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# A Variety of Interests

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## A Variety of Interests

When, in 1949, Budd announced that he would retire on the first of the month following his seventieth birthday on August 20, no one could persuade him to change his mind, for he himself had enforced that rule for Burlington officers. It was perfectly obvious, however, that the man who was the universally acknowledged "dean of railroaders" was a good deal more vigorous and alert than countless men half his age. No one with his intellectual curiosity and variety of interests could be expected to sit still. It was simply a question of what he would do next.

Franklin B. Snyder, president of Northwestern University, offered him a professorial lectureship with virtual *carte blanche* to give such seminars as he desired in a wide range of fields including transportation, business and government, investments, western history, and business administration. Budd gave that invitation very serious thought, yet did not accept it for the simple reason that he did not think he was qualified. There are many of his friends who still disagree on that point.

As the time for his retirement from the Burlington drew near, Budd received another invitation, this time from Mayor Martin Kennelly who asked



him to assume the chairmanship of the Chicago Transit Authority. The choice was obviously not a political one, for the Mayor was a Democrat, and Budd a Republican. Nor was the job a sine-cure. No subject was more touchy or troublesome than the hopelessly tangled public transit system of Chicago. When Budd took the job there were those who, in the nicest possible way, suggested that he must have taken leave of his senses.

But as usual he had his own excellent reasons. First of all, he thought it would be much better and more interesting to have something to do rather than just to stop working. Next, he was convinced that the Mayor was doing his best to give Chicago an honest government, that the recently created Transit Authority should have a fair chance, and that he could, perhaps, render a civic service to the community.

"It was an opportunity which one could never get on the railroad," Budd said, "of finding out whether people would be willing to pay what it cost to give transportation, . . . and whether, if they did, you would reach the point where you would encounter the law of diminishing returns because the fares would be so high. And then you could discover whether, if the community did reach that point, the people would be willing to face up to the proposition that there might be some amount which, considering its social and economic effect on the whole community, it would be fair and proper for the riders to pay, and above that something would have to be paid from the public tax fund."



Obviously for Budd the C.T.A. job was a challenge and a golden opportunity to make a meaningful experiment.

As even those who have had to pay increased fares in Chicago will admit, it was worth it. During the five years that Budd guided the destiny of C.T.A., the entire plant, and particularly its equipment, assumed a "new look." At the very outset he had to find enough money to replace the cars that ranged anywhere from thirty to fifty years of age. Only his personal standing with the financial community brought forth the desired loans. Next, of course, he ran into vigorous public criticism for his gradual raising of fares and invited a storm of brickbats whenever he suggested a change in service. But he kept moving toward his objective, meeting his bitterest critics in public debate time and again, and maintaining smooth relations both with the city authorities and with the employees. When he finally laid down the burden in the summer of 1954, Chicago had achieved its goal of 50 years in complete consolidation and modernization of its local transportation.

While serving as chairman of C.T.A., Budd was "borrowed" by the federal government on a matter of both diplomatic and economic importance. In 1951 a Joint Brazil-United States Economic Development Commission was established by the two governments to formulate plans de-



signed to overcome transportation and electric power shortages in Brazil. To evaluate the adequacy and priority of the various projects, several distinguished consultants were retained. One was Ralph Budd, who was chairman of a five-man Special Railroad Mission. All members of his group were thoroughly experienced in railway operation, and all or some of them were in Brazil from mid-December, 1952, until the following March. The report which he prepared is now being given serious consideration by Brazilian authorities.

Regardless of the burden of official duties, Ralph Budd has always found time for his principal avocation, western history. While on the Great Northern he not only sponsored Grace Flandrau's series of historical pamphlets as well as the "Empire Builder" broadcasts, but arranged and personally directed two excursions on which he invited leading historians from all over the country. During the course of these trips, monuments were dedicated to Verendrye, the French explorer, David Thompson, the great geographer, John Jacob Astor of fur trade fame, Lewis and Clark, and John F. Stevens.

On the Burlington in the mid-thirties he opened the company's extensive colonization records to historical research and in 1943 deposited in the Newberry Library some fifteen tons of invaluable source material covering the period 1849-1901.



To qualified historians who wished to work in this material, as well as in more recent data still in company files, he gave constant encouragement with the result that several books and innumerable articles have been and will be published concerning the Burlington's history.

But Budd's interest in history has been by no means at second hand. In virtually all his many public addresses he invariably placed his topic in solid historical context and, as on the Great Northern, sponsored two elaborate historical pageants for the Burlington. He was for many years an active trustee of the James Jerome Hill Reference Library in St. Paul, and still is a trustee of the Museum of Science and Industry, and the Newberry Library, both in Chicago; meanwhile he has encouraged and participated in the activities of numerous historical societies, including the Lexington Group that is devoted specifically to railway history.

In the light of this interest, it was natural that when a group of Chicago businessmen gathered to plan some sort of lakefront fair in 1948, Budd found himself at the first meeting and pounced upon the suggestion that it be made a railroad celebration centering around an historical pageant. As a member of the committee in charge he devoted long hours to planning and building the Railroad Fair. The two-year show (held over by popular demand) not only introduced several mil-



lion people to modern railroading, but was successful financially.

Since June, 1954, Ralph Budd, in the technical sense, has been "retired," and has established a home in Santa Barbara, California. The fact that he is a member of several boards of directors, including that of the Burlington, means that his counsel is still available to business, however, and he has the opportunity, which he relishes, to keep up to the minute on what is going on and to maintain his countless friendships. Like a busman on a holiday, he likes nothing better than to travel.

Curiously enough, his wife has never shared his peripatetic inclinations, yet like Jack Spratt and his wife, they have made an ideal combination. Their older son, Robert Budd, who lives in Bloomfield Hills, is president of the Great Lakes Greyhound Lines at Detroit, as well as an officer of various other bus companies. Their younger son John, who lives in St. Paul, is president of the Great Northern Railway. Thus, in their own ways, Ralph Budd's sons have carried on the family tradition in the field of transportation.

But it would be a mistake to think of Ralph Budd only in terms of the right of way. He is an omnivorous and critical reader and an historian in his own right. His knowledge of geography, the West, and the American Indian—as well as of the various artists who have portrayed the Great West—"confounds the experts." He has been an

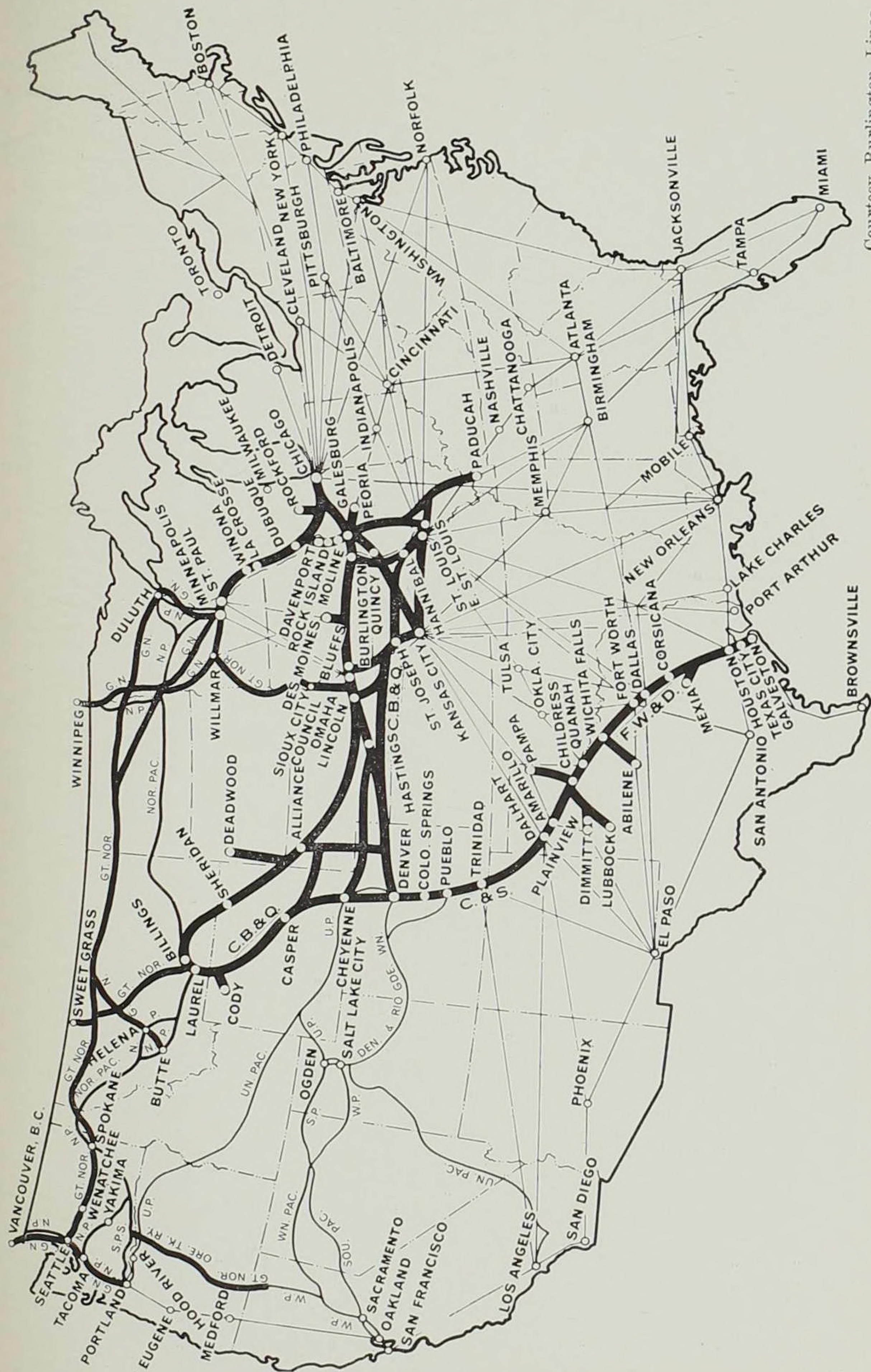


ardent horseback rider, enjoys watching football, and is a baseball fan of long standing. Probably the comment most often made about him is that, no matter with whom he is talking, be they young, old, great, or humble, all feel they are conversing with somebody of their own kind.

Ralph Budd, in short, is a national figure whose achievements are indeed incredible. But he is a human who is intensely credible.

RICHARD C. OVERTON





The Burlington, Great Northern, and Northern Pacific Lines.

Courtesy Burlington Lines