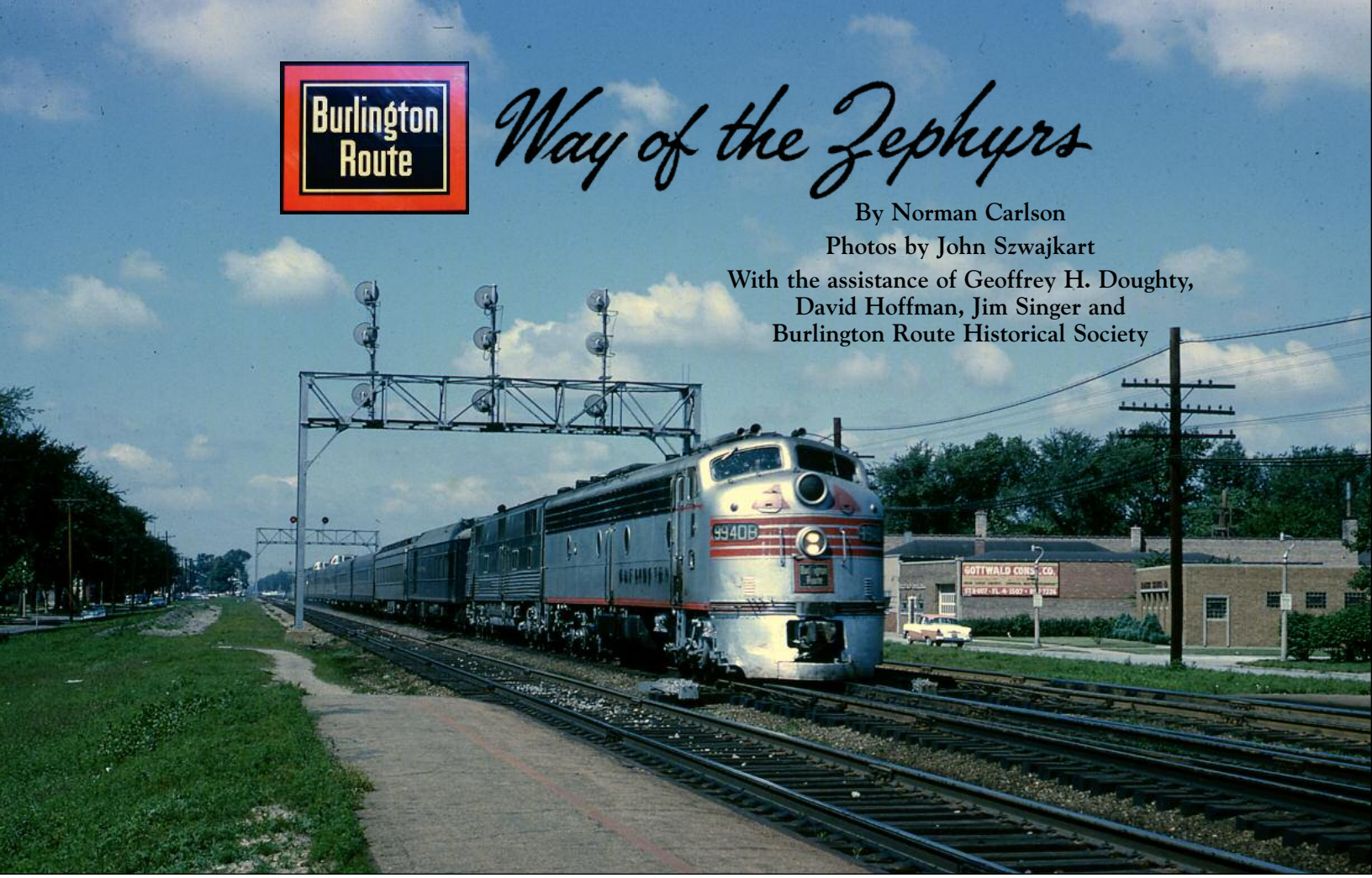
Way of the Zephyrs

By Norman Carlson
Photos by John Szwajkart
With the assistance of Geoffrey H. Doughty, David Hoffman, Jim Singer and Burlington Route Historical Society



▲ E-8 9940B is leading this eastbound train past the La Vergne station in Berwyn on August 12, 1962. Delivered in January 1950, this unit was renumbered as 9933 when the BN merger occurred in March 1970. It was conveyed to Amtrak in August 1972 as their number 332 and was sold for scrap in June 1981. John Szwajkart was in Berwyn getting some hot dogs and walked over to the railroad to see what was happening. This train appeared and it is believed to be an Illini Railfan Club special returning to Chicago. An E-5 is the second unit.

It has been 50 years since March 2, 1970, when the Chicago Burlington & Quincy through merger became a part of the Burlington Northern Railroad. It is very hard to believe that it has been that long since the "Q" disappeared. We thought that the best way to recall the Burlington was to recall when the railroad was noted for its outstanding passenger service. Yes, the "Q" was most certainly the Way of the Zephyrs and Vista-Domes.

Competence together with consistent customer service delivery and excellent marketing are the keys to success in any enterprise. When you add partnerships that last for decades your chances of success increase. Then add to that a sound strategy with continuity of excellent and talented people at all levels of the company and success is assured. We have just described the Chicago Burlington & Quincy's passenger service from the 1930s leading up to Amtrak assuming that service on May 1, 1971.

For almost 34 years, December 8, 1931, to September 30, 1965, two men, Ralph Budd and Harry C. Murphy held the office of President of the Burlington. The company's partners in the passenger business were the Edward G. Budd Manufacturing Company and Electro-Motive Division of General Motors. Edward G. Budd followed by his son Edward, Jr., and EMD's senior executive were always present at significant events regarding the Zephyrs. It is interesting to note that both Budd and GM were basically in the automotive industry.

The Pioneer Zephyr was the creation of four principals; Ralph Budd, Edward G. Budd, Sr., Charles Kettering, GM's vice president of research, and Harold Hamilton, founder and president of Winton Engine Company. The two Budds, though not related, were deemed to have shared a "courageous vision of the future of rail travel." The two Budds believed that they could offer a greater level of comfort in rail travel than any other common carrier. In creating the first Zephyr the concepts of aerodynamics, new construction techniques and stainless steel were combined to create a stunning new, light weight train, a great departure from the past to bring passengers back to the rails in the depths of the Great Depression. It was that belief and their attention to detail that resulted in the Pioneer Zephyr. Kettering and Hamilton signed on with the same enthusiasm and attention to detail. Collectively, they brought decades of engineering experience to the table.

Much of the success of the Zephyrs is due to Budd Manufacturing's "Shotweld" process of spot welding that used very high current electricity to weld stainless steel. Looking back from the perspective of almost 2021, Budd's delivery of the first Bi-level suburban coach to the Burlington in 1950 was a descendant of the Pioneer Zephyr. Today, the stainless steel bi-level coach is the basis of Metra's fleet. Many Budd-built coaches remain in daily operation.

Richard F. Begley, by substantial contribution, has made it possible to publish this page

▲ The Denver Zephyr was the premier passenger train on the Q. On this beautiful autumn day, October 4, 1964, E-9 9986B is leading the eastbound train through the Congress Park station in Brookfield, Illinois. This unit was delivered in December 1956 and was renumbered as 9981 upon the BN merger. It was sold to the West Suburban Mass Transit District (WSMTD) in August 1972 and rebuilt as a E-9Au by Morrison-Knudsen in September 1973. Due to being elevated to cross over the Indiana Harbor Belt, Congress Park was a great spot for photography as there was full visibility of the railroad in each direction.

The Pioneer Zephyr was a product of the financial constraints of the Great Depression and the desire for a lightweight, low-cost (capital and operating) passenger train to stir public desire to return to rails for their travel needs. Today, it is hard for us to think about non-airconditioned, heavyweight passenger cars painted in dark colors hauled by black locomotives belching smoke and cinders as a means of conveyance. Please consider the evolution of what occurred from Ralph Budd's initial trip to the Budd Company to ride a gas-electric car at

Denver Zephyr

The Denver Zephyr was the premier passenger train on the railroad. It was a moneymaker due in part to its fast schedule. There was a huge ski business, so much so that on Friday nights westbound and Sunday nights eastbound there was a second section of the train. In 1925 when the Burlington introduced the Aristocrat it had a 27-½-hour schedule between Chicago and Denver. The goal for the Zephyrs was 16 hours or less transit time.

When the Union Pacific's City of Denver entered service on June 18, 1936, Burlington's competitive response was to operate the Pioneer Zephyr and the Mark Twain Zephyr as an Advanced Denver Zephyr. These 60-seat coach trains sold out immediately for the overnight trips. This service lasted for 97 days, May 31 to September 5, 1936, with a 98.1% on-time performance. Two Budd-built 10-car train sets with a two-unit diesel locomotive entered revenue on November 8, 1936. The train was christened with a bottle of champagne swung by Jane Garlow, Buffalo Bill's granddaughter who was riding a horse. It was the first Zephyr that included sleeping cars.

Burlington's last major investment in its intercity passenger service was the new Denver Zephyr train sets that were placed in service on October 28, 1956. There were multiple christenings of these train sets. In Chicago that honor was given to Beth Murphy, Harry Murphy's granddaughter. Like the Pioneer Zephyr when Edward Budd, Sr. provided guidance on how to swing the bottle, this time Edward Budd, Jr. assisted Beth. This train introduced Slumbercoach service on the Burlington.

The train was designed so that you would experience Colorado from the bumping post at Chicago Union Station until you returned back to Chicago days later. 28 new cars were required for the service. The interior colors of the train were those one would experience in Colorado. A portion of the train operated between Denver and Colorado Springs on the Rio Grande. A favorite among the passengers was the Vista-Dome Chuck Wagon car, a mid-train buffet car. This car had its own china embossed with its own brand, a "C" with a long horizontal bar from the end of the C to DZ with The Chuck above the bar and Wagon below the bar. The menu of full dinners, sandwiches and plenty of beverages was complimented by a Colorado motif from end-to-end within the car. There was a dining car as well. Nothing was spared on this entire train to make it a memorable experience for every passenger.

Fred Lonnes, by substantial contribution, has made it possible to publish this page

▲ On September 8, 1963, the Morning Twin Cities Zephyr is between the LaGrange Road and Stone Avenue stations in LaGrange, Illinois. It was a wonderful Sunday morning made more so as the 4960 was following this train on one of Burlington's famous steam-powered excursions. E-7 9949 is leading another E-7. This unit was delivered in September 1947, renumbered 9925 in March 1970 and traded in that September for a SD45.

Twin Cities Zephyr

The Milwaukee Road, North Western and Burlington were fierce competitors in the Chicago-Twin Cities Market. Soo Line, Rock Island and Chicago Great Western also connected these metropolitan areas on more leisurely schedules. Wanting to build on the success of 9900, the Pioneer Zephyr, two more three-unit articulated train sets, 9901 and 9902 with 88 seats in each train were ordered from Budd and EMD. They entered revenue service on April 21, 1935, with one 441-mile trip. Beginning on June 2, 1935, each train set made a daily round trip so there was a Morning and Afternoon Zephyr to meet the demand. Running time between Chicago and St. Paul was 6-½ hours with 30 more minutes to Minneapolis. There was a one-hour layover to turn and clean the trains.

Beginning on August 3rd a steam-powered section was needed to meet the demand for the Morning Zephyrs. The Budd Company did a study that said only 17 passengers were needed to cover the operating cost of 9901 and 9902 versus 80 passengers on the steam-powered trains. On November 18, 1936, two new Twin Cities five-car articulated train sets, 9904 and 9905, with a seating capacity of 120 in coach and 50 in first class entered service. There was a lounge section and a full dining car with "meals to tempt the gods." The locomotives and coaches of one train were named after Greek gods and the other train after Greek goddesses. 9901 and 9902 were assigned to other services. In 1947 these 1936 train sets were reassigned to the Nebraska Zephyr. The goddesses train set is preserved and operated at the Illinois Railway Museum along with E-5 9911A.

On December 7, 1947, two new seven-car train sets entered Twin Cities service. Each train had four vista-dome coaches, a round end parlor observation vista-dome car, diner and baggage-club lounge. Between St. Paul and Savanna, Illinois, this was a very scenic trip as the railroad was on the east bank of, or in same cases on embankments in, the Mississippi River. Burlington marketed this portion of the trip as where "Nature smiles for 300 miles." Burlington's Passenger Department was very aggressive in marketing and selling tours with package pricing. There are extra cars on the train featured in the cover photo. John Szwajkart took the photo as his parents were on the train for a Twin Cities weekend tour. They enjoyed this so much they booked a week-long Colorado trip via the Denver Zephyr.

Budd's Philadelphia plant on September 29, 1932.

The combination of using new theories of aerodynamics, new construction techniques and stainless steel resulted in a revolutionary product. The fact that Ralph and Edward Budd, Sr. both had engineering backgrounds played no small role in this endeavor. Meanwhile in Detroit, Kettering and Hamilton were perfecting a two-cycle, eight-cylinder diesel engine to replace the then standard four-cycle, eight-cylinder diesel engine. The two-cycle model also used new metal alloys that resulted in a weight reduction of almost one-third compared to the previous design.

On June 17, 1933, a 600-horsepower diesel engine was ordered to be built by GM. GM was now a partner with The Budd Co. and the Burlington, a relationship that would last for decades.

So now it is time to name this revolutionary new train. Albert Cotsworth, Jr. Burlington's General Passenger Agent, thought that this last word in passenger train technology should be named with the last word in the dictionary. His search had not come up with an appropriate word beginning with a "Z." Ralph Budd, being a

Douglas Hosler, by substantial contribution, has made it possible to publish this page

▲ John turned around to capture this same train in a going away view. ▶ The combined Nebraska and Kansas City Zephyrs looked more like a mixed train than a passenger train with all of its headend traffic. The train was split at Galesburg. On Sunday, June 19, 1966, locomotive 9985B is leading this westbound train through the Congress Park station. This E9 was delivered in December 1955 and rebuilt and operated in suburban service as 9910.

Renaissance man, recalled his reading of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and *Zephyrus*, the god of the west wind. While this was not the last word in the dictionary, Budd was pleased and Cotsworth agreed.

Following Edward Budd, Sr.'s advice on where to aim the bottle of champagne on the Zephyr's nose, Marguerite Cotsworth, Albert's daughter, christened the Pioneer Zephyr on April 17, 1934, at Pennsylvania Railroad's Broad Street Station in Philadelphia. The station was a few miles from Budd's assembly plant. In attendance at this event, which was broadcast over the NBC radio network, were representatives of GM and United States Steel and a mass of people. After a nationwide tour and the Zephyr's record-breaking run from Denver to Chicago on May 26, 1934, the train was placed on exhibit at Chicago's World's Fair. On November 11, 1934, the train entered revenue service between Lincoln, Nebraska and Kansas City, Missouri, via Omaha.

Ralph Budd was born on a farm near Waterloo, Iowa, on August 20, 1879. After graduating from Highland Park College in Des Moines, he joined the Chicago Great Western's engineering department as a draftsman. In 1902 he moved to the Rock Island to work on their Kansas City-St, Louis line's construction. There he met John F. Stevens who was noted for his work on the Great Northern. Budd followed Stevens to construction engineering assignments on the Panama Railway and the Oregon Trunk. He became chief engineer of the Oregon Trunk and then the Spokane, Portland and Seattle.

Richard Tower, by substantial contribution, has made it possible to publish this page

▲ Burlington's California Zephyr was marketed as a cruise-type train. A very late CZ led by E7A 9933B built in March of 1949 is nearing the end of its eastbound journey as it crosses LaGrange Road in LaGrange, Illinois on June 19, 1966. The train is slowing down as it is being crossed over to the center track at Congress Park. ▸ Turning around we can see the eastbound home signal for the Congress Park interlocking. The dwarf signal hanging on the left side of the top signal is a lunar indication. It is a type of "call-on" indication to advance suburban trains into an occupied block at restricted speed.

In 1912, James J. Hill became aware of Budd and asked him to join the Great Northern as an assistant to him. Budd became the chief engineer and executive vice president. At age 40, in 1919, Budd became the youngest railroad president in the United States. In the 1920s, together with Northern Pacific's president, Budd attempted, for the third time to merge the GN and NP with the Burlington. The Interstate Commerce Commission would only approve the merger if GN and NP would divest themselves of the Burlington. As we know, this merger was finally accomplished on March 2, 1970, 69 years after the first attempt.

Budd was described as looking more like a university professor than a railroad president. One associate described that "traveling with Budd was something like taking an escorted tour with a naturalist." Quiet and modest, Budd was an avid reader and learner. Some people believed that he was a "closet historian." He had an engaging personality and an unusual sense of perspective. He was also a mentor of talent. Men who worked for him went on to become railroad presidents; Fred Gurley (Santa Fe), John Farrington (Rock Island), Alfred Perlman (Rio Grande and New York Central) and his successor Harry C. Murphy. His son, John M. Budd, became the president of the Great Northern.

Approaching the then Burlington's mandatory retirement age of 70, Ralph Budd announced he would retire on August 31, 1949. He held that office for 17 years and nine months. Mayor Martin Kennelly of Chicago appointed Budd to the chairmanship of the Chicago Transit Authority where he served for five years. Northwestern University offered Budd a position to lead a professorial lectureship in transportation, business and government. (Budd served as an advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt.). Budd turned down the position saying that he was not qualified. In 1954 he retired and moved to Santa Barbara, California. He passed away on February 2, 1962, at 83 years of age.

Harry C. Murphy was appointed as president of the Burlington effective on September 1, 1949. Murphy was born on August 29, 1892, in Canton, Illinois, and grew up in Eldora, Iowa. He attended Iowa State College and the Armour Institute of Technology, now the Illinois Institute of Technology, in Chicago. Hired by the Burlington in 1914 he worked for a short period as an accounting clerk before moving to the engineering department. He was a pilot in the Army Air Corps during World War I. Upon returning to the railroad he was assigned as the division engineer in Centralia, Illinois, and then spent 14 years in various divisions across the railroad.

He was appointed in 1933 as the safety superintendent. This lasted for three years when in 1936 he was appointed assistant to the executive vice president. In 1939 Murphy became assistant vice president of operations, moving into the position of vice president of operations in 1945. Having served in increasing roles of responsibility in the Budd administration, there was no doubt that he would continue the policies of Ralph Budd as president of the Burlington.

Railroads are managed in a military-style command and control environment.

David Wilson, by substantial contribution, has made it possible to publish this page

California Zephyr

Burlington's philosophy was to create passenger service designed to fit specific needs. In the Post World War II environment Ralph Budd felt that branch line trains could not compete with automobiles. At the other end of the spectrum, a train operating 2,532 miles between the Chicago and Oakland could not compete with airplane travel. Thus, the California Zephyr was designed to be a cruise-type train scheduled to allow passengers to soak in the scenic beauty of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado and the Feather River Canyon in Northern California. Traveling end-to-end, people would spend approximately 51 hours on the train.

Leaving mid-afternoon from Chicago the train travelled overnight to Denver on the Burlington on a slightly more leisurely schedule then the Denver Zephyr. From Denver passengers rode the rails of the Denver & Rio Grande Western through the Rocky Mountains arriving in Salt Lake City at night. Overnight, passengers rode across the desert of Western Utah and Nevada. In daylight they enjoyed a 115-mile ride through the Sierra Nevada Mountains between Portola and Oroville, California in the Feather River Canyon. Oroville is approximately 60 miles north of Sacramento while Portola is 50 miles northwest of Reno, Nevada. Arrival in Oakland was mid-afternoon. Departure from Oakland was mid-morning with an early afternoon arrival in Chicago. The entire trip was 1,039 miles on the Burlington, 570 miles on the Rio Grande and 923 miles on the Western Pacific for 2,532 rail miles.

The consist of the train was Vista-Dome reclining seat coaches, buffet-lounge and round-end observation lounge car with sleeping cars, a dining car and a baggage car that were "flat-roof" cars. This equipment was owned in proportion to the route miles by the three railroads. Each railroad provided its own motive power. The train entered service on March 20, 1949, replacing the Exposition Flyer that had entered service on June 10, 1939. Full dining service was offered in the dining car with multiple seatings on a reservation basis. Beverages and light meals were offered in the buffet-lounge and the observation car. In addition to the sleeping car porters, Zephyrettes were onboard to assist passengers with their needs. After 10 years of service the train was given a "new look" in 1957 that included changes in color schemes, replacing open section sleepers with Slumbercoaches and redesigning the lounge-buffet as the Cable Car Lounge. Ralph Budd believed that the way you made money in passenger service was to keep the equipment moving. Upon arrival in Chicago, the last three cars of the California Zephyr were quickly turned and serviced to depart that evening on the combined overnight Ak-Sar-Ben (Nebraska spelled backwards) Zephyr to Omaha and Lincoln and the American Royal Zephyr to Kansas City.

Despite this, Murphy was approachable and known to walk to other offices when he wanted to talk to someone. He lived in Aurora and commuted on his own railroad. Some described him as a "mechanical genius." The rejuvenation of Burlington's suburban service commenced during his tenure as vice president of operations and was completed early in his tenure as president.

He retired as president on September 30, 1965, having held the office of president for 16 years. In retirement he continued to live in Aurora, and he passed away on March 4, 1967, at 74 years of age. At the time of his funeral all trains on the railroad stopped for one minute in his memory.

Knowing something about the men who made this happen will help understand why the Burlington passenger service was what it was. Those who experienced it, be it regular service, tours, private trips or those incredible steam-powered fantrip excursions all over the system will never forget the *Way of the Zephyrs* and Vista-Domes.

For more information on the Zephyrs we recommend Geoffrey H. Doughty's two books, *The Early Zephyrs* and *Way of the Zephyrs The Postwar Years*.

Everywhere West

J. Robert Wayman, by substantial contribution, has made it possible to publish this page