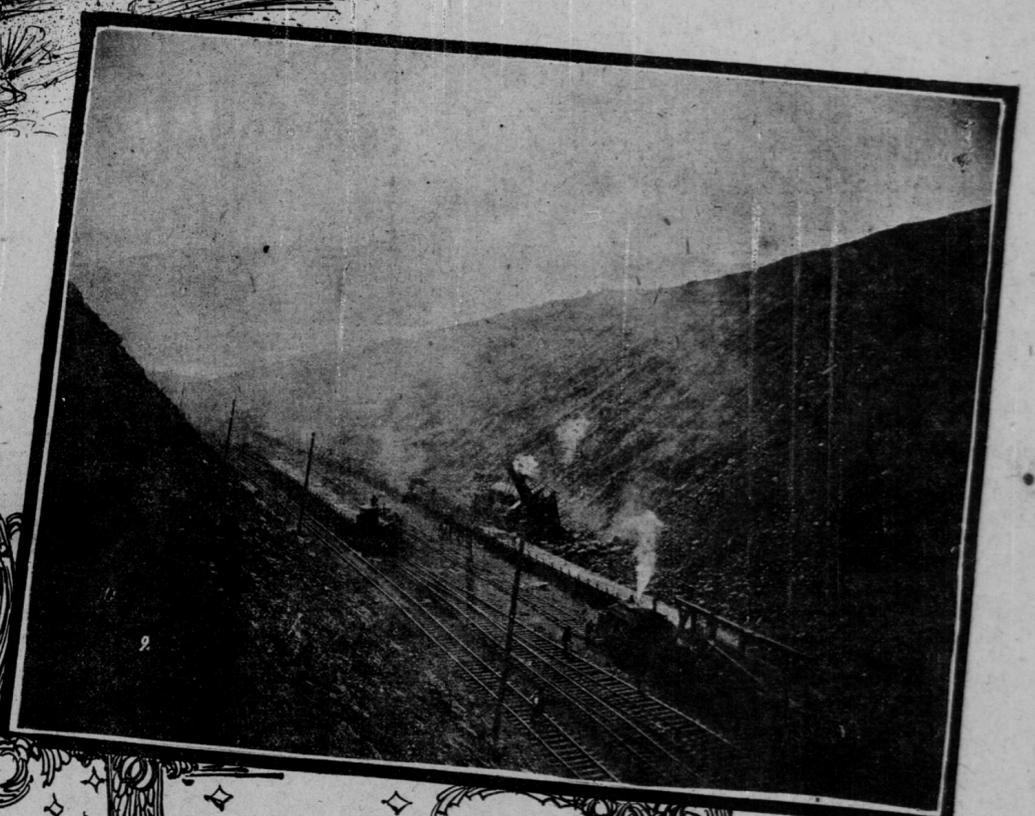


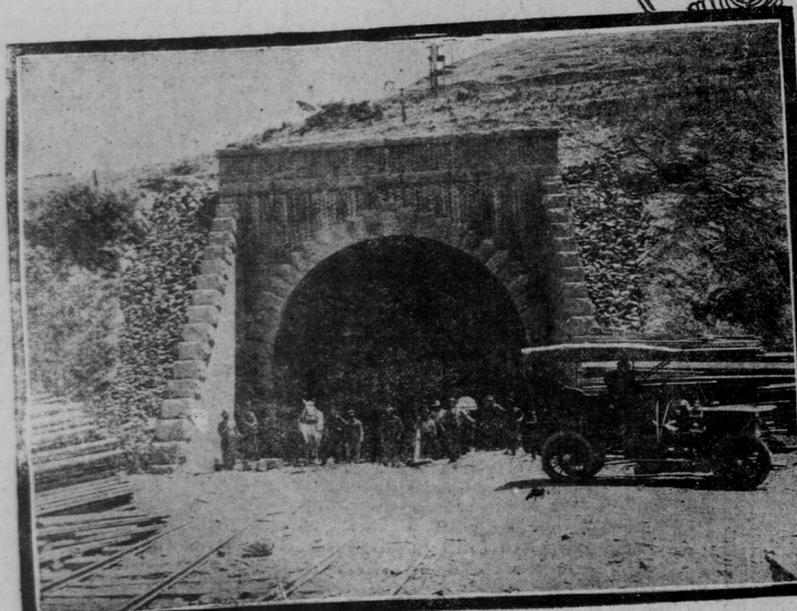
WILL THE PHANTOM LOCOMOTIVE VISIT VISTACION?



PETE QUINN, ENGINEER



THE 90-FOOT CUT AT VISTACION



TUNNEL MOUTH at the CITY SIDE OF VISTACION

By F. Jay Cagy

WILL the phantom locomotive visit the new roundhouse at Vistacion? That it will do so is the secret hope nourished in the breast of more than one hard-headed old railroadman, who was scoffing at the idea that he was superstitious—and yet—well, there must be something in all those stories told by lifelong friends and comrades of the rail.

Never heard of the phantom locomotive? More than likely. Men do not lay bare to the casual acquaintance these vague yet tenacious beliefs. But in the cool shadows of the roundhouse, the snug seclusion of the caboose, among old and sympathetic railroad cronies, the mysterious appearances of this apparition of good omen are soberly discussed.

Old Michael Flaherty believes in it, as, indeed, why should he not, since Quinn of the R. S. & F.—who was running old number 870 long before there was such a type as the big mogul—told Flaherty, who was firing for him, all about the affair at Platte Junction. That was years ago. Quinn is dead now, and Flaherty has had his day at the throttle—lost his nerve—and a railroadman still is reduced to the post of watchman of the new roundhouse at Vistacion. But he has not forgotten Quinn's story, nor the evidence of his own eyes—for he, too, has seen the phantom locomotive. Flaherty believes that the good luck

will come to Vistacion and the Bay Shore cutoff, as it always does come to any section of track over which the phantom rolls its invisible wheels. Not that Flaherty has yet seen this ghostly locomotive, even dimly, through the gloom of the roundhouse interior, but, more than once, when he knew there was not a veritable locomotive within miles, he has heard the rattle click with approaching wheels, heard the weird warning of a ghostly whistle, the quick, sharp puff of the exhaust, the clang of an invisible bell—and, standing back from the roundhouse switch, has heard the phantom locomotive pass with a rush of wind and run straight on through the closed doors of the empty roundhouse, into its echoes interior.

And so Flaherty sits and watches, hoping to catch a glimpse of this good omen of the rail, and pondering meanwhile, upon the tales of Quinn and other true-hearted and horny-handed railroadmen, from Billy Crawford, who met the thing last week, to Andy Ames of the Santa Fe, whose experience occurred in '83.

When Quinn Saw It

Quinn had the night run from Reno west over the Sierras—300 miles of heavy grades, sharp curves and creaking trestles, with deep and rocky gorges upon the one hand and frowning crags upon the other. He was a bluff, two-fisted man with a sort of calm, good humored independence, which was the bane of train dispatchers and division superintendents. He

was afraid of nothing, not even of authority, but he was a good engineer and he usually pulled No. 7 into the station at Oakland mole so nearly on time that his little furries of independent retort were overlooked. It was Quinn who answered the inquiry of the D. S. "Why did you stop at Dutch Flat for water?" with the curt wire: "Because I couldn't get it without stopping." It will be seen that Quinn was not a sensitive or dreamy nature. Any phantom seen by Quinn was not a matter for question.

No. 7 was late that night. There had been a freight wreck at Gold Run, and the overland was held for two hours while the wrecking crew cleaved the rails. When she pulled slowly between the piled up tangle of splinters and scrap iron which had been fast freight No. 56, Quinn was in a mood to force the big compound engine to the limit. She took the sharp curves at a speed which rocked the sleepers in the Pullman berths and tore down the grades with every ounce of steam doing its best to force her through the remaining hours of the run at the rate of a hundred miles to the hour.

Signal lights were but a quick blur in the darkness—Quinn was running on his nerve and the chance that all was well ahead. As No. 7 neared Auburn she rounded a sharp curve in a deep cut, and into Quinn's startled eyes there flashed the gleaming headlight of a locomotive—on the same track.

Some men might have jumped—not Quinn. He threw on the air and

waited. It cannot be denied that his heart failed him and that he had a quick vision of a little fire lighted sitting room on Adeline street, where Lucy and the kids were waiting for him. There was little time to think. The cab rocked and swayed with the tremendous speed, the wheels screamed with the sudden setting of the brakes; the great yellow headlight, like an evil eye, bore down upon him. He clutched the sill of the cab window, whispered a word of prayer and—the headlights met. There was a sensation as of swiftly rushing air and the phantom locomotive passed through or over No. 7, which came to a grinding stop with a shock which threw the frightened passengers pell mell out of their berths, and sent the conductor rushing, with his twinkling lantern, to see what had gone wrong.

Quinn climbed down from his cab, dazed and solemn. The white faced fireman clung to his seat, unable to move or speak. "There's something wrong ahead," said Quinn, seizing the lantern from the conductor's hand. "No, I don't know what it is. Just sensed it, I guess. You come with me and I'll show you."

The Trestle Was Gone

Together they walked some hundred yards or more around the curve. The trestle over Hog gulch was gone—washed out by a cloudburst higher up the Sierras, and which had shown no sign below. Quinn was complimented by the D. S. on his keen sight and quick nerve. He said nothing about the phantom locomotive, but the fireman, who had seen it, too, was not so reticent. Quinn always laughed at the idea, except when he knew his man. It was Quinn himself who told the story to Flaherty.

Andy Ames was a railroad telegrapher at a little way station on the Santa Fe, a mere water tank of a place, but Andy was young and ambitious and was putting by three-quarters of his salary to furnish up a little home for Betty Williams and himself, when they should marry in the fall. So Andy plugged away, not caring much that the busy season of fruit shipping sent the freights along so thick and fast that he hadn't the proper amount of sleep. Andy dreamed of Betty all day, anyhow, so the loss of sleep didn't mean so much to him as it would to a more prosaic youth. Not that Andy wasn't a good operator—he was—none better on the line.

But one day Andy got a bit muddled in his orders. It wasn't strange under the circumstances—he had been on duty for an unconscionable number of hours, his night relief being down sick with a fever. A freight train lay on the main line while the engine took off when he heard a shrill whistle from the east, and springing to his feet, fully awake, he saw the great yellow headlight of an approaching train, its glare falling full upon the rails of the main line which clicked with its swift approach.

Ames says he knew there wasn't time to act—knew that before he could run to the switch and throw the approaching train to the safety of the siding a horrible collision must inevitably occur. Yet he felt so irresistibly impelled to make the attempt, futile though he knew it to be, that he ran wildly up the track, yelling to the freight crew to save themselves, and while he was still 50 yards from the switch was horrified to see the approaching locomotive plunge headon into the waiting freight.

Ames had often heard of and always ridiculed this beneficent monster, this good omen of supernatural railroadmen. But he knew now that this impossible thing was true—knew, too, that there was some hidden meaning in its abrupt appearance. He did not stop to question. Still impelled by some intangible yet imperative force, he rushed forward to the switch and swung it open, just in time to let a special, which the blinding light of the phantom had prevented him from seeing, rush clanging to the safety of the siding.

Five hundred souls were saved from the awful horrors of a railroad wreck by this beneficent monster, which was

invisible to all but Ames. He, poor fellow, was roundly reprimanded for not giving the special the right of way and side tracking the freight according to orders. He took his medicine quietly—it would have meant discharge if he had not been a good fellow, whom the freight crew liked, and shielded by keeping quiet about the closeness of the call. You see, they all knew how long Andy had kept awake, and all about Betty Williams—matters of no moment, of course, to men who sat in offices and issued orders. But not even to these stanch friends, the train crew, did Andy tell of the phantom locomotive—he was young and afraid of being laughed at. When he grew older and wiser he confided it to Flaherty, who was at that time the star engineer of the Q. E. D. Flaherty did not laugh.

Billy Crawford Sees It

It was only last week that Billy Crawford saw the phantom locomotive—and it was not a thousand miles from Vistacion, where it is the hope of Flaherty and others who know that it will stay for a week or two at least. Billy Crawford is a young man—just about the age of that young Ames who was saved by the phantom engine, way back in '83, from a life long memory of horror. But Billy is more talkative than Ames—and, moreover, he was in no danger of discharge if the truth became known. So his particular adventure was a good deal talked about, and the story even spread beyond the limits of the railroad fraternity, and saved, indeed, the real impulse which resulted in this article.

Billy has the run between San Francisco and Santa Cruz. Down on the peninsula, not many miles out of the city, there is a long level stretch of track, which is as straight as the company rules. Billy was on time, the night was clear, everything going along like clockwork. Billy had a date that night with a couple of fellows just out from the east, and he was going to show them the difference between wide open Frisco and that little Vermont hamlet they called a city. He was planning a few audacious stunts as a climax to the evening's fun, when he became aware of a strange light on the road in front of him, but from behind.

Crawford threw a quick glance over his shoulder and made a remark not to be found in the printed rules and regulations. The light came from a locomotive which was tearing along with the phantom locomotive—not, at least, to the uninitiated.

locomotive which, contrary to all railroad rhyme or reason, was running inbound on the outbound track. Billy and the fireman both saw it—and were suddenly reversed. But it was there, sure enough, and drawing steadily nearer. Already the headlight was abreast of the rear coach of Crawford's train. It crept silently—silently, there was the terror of it—on and on, gaining, gaining, until at last it flashed beside them, neck and neck.

Suddenly it came over Crawford that there was no locomotive of honest iron and steel. It was diaphanous. He could look through it and beyond, and catch the quick shadow of the telegraph poles as they hurried by—catch, through the bulk of its huge boiler, the gleam of passing lights, right beside them, and as his train moved on, there was no one in the cab—neither fireman nor engineer to guide its headlong flight. It was the phantom locomotive.

Auto on the Track

Crawford was not long in coming to a decision when this fact dawned upon his mind. He had heard of the warning phantom and he knew that its appearance always occurred at a time of danger, which seemed its province to avert. He applied the air brakes without delay, and as his train slowed down and stopped the phantom vanished. Swinging to the ground he gleam of his headlight, upon the mobile lay overturned upon the track, its frightened occupants crawling down upon them, but with a hazy remembrance of a frame dinner but an hour or so before he was not surprised to find them dwindle into one. Such is the story—in some of its many variations—of the phantom locomotive, whose visits are so anxiously desired at the new roundhouse at Vistacion, and on the tracks of the Bay Shore cutoff, where its presence for a week or two would undoubtedly bring good luck.

The skeptical may doubt these tales—but there are those who know—among them Flaherty, watchman at the big, new roundhouse at Vistacion. And he will not tell of his own experience with the phantom locomotive—not, at least, to the uninitiated.