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**at every
step**

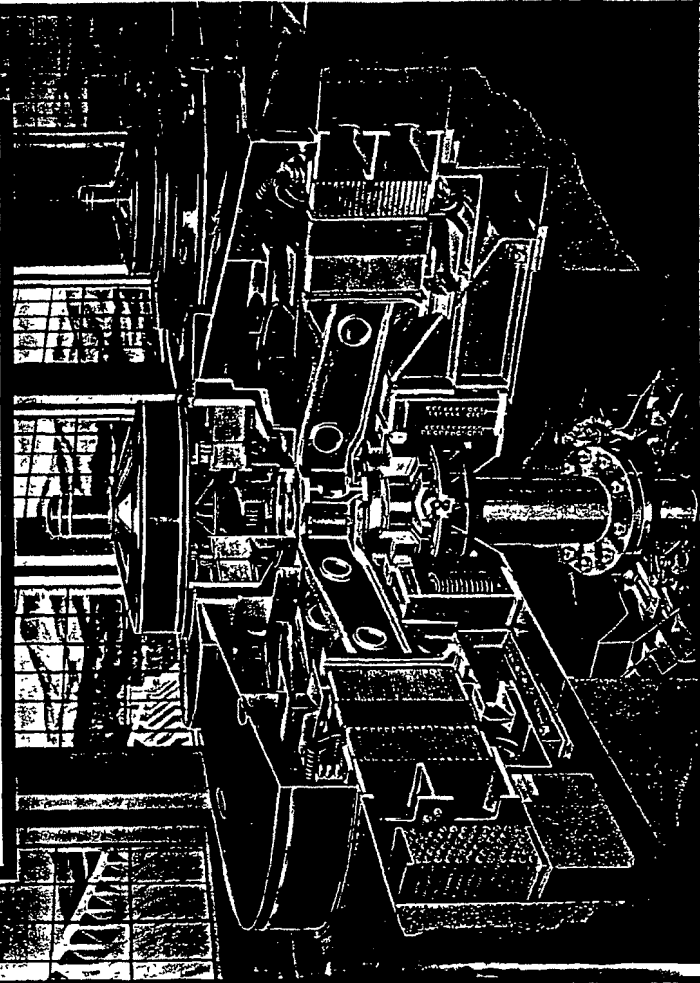


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Bechtel Briefs



THE HEART OF HYDROELECTRIC POWER

July 1949



By ROBERT L. INGRAM

1808-1048



FOREWORD

THE WORKS of men speak for them, needing no words. However, signal occasions make words appropriate, as in 1948 the fiftieth anniversary of Dad Beckett's start in the construction business. By then the ranks of old-timers were rapidly thinning: there existed no single, related and permanent record of the work, and no man—not even this narrative's principals—knew all the key facts about a half-century's activities.

[illegible]

Should inaccuracies be found they likely will be of detail, traceable to faulty memories. The larger meanings were never in doubt: spirit and import stood out with crystal clarity in the very interview and teller. It is hoped this brief book will partially repay its real authors for the pleasant hours and days they gave to recreate events of the past. Acknowledgment is made also to all who contributed and there were many not named here.

Accomplishment is made to all who contributed and there were many. Of them, I especially want to mention those who were formerly with Southern Pacific and Union Construction Co., Warren A. Beckel, Jr., who helped me get going fairly far in short notice in the firm's employ; George C. Linn, retired co-founder and former Secretary-Treasurer of Industrial Legation Pacific; and J. C. Hunsbarger, whose oil was culled under the same guise. Early in 1942, I retired, and Silas H. Polner, former Beckel partner and a Director of Pacific Gas and Electric Company; Otto W. Peterson, Chief Engineers' Construction Division Pacific Railroad Co.; and Thomas L. Phillips, Chief Engineer, The Western Pacific Railroad Co. To Robert L. Bridges who has raised capital and run the firm for me and in recent years to Kenneth B. Brown, who has been my right hand man, I am indebted. Kenneth Brown, this man writing, played a straight tune.

on and to patiently keeping his pen writing during a stormy time.

of America after the hundreds of meetings and frequent arrangements.

CHAPTER I.

[illegible]

Background of a builder

Leading with the old slip report was hard work, but hard work was nothing new to a young man who had fought to win a living out of the Kansas soil following the great money panic of 1893. W. A. Reibel was well prepared for rough going on the railroad job by the two circumstances of simply ancestral

bridegroom, he wanted his lady to have the good things of life, and the ability of the ranch to provide them looked doubtful at best. By December 23, 1898, when Warren, his first son was born at Peabody, W. A. Beethel already had turned his energies to better account. Raids were being laid in Indian Territory some miles to the south; in the spring of '99 word had reached him that the railroad would look with favor on a well-set-up young man willing to deliver a full day's work, especially if infused with his own team of work animals.

The eventual outcome of his trip in Indian Territory is reflected in the works of one of the world's largest engineering and construction organizations. But the immediate result was no more important than the addition in 1906 of the railroad section of one more liberal band with a "hasty outfit," except for a change that took place within the man himself. Here, in the heat and dust, he found what he had been looking for—and he knew it.

It would be agreeable to report that the railroad job was his first adventure in construction but this was not strictly the fact. In "off seasons" while running near Peabody, W. A. and Bechtel had done some local road work, and even was construction prevalent in the family even farther back. His father, John Moyer Bechtel, had been a county road commissioner while living at Freeport, Illinois. Certainly, however, the job in Indian Territory marked the essence of W. A. Bechtel's life work.

Found: a lifework

For the right people heavy construction can be an infection. It got into the freshman

EDITOR'S NOTE

BECKETT, Ingram is privileged to present in this series of mailman's "A Builder and His Family" written and copyrighted by Robert L. Ingram. The telltale of the Beckett story is something that has been long overdue, at least in the form in which it appears here. It is a story of a family and employees who have followed its growth through years of association with it can enjoy this story it will be reprinted in serial form in this and forthcoming issues of BECKETT. The narrative, we think, rapidly depicts the minutiae, and lifework of a man, his sons and his people who have chosen to make his presence their guideposts to a way of life.

"A Builder and His Family" is not the only Bethel story that could be told. There are many facets to it as persons who could write it, however, we, at least, and the author feel privileged to have had a part in bringing into clear focus an era which started fifty years ago and has continued without interruption until the present time—ever changing but always resting on a solid foundation.

stemster's blood and stayed there. W. A. had a natural affinity for this kind of work and he relished the satisfaction in accomplishment that is the builder's real reward. Years later a prominent engineer said of him: "He loved construction. Long after he had become a successful contractor, I have seen him peel off his coat and take a turn or two with a team shovel and scraper. He used to climb up on a steam shovel and load a couple of cars, enjoying every minute of it. W. A. came right up from the grade."

1899: Ever ~~Val~~

After the stretch in Indian Territory, he went north into Iowa and Minnesota, and then west to the coast of California. He came into Wooming on Union Pacific railroad after Wooming men took over the road. But for some time, in the Crested tradition, his eyes were turned toward the Far West. He went there soon after the new century began, first to Oregon as a gang foreman on the Southern Pacific, and then to Whitehead section of the Nevada, where he figured crew sections for the St. Engineering Department. "I landed in Reno," he said, "with a wife and two babies, a slide trombone and a two dollar bill!" A second son, Stephen Davidson DeWalt, had been born at Aurora, Indiana, on September 21, 1900.

The Far West at the turn

of the century

The west at this time remained largely a land of promise. In the fifty years following the Gold Rush, giants like Stanford and General Dodge had laid the way for the future with highways of steel, yet California, always the leader in western development, by 1900 had attracted a population of only 1,015,000.

1. sources were there, but except for gold, still almost entirely unexploited. What was to inspire son Stephen D. Beckwith's engineering vision thirty years later, and water and gas as sources of power, a field in which today's Bechtel interests are highly active, had never been exploited to any considerable extent. People, the factor essential to empire, were fabled to come in numbers large enough to support a well-rounded economy. The try that could unlock the treasure house was transportation, and transportation meant the railroads. When Collis P. Huntington, last survivor of

Southern Pacific's "Big Four" died in 1900. His company already was operating eight thousand miles of railroad extending from Portland to Guaymas, Mexico, and east to Ogden and New Orleans. But Santa Fe's main line into Oakland had yet to be completed, and Western Pacific was not in full operation until 1907. Southern Pacific was building down the Coast. Northwest from Marin County a number of independent short lines would wait seven years for consolidation into the North-

So, although all the pioneer rail routes were complete as the Twentieth Century began, western carriers were engaged on the less spectacular but more comprehensive program of shortening distances, improving grades, and adding branch lines.

1902: Some early friendships

V. C. Hindmarsh, now a Vice President of Bechtel Corporation, and George S. Colley, father of International Bechtel's George Colley, became acquainted with W. A. Bechtel at Wadsworth, Nevada. The three men were employed during 1902 and 1903 on reassignment of the Southern Pacific's Overland Route, then called the Overland Route.

called the
who was SI
Supervising Construction Engi-
neer on this job tell how W. A. caught up
with the railroad. His name is A. J. Bartley.
He is now retired and living in Berkeley, Calif.
Mr. Bartley's words, is the story:

Fadsworth, Nevada

"I ran and back near Westveth during the winter while I was inspecting some work being done on the roadbed. I saw a man walking back from the work site of the contracting firm of Carroy, Roy and Hightree. He looked discouraged as he asked me if there was a chance to get a job with the railroad. I told him I knew of no job open at the moment, but that one might be, a little later. I asked him if he wanted a lift in my wagon, by which I meant that he could ride in back for a while, as the lumberyard and then walk to the mill. He thanked me and then went back for a while, saying on that day the weather was cold—and was generally cold three—four days and was then found and a good wind blowing up the canyon.

"He said his name was Bechler, that he had been promised the job of superintendent by the contractor's agent, but that when he arrived at the site Higgins told him to clear out—that no superintendent was needed. I found out later that he hid his family along and wrote a short of money. He looked like a mighty fine man to me, so when I got to Wadsworth I asked at our office if a job was going to be opened."

The SP hired an estimator

"Well, there was an opening and we agreed to it," Beck's life took it, as an estimation. He worked hard and was well rewarded. From there he was sent to the Ogden office. A little later he requisitioned a gravel pit superabundant for a quarry at Lovelock, and "Beck" was sent out. There were fifteen to twenty new cars on the job aiding all the time. The work was loaded by steam shovel, which there was a new idea. It was a tough job and "Beck" did very well. In those days out on the desert, men worked from sunrise till sundown.

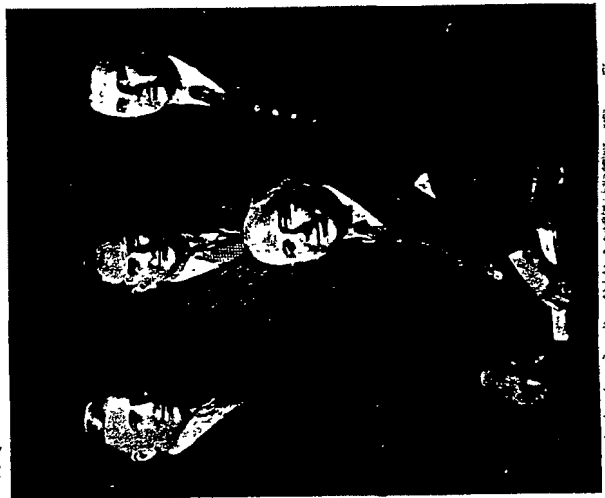
—I was learning all the time, but he seemed to me a natural engineer, and I've always thought that good engineers are born, not made. They must have a knack for it in the first place, or all the books on stress and strain won't do much good.

"I was glad to hear of his success in later years. He deserved to succeed. 'Beck' was what I've always thought an engineer should be—a man who understands what is to be done, knows how to do it, and finishes the job economically."

1903: Quarryman at Lovelock—
Home was where Mother made it

At the Lonecreek sex rev, one of many large, converted lox, got the family line. The Lonecreek sex rev, one of many large, converted lox, got the family line. The Lonecreek sex rev, one of many large, converted lox, got the family line.

End of first installment?



Kenny, Steve and Warren in the 20's, standing in back of W.A.'s (Dad) Doctel.