successors as well as the railroad that replaced the overland trail. Letters and articles for publication in the newsletter are welcome and can be sent via email to the newsletter editor at <[rjwilh@gmail.com](mailto:rjwilh@gmail.com)> or via USPS at **Smoky Hill Trail Association, PO Box 978, Hays KS 67601**. They become the property of SmHTA and may be edited or abridged at the editor's discretion. All rights reserved.

**Membership** in the Association is open to all individuals, families, institutions, and businesses. Annual dues are \$25.00 for individuals, \$30.00 for families, \$40.00 for nonprofit organizations, \$50.00 for businesses, and \$100.00 for patrons. Life membership, individual or family, is \$500.00 (may be paid in quarterly installments during one or two years). Membership fees should be sent to **Smoky Hill Trail Association**, at the address above. Other donations are always welcome.

**President:**

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## NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

The deadline for articles to be included in the next edition of the Overland Despatch is **August 31, 2016**. Please have your articles, announcements, notes, etc. sent to the newsletter editor either by US mail or E-mail by that date (addresses in box above). Thank you.



*(President's Column continued from page 1)*

them, though I have personal memories of only two of the sons. About 100 yards away is another family plot, in which are buried several of whom I have personal memories. My parents lie there. Two of my Mom's brothers, both of whom served in the Second World War are close by. One of those made the "supreme sacrifice" at the age of 19 years. Three other brothers of my Mom also served in that war and are buried in other states. Close by the resting places of their sons lie my grandparents. Also in the family plot are the graves of my older brother and his wife. He was a veteran of the Korean War. My late wife lies close by and a nephew of mine does as well. So, I have lots of memories when I stand there.

Each year an honor guard from the American Legion Post delivers a tribute to the veterans buried there. My middle brother is a veteran of the Cold War and presides over those ceremonies. The grave of the most recent deceased veteran is honored with a rifle salute. This year that veteran was a woman, who served in World War II. About 25 yards from the family plot is buried another Civil War veteran. He has no family connections to me but I feel like he is part of the family. His name was Harvey Groves. He served in the 6th Missouri Cavalry which later became the 13th Missouri Cavalry. After the Civil War ended in 1865, two companies of this regiment accompanied the survey led by Lt. Fitch that marked the Smoky Hill Trail from Atchison, Kansas, to Denver City, Colorado Territory. Harvey Groves was in one of those companies. He apparently liked what he saw when they traveled through present-day Gove County, as he returned to that area after he was mustered out of the army. He improved upon a homestead in southern Gove County, close to the Smoky Hill River. He has no family members living in the area and no one ever visits his grave. I make it a point to stop and place a bouquet for him every Memorial Day.

The second cemetery is about 15 miles west at a little spot in the road called Orion. It was once a thriving town with a few homes, a grocery store, a

*(continued on page 3)*



*(President's Column continued from page 2)*

school, and a church. Now there is only one home and the defunct old store building. My Beougher grandparents homesteaded about a mile away in 1886. Several family members are buried there; my grandparents, three uncles and their wives, my great grandmother, and several cousins. A set of 7 small markers in a row attest to the trials of one of my aunts and her husband to start a family. Some markers have a name and some say merely "infant daughter" or "infant son." The years of birth and death being the same on each stone indicates that the little life was very short. The pain indicated by these must have been unbearable.

The third cemetery I visit is near Clayton, Kansas, about 50 miles away from Gove. That is the home area of my late wife. Many of her relatives are buried there, including her parents and her brother, who served honorably in Germany during the Vietnam War era. One of his high school classmates made the "supreme sacrifice" during that War. There is no family left there so I honor my wife's family with bouquets to show that they are not forgotten.

My Mom always remembered her relatives with bouquets on Memorial Day. It is my privilege to continue her legacy. So many of my relatives gave their youth to service in protecting our freedoms. I remember them and many others who served on each Memorial Day.

Elton Beougher

President SmHTA



## NEXT SMHTA BOARD MEETING

The next board meeting of the Smoky Hill Trail Association is scheduled for August 13, 2016. It is open to any and all members of the Association, although you will not be able to vote on any motions made. If you would like to attend, contact President Elton Beougher via e-mail at [ebeoughe@fhsu.edu](mailto:ebeoughe@fhsu.edu) for the place and time.

Thank you!



## AIR TOWNS AND THEIR INHABITANTS

By W.E. Webb

*(From Harper's Monthly Magazine, Vol. 51, Issue 306, November 1875) Part 3.*

*Webb's account of towns along the Kansas Pacific Railway continues with more about the town of Sheridan:*

Another character of celebrity in Sheridan was "Ascension Stephen." This worth was a half-witted Millerite, [1] who climbed the two buttes once or twice every month, with a saloon table-cloth in his pocket that might answer for wrapper when the great trumpet should sound. Fine evenings were often spent by him in this weary and lonely waiting, and on one occasion he frightened the wits out of some drunken Irishmen by rushing down the hill toward them as they were returning from a wild debauch. So well did the table-cloth do duty on this occasion that, for the first time in months, the Irishmen reached their homes sober. A more effective temperance banner never fluttered in the breeze.

One reply of Stephen's was worth of a less addled brain than his, from its giving a satisfactory reason why Adventists should cleave to property even on the eve of ascension day. He was asked to give up his shanty and an old horse possessed by him on the day preceding that which he declared should witness the dissolution of Sheridan and all things terrestrial.

"Why should you keep this property?" said his covetous questioner: "you brought nothing into this world, and you can take nothing out."

"True enough, mon," said Stephen, in his old brogue; "but dinna ye ken the Lord says, 'Occupy till I come?'"

Morals in this mushroom town were among the articles of commerce. No one tried to possess any, unless money was to be made by it. An occasional individual thought it worth while to abjure women,

*(Continued on page 4)*



*(Air Towns continued from page 3)*

wine, and cards long enough to inspire confidence and run away with some of his fellow-towns-men's ducats. From motives of courtesy, occasional women were called wives, but it was well to avoid inquisitiveness on the subject. I remember one day when a certain couple arrived by stage. It was easy to see they were fugitives. Of the two the woman was the oldest, and it appeared to be rather a case in which she was running off with the man. They soon obtained passage in a Mexican train for Santa Fe. Two days afterward a pursuing husband arrived in Sheridan. His questions were few and to the point. Having learned that the fugitives were two days' journey away on the desolate plain, he simply fired up with an extra chip of navy plug, thrust both hands deep into his pockets, and remarked, "The old gal's tongue cuts like a cart whip. 'Fore next spring there'll be one man sorry I didn't catch up."

Twelve miles from Sheridan, and close to the Colorado line, Fort Wallace stood guard. Its bright flag, far away over the waste, could be seen for miles. This piece of country is known to geologists as a peculiarly rich fossil belt, having yielded up some very valuable specimens. In a wild ravine just on the edge of town the remains of a large saurian were discovered, and forwarded to Agassiz. [2] Other valuable specimens were sent to the eminent naturalist Professor Cope, [3] and some, which were new to science, named by him. An eccentric Sheridan man who had contributed his discovery was astounded by having it named after him. But the Latin ending was entirely too much. Before, he had been a sort of street authority on geological matters, and was wont to mystify such "bull-whackers" and "foragers" as had an itching for learning by allusions to primary, tertiary, cretaceous, and so forth, mixed in for the sake of sound, and at the expense of sense. With the scientific name came two letters from scientific men. This sudden immortality struck him dumb. He remarked to me, sorrowfully, "Knowing about

as much of fossils as an oyster does, I shall keep my mouth about as closely shut."

All over this fossil belt the remains of the monsters of the primitive world are thickly strewn. Huge saurians, locked for thousands of centuries in their vise-like prison, are constantly being exposed by the elements to the gaze of the nineteenth century. While we doubt a modern sea-serpent as impossible, we discover fossilized marine monsters which could easily have swallowed the biggest snake ever run foul of by honest mariner. Time was when this now desolate plain lay under a tropical sun, a beautiful succession of green pastures and sparkling lakes. Here the lion roared and the tiger crept noiselessly on his prey, while the elephant traveled leisurely along with his trunk, and the rhinoceros offered a horn to the primeval man when he came that way. And this latter personage, if we may believe some of the authorities, not only existed during the latter part of this period, but, with the strength of a gorilla and the club of a Hercules, dashed in the skulls of such beasts as were necessary for his food.

But perhaps the period of time immediately preceding this, when the sea covered the plain, was even more interesting. Huge snake-like forms swarmed upon the waters, among them individuals which, without moving the body, could explore with their long necks the depths forty feet below. And often the fierce struggles of so many great creatures must have made the deep "boil like a pot," while flying saurians, with leathery wings covering a spread of twenty feet, beat the air above, and viewed the combat.

The game of this region now is buffalo, antelope, elk, and wolves. The water-courses are insignificant and destitute of trees. The principal river, the Smoky Hill, sinks into the sand, underneath which it flows on, a living stream.

Many episodes of these air towns do not partake of the usual serio-comic character, but are all tragedy. Gunshot Frank and Sour Bill, two noted bullies, quarreled. Each armed himself with a revolver, put a spade on the left shoulder, and with a

*(Continued on page 5)*



*(Air Towns continued from page 4)*

few friends started off for a spot near the buttes to fight a duel. The plan was that after arriving on the ground each man should dig a grave for the other, and then, exchanging places, fight on the edges. But before the work was half done Gunshot made an imprudent remark, and Bill shot him through the abdomen. The dead man's friends at once fell upon the murderer, and one of them broke in his skull with the spade. At night two men slept in the graves their own hands had helped to dig. The most astonishing crop the plains ever produced was the one of "Bill" heroes. If an ambitious frontiersman named William chanced to see an Indian or kill a few bison, he at once took unto his name an addition, and became a character. But let it not be supposed he was a hero among his companions. To them the ever remained plain Bill, or, at the best, with a Jones or Brown added, as the case might be. I remember one particular teamster whose name was William Hobbs. He could not have placed a bullet from his carbine in a barn door at one hundred paces. And yet, without any provocation whatever, he seized upon the word California and wore it, although that wonderful State had never, to my certain knowledge, been favored with his presence. This man had not been cut out for a hero. His becoming one was in direct violation of nature's laws. He was fat, short of wind, red-faced, and timid as a hare. As the frontiersmen expressed it, having never lost any Indians, he could not be induced by any consideration to find one. However, by lying in wait for tourists and correspondents, he often managed to get business as a guide. He had donned a suit of buckskin made in St. Louis, and would state to the gaping stranger, "My name's California Bill *here*; over *thar* it's 'Pache, on 'count of my fightin' the tribe." He could not have told one of the latter from a Digger; yet soon the Eastern papers came back with thrilling descriptions of this noted scout and Indian slayer. "Iron muscles wrapped in buckskin, piercing eyes, a dead shot at red-skins,"

and so forth. And yet I have known this dead shot to miss, four times in succession, a bison at fifty yard; and on one occasion, having mistaken a Mexican herder for an Indian, he fled so fast and far that he lost hat and pistol and ruined his horse. After this he was fain to go East and perambulate Broadway in long hair and dirty buckskins, and be heralded by open-mouthed newsboys as "Forny Bill, the feller what chaws up the Injun nation." These specimens are also apt to fall upon some cheap story writer, who embalms them as heroes and gives them the *entree* of saloons and hotels. But when forced back by want to the haunts of the frontier, the breeches of skin, broad hat, the swagger are put away, and the usual garments of the plain adopted. Out there, where the poverty of spirit lurking beneath is known, a lion's skin does not change the character of the animal borrowing it.

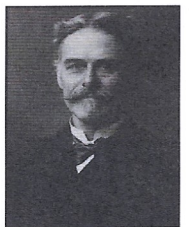
[1] A "Millerite" was a follower of William Miller (1782-1849), a Baptist preacher who prophesied the Second Coming of Christ would occur in 1843.



[2] Jean Louis Rodolphe Agassiz (1807-1873) was a Swiss scientist who published many books on natural history and was the Director of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard University from 1859 until his death in 1873.



[3] Edward Drinker Cope (1840-1897) was an American paleontologist who collected many fossils in Kansas in 1871-72. He had an infamous feud, known today at the "Bone Wars," with another paleontologist, Othneil Charles Marsh, over many of these fossils.



*This article will continue in the next issue with more eyewitness accounts of life in Sheridan and other spots along the route of the Kansas Pacific Railway.*



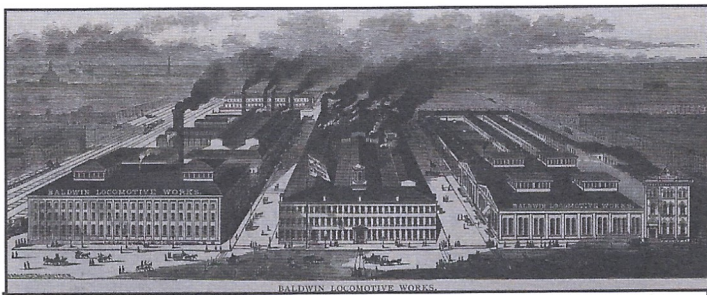


## THE SAGA OF KP 51

Thirty miles east of Denver along the Kansas Pacific Railroad, was the unincorporated town of Kiowa Crossing, so named because it sat just west of Kiowa Creek, a meandering stream having its headwaters in the Black Forest near Colorado Springs and flowing 123 miles north-northeast into the South Platte River near the present-day unincorporated town of Orchard, Colorado. Among the few inhabitants of Kiowa Crossing was a railroad section crew of half a dozen men or more. They had the responsibility for maintaining a section of track several miles long.

On the night of May 21, 1878, two Kansas Pacific locomotives were getting set to haul scrap iron (one source says rail iron) east. The load was too heavy for a single engine to haul so it was divided into two "sections." Also contributing to the load being split between two locomotives was the fact that there had been some storms in the Denver area, which made the track wet and the locomotives would need to travel at a slower speed.

The locomotive pulling the first section was a freight-hauler listed as KP #51, [1] built in June 1870 at the Baldwin Locomotive Works in



Baldwin Locomotive Works, Philadelphia, PA in 1875 (J.B. Lippincott & Co.)

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In modern parlance, #51 was a 4-4-0, meaning that it had four "pilot wheels" at the front to help the engine stay on

track during turns, four "drive wheels" providing the power, and no "trailing wheels." [2] It was to pull a

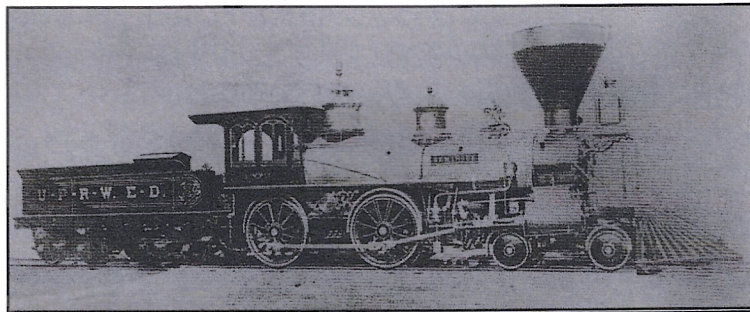


Photo of one of KP #51's sister locomotives, KP #21, also a 4-4-0

train of about 25 cars (the exact number is not known).

The train was crewed by five men. In the locomotive cab was John Bacon, the engineer, Frank Seldon, the fireman and John Platt, a brakeman. In the caboose was the conductor and a rear brakeman. According to one source, John Platt was not a part of the crew but was merely hitching a ride from Denver to Hugo, Colorado.

KP #51, being the first section of the train, left Denver at 7:00 pm. The second section was to leave at 8:30 pm. Although it had rained heavily in the Denver area, land to the east had received only sprinkles so, as #51 traveled east, the tracks got drier and Engineer Bacon increased his speed.

Although Kiowa Crossing had little rain, the heavier rains to the west filled the rivers and creeks and that water began to travel swiftly eastward. As #51 approached Kiowa Crossing, the water in Kiowa Creek began to quickly rise.

A drifter, sleeping in a cave (or dugout) on the bank of Kiowa Creek, was the first to realize what was happening. He was awakened as water began to invade his temporary home and rapidly rise. As he crawled out of his hovel, the bridge across Kiowa Creek collapsed. He quickly rushed to find the section crew to give them the news. They knew a train was on its way and would be arriving any

*(Continued on page 7)*



(Saga of KP 51 continued from page 6)

minute, so one of the men lit a warning lantern and ran to the track. But he was too late.

Locomotive #51 neared Kiowa Crossing oblivious to what was happening ahead. Bacon may have seen the warning but he was traveling much too fast to do anything. It was merely a matter of seconds before he reached the washed out bridge. The locomotive and all the following cars sailed into the night, crashing into the rain-swollen creek, taking the three men in the locomotive cab to their deaths. The conductor and brakeman in the rear were both able to jump clear before the caboose followed the rest of the train to disaster.

There was plenty of time to warn the second section of the train that left 90 minutes after the #51.

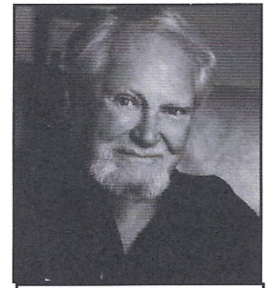
The following day, recovery efforts began the search for the crew. It took time as there was still five feet of water in the creek that ran through the 30-foot deep ravine. The bodies of Frank Seldon and John Platt were found a mile-and-a-half down the creek the following day, May 23rd. Five days later, the body of engineer John Bacon was found ten miles downstream.

In an interesting, although tragic, side-note, Seldon and Bacon had married sisters, Susan and Gertrude Bennet, who lived in Kiowa Crossing. As a memorial to the tragedy, the town officials decided to rename Kiowa Crossing in honor of the women's maiden name. Kiowa Crossing is now known as Bennett.

The Kansas Pacific began to clean up the wreck almost immediately and by August, the wreckage of most of the cars had been removed. A temporary bridge had also been built in order to get the line moving again while a permanent bridge was constructed in the fall.

In September, it was reported that the 80,000-pound locomotive had been found imbedded ten feet into the ground. However, at this point a mystery began to develop as it was

alternately said to have been recovered and then left to be abandoned. Over the years, many people, including the mystery writer Clive Cussler, whose book "Night Probe" was based on the wreck of #51, have attempted to find the "lost locomotive." All to no avail.



Clive Cussler

That is, until Cussler and a fellow writer began to search for the locomotive in the depths of history rather than the depths of Kiowa Creek. The Kansas Pacific had insured all of its rolling stock and especially its locomotives. Evidence was found that indicated officials declared the locomotive a total loss and collected the insurance. About a month after the crash, a salvage crew was sent to Kiowa Crossing and recovered the locomotive in the middle of the night. Although it seems unbelievable that it could be recovered in only one night, two news articles published in Kansas City newspapers seem to corroborate the claim. The June 5, 1878 issue of the *Kansas City Journal* stated that the engine was located, "twenty feet below the level of the prairie" and that it would be, "raised by the use of derricks" and taken to be repaired. On August 30, 1878, the *Kansas City Times* reported that, "The Kansas Pacific engine, which was lost in the quicksand...has been recovered...and it passed east of Armstrong [3] Monday night." It remained there until 1881, two years after the crash and a year after the Kansas Pacific was sold to the Union Pacific, when it was rebuilt as a 4-6-0 and given the number UPRy #1026. Rebuilding it as a 4-6-0 made it a more powerful engine able to carry heavier loads but at a slower speed, which it did until officially retired in 1897.

For many years, the wreck of KP #51 was known as the "Mystery of the Lost Locomotive of Kiowa Creek" when it turned out to be nothing

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*(Saga of KP #51 continued from page 7)*

more than an insurance scam perpetrated by railroad executives.

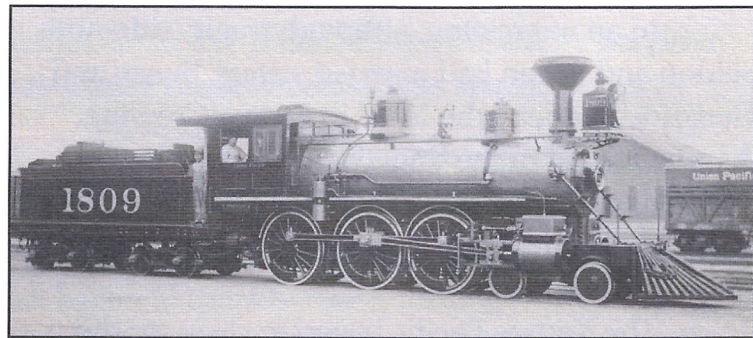
An interesting after-note regarding the two locomotives is that KP #51 with four drive wheels, weighed about 88,500 pounds while UPRy #1026 having six drive wheels, weighed about 85,500 pounds, or 3,000 pound less. It is said this was accomplished by replacing iron parts with lighter steel parts.

[1] Each railroad company renumbered their locomotives as they were purchased. The manufacturer designated this particular locomotive as number 2162 but when it was purchased by the Kansas Pacific, it became #51, indicating it was the 51st locomotive purchased by the KP.

[2] This method of describing types of railroad locomotives by counting the number and types of wheels, was developed by Frederick Whyte (and thus called the "Whyte Notation") and did not come into wide-spread use until 1900. Thus the

designation of #51 as a 4-4-0 would have been unknown in 1878. It is being used here for descriptive purposes only.

[3] Armstrong refers to the KP main eastern storage and repair yard near Kansas City.



Union Pacific #1809, a 4-6-0 locomotive

Although no photographs of either locomotive in this account are known to exist, it is thought the photographs used resemble them

*Note from the author: Many accounts and sources were used to prepare this article, the primary source being "The Last Word on the Lost Locomotive of Kiowa Creek" by Robert Collins in Kansas Territorial magazine, February 21, 2010. Bob Wilhelm*

