

Presidents To Bakersfield, 1880, 1891

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By Gilbert Gia
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George W. Wear and the Bakersfield Democrats had their reasons for giving the cold shoulder to President Rutherford B. Hayes when his train stopped at Sumner in 1880. The election of 1876 had been a great disappointment to Mr. Wear, who was the editor and publisher of the *Kern County Democrat*. Democratic candidate Samuel J. Tilden had received 52% of the popular vote, but a congressional panel gave Rutherford B. Hayes enough electoral votes from Florida to make him 19th President of the United States.



Hayes' moderate position on Chinese immigration angered many Californians, including Wear's friend Pavey who remarked a few days before Mr. Hayes' arrival that he wouldn't take 10 steps to see the "fraud."

Republicans needed to carry the Pacific states in the election of 1880 to elect James A. Garfield. To strengthen the party's base, President Hayes made a 9,000-mile whistle-stop junket, and in the process he became the first seated US President to visit Kern County.

The Union Pacific Railroad provided Hayes with a locomotive, two passenger cars, and a dining and baggage car that belonged to the railroad's board of directors. Accommodations were comfortable, but by the standards of a decade later, they were far from luxurious. Newspaper coverage focused primarily on the President and his entourage: First Lady Lucy Webb Hayes; Secretary of War Alexander Ramsey; Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman¹; Army Surgeon Huntington; E. W. A. Hitchcock (senior security agent for General Western Railroad); and the Hayes' 22 year-old son "Rud."²

In the second week of September 1880, the train crossed into California at Truckee and on to the line's northern terminus at Redding. The party boarded stages for Rosenberg, Oregon and then took a train on to Portland, the Columbia River, Walla Walla, and Seattle.³ They returned to Portland and boarded an ocean steamer for San Francisco. At Oakland the special train carried them south into the San Joaquin Valley. When at Los Angeles, the party would make its return to Washington, DC via Arizona.

On October 22, 1880, under bright moonlight, the train stopped for 10 minutes at the Southern Pacific's Sumner station just east of Bakersfield. The next day an article appeared on page three of the *Kern County Gazette*. It was entitled "The Fraud," and the story began with the words "President Rutherford B. Hayes... who secured the position through fraud and corruption..." George Wear noted that as the train approached Sumner, the town's fire-bell sounded, "and those of our

¹ Rutherford Platt Hayes was a field commander in the Civil War. In 1864 he showed particular gallantry in spearheading a frontal assault at the savage Battle of Cloyd's Mountain. During the war he had four horses shot from under him. Although other presidents served in that war, Hayes was the only one injured. He was wounded five times.

² Rutherford "Rud" Hayes attended Michigan State University. In 1880 he graduated with a B.S. from Cornell University.

³ *Kern Co. Gazette*, Oct 9, 1880: Note: "The Presidential party are now in Oregon."

citizens who would raise enough enthusiasm, started for the depot to witness the fraud. The cornet band was out, and the cannon was there to belch forth on his arrival. When the train came to a halt, the President was loudly called for, and he responded in a short speech."

Wear described how other towns had received the President. "[The] poor were allowed to see him as well as the rich, though he has only been the guest of bankers, railroad kings, and corporations. He has failed to create the unbounded enthusiasm with the masses that his managers supposed he would. Republican leaders should have played a stronger card, for as it is, the affair has only created disgust. The train moved off, and our citizens returned, Republicans in ecstasies and the Democrats enjoying the knowledge that this is the last Republican President that the country will have -- at least for a long time."⁴ The election a few month later proved that Wear was wrong.

In 1903 George Wear wrote again about Hayes' visit, but the newspaperman cautioning readers that that was "a long time to remember minute details... but the gist of the recitals and the truth is what I have of it, and if my memory errors in minor details, no harm will be done anyone." Here is what Wear wrote:

"Gentlemen," remarked Charlie Maul, "An old incident just occurs to me. When President Hayes passed down the railroad -- let me say that was in 1880 or 1881 -- I forget which -- there was a big crowd at the depot to see him. His train was to arrive at about nine o'clock at night. When the people were preparing to go to the depot someone asked Pavey if he was going. 'Me going! No!' Pavey replied, 'What would I go for? What do you suppose I want to see him for? It was Tilden, the man who justly beat him for President that I would go for, but I don't want to see Hayes.

⁴ Kern Co. Gazette, Oct 23, 1880

He ain't my kind of man. I wouldn't go ten steps to see him. No, sir, I will stay right here.'

"Charlie Maul then continued, 'So the boys went that night. And the next day they didn't say anything to Pavey. Finally, curiosity got to itching Pavey so bad that he had to ask, 'Well, what did the old fraud say?' Ed Palmes, who was standing next to Pavey, narrowed his eyes, and whispered to him, 'Well, Pavey, old Scribner climbed up there on the platform to welcome Mr. Hayes, and then Scrib says to Hayes, 'As an active Republican I'm glad to welcome you, Mr. President. The President shook his hand warmly and replied, 'You have served the country well, and perhaps saved the Republican Party from defeat. Don't call me 'Mr. President' -- call me Rutherford.' "

Pavey liked that one, but what he didn't know was that Ed had set him up for the next part of the story.

"So then,' said Ed, 'We saw the President put his hand up and shade his eyes, and he looked all around amongst the people, and finally he turned to Gen. Sherman up there on the platform, and he whispered something to him.' The boys who were listening to Charlie started smiling, and sure enough Pavey piped up and said, 'Well, did anybody hear what he said?' And Ed turned to Pavey with a serious look and answered, 'Why, Hayes looked at the General and said, 'Bill, somebody's missing out there. Where's Pavey?'"⁵

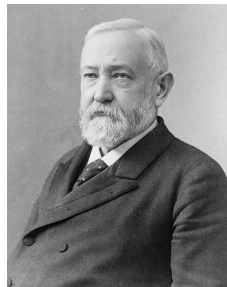
President Hayes' trip out West paid-off in 1880 with the election of Republican James A. Garfield. But in 1884 George Wear finally got a Democratic president, Grover Cleveland. Wear's sense of justice lasted

⁵ *Daily California*, Sep 23, 1903

only four years. In 1888 Benjamin Harrison became President even though the Democratic Grover Cleveland received more of the popular vote, and George Wear suffered through another four years with a "fraud" president.

George Wear might have allowed some of Harrison's successes: The admission of Idaho and Wyoming to the Union, passage of the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, and enactment of pension legislation. But Wear must have surely pounded Harrison the Republican for his support of high tariffs and his ties to big business.

Voters turned on Harrison's party, and the Republican chances for election in 1890 looked as doubtful as they had been in 1880. A shrinking US treasury, declining economy, and widespread unemployment made swing votes critical. In April 1891 the Republican party sent President Harrison on a cross-country rail tour.



Did he grudgingly agree? Benjamin Harrison was an intrinsically quiet man, and the openness of the White House tried him. In recalling his years as president, Harrison wrote, "It is an office and a home combined -- an evil combination. It is open to visitors from 10 am to 2 pm-- without card or introduction. There is not a square foot of ground, not a bench nor a shade tree that the President or his family can use in privacy. Until screens were placed in the windows of the private dining room, it was not an unusual incident for a carriage to stop in front of them while the occupants took a gratified view of the

President and his family at their breakfast or lunch."⁶ The President might have welcomed the cross-country tour.

In complete contrast to the Hayes trip of 1880, Harrison's had carloads of assistants. The luminaries included First Lady Caroline Harrison, millionaire Postmaster-General John Wanamaker and wife, and Secretary of Agriculture Jeremiah McLain Rusk. Lesser-knowns were six of Harrison's relatives, his private secretary⁷, and a military aide. Then there was the supporting staff: Conductors, cooks, waiters, stewards, porters, baggage master, and a barber⁸. Adding to that assembly were three reporters from the United Press, Associated Press, and Press News Association.⁹

The Presidential Special was fitted up at the Pullman Car shops at Wilmington, Delaware. They were the perfection of the builder's art. Behind the engine and coal car was the Aztlan carrying the generator for cabin lighting and a pressured, 141-gallon potable-water supply.¹⁰ The Aztlan and the remaining special cars in series were connected by "enclosed vestibules."

The cars were built to European-monarchy standards. The Aztlan's library had polished mahogany desks, and the sofa and chairs of its smoker room were upholstered in seal-brown plush. "Electric screw-fans are at each end of its smoking compartment so that when the press representatives are weary of the 25-cent Havana atmosphere they can cut it up by turning the current on."¹¹ The Aztlan also had a full larder with wines and liquors.

⁶ Benjamin Harrison, *This Country Of Ours*, By Benjamin Harrison. New York, C. Scribner, 1897

⁷ Probably Elijah W. Halford

⁸ In 1880, by contrast, Pres. Hayes' son had to leave the train at Cheyenne, WY to get a haircut.

⁹ *Los Angeles Times*, Apr 10, 1891;

¹⁰ Opulent railcars of the period were assigned names.

¹¹ *Washington Post*, Apr 13, 1891; *Los Angeles Times*, Apr 20, 1891



Next was the dining car Coronado. Silver, electric lamps illuminated the interior, and the dining tables were appointed with white linens and sterling silver plate. The woodwork was brilliant-white, the upholstery red plush, and the curtains green plush.

Behind the dining car was the sleeper New Zealand fitted with a double drawing-room and two sleeping apartments for the President and Mrs. Harrison. Woodwork was white and gold, and the interior surfaces upholstered in velvety, steel-frieze blue plush. The curtains were soft terra cotta. This car was for the exclusive use of Mr. and Mrs. Harrison.



Behind the President's car was the drawing-room car Ideal. It had one large room and six adjoining drawing rooms. Each was finished in salmon and white with gold-mottled woodwork; the seating mahogany, "exquisitely upholstered in white hair."



The end car was the Vacuna. Its combination library-observation car contained 16 chairs aligned with oversized French windows, and a behind a bank of closets were six drawing rooms. Each of these private compartment was upholstered in various colors of silk plush and matching woodwork. On the outside-back was a 7x9-ft open air platform. This speaking deck was partially roofed from the weather and fenced with a highly-polished bronze and brass railing.

The press didn't learn of Harrison's trip until April 3, 1891, but reporters were present late on April 14 when the dynamo inside the Azatlan was started. "Soon the electric wires running from one end of the train to the other were tremendous with the subtle fluid. The incandescent lights were turned on and a fairy scene presented."¹²

At exactly midnight, the special train left Sixth Street Pennsylvania Station, and President Harrison and party began their round-trip, 9,332-mile, 30-day-plus tour to the Pacific Coast. The isolation between stops would be very unlike the public White House, and the President, wrote the *Boston Globe*, had a smile on his usually somber face.¹³

¹² *Washington Post*, Apr 14, 1891

¹³ *Daily Globe* [St. Paul, MN], Apr 14, 1891; *LA Times*, Apr 14, 1891

But the *Boston Globe* was not enthusiastic. It estimated the tour's cost to be about the same as Harrison's annual salary, and the political implications also worried the *Globe*: "These cars that are bearing Caesar Harrison and his presidential fortunes could buy a first-class farm in Kansas... He and his party of 14 are therefore expending at least \$1,500 a day of somebody's money, for no one has any idea that Mr. Harrison will pay a solitary dime for all the splendor and luxury... A direct appropriation from the treasury for the purpose, it's plain, will never be made, but 'my Postmaster General' as Mr. Harrison calls Mr. Wanamaker has a vast discretion in the making of mail contracts, and how can he fail to deal generously during the next two years with the presidents of the great lines who have entertained him, and his master, as men [people] were never [before] entertained by railroad princesses and potentates?"¹⁴

Harrison had done several short rail tours before this trip, but for this one Wanamaker had to coordinate a lengthy itinerary. Switchmen and dispatchers across the country sidetracked and idled rail traffic in favor of the fast-moving special, and the train made punctual stops in Virginia, Tennessee, Georgia, Alabama and Arkansas.

Harrison was at El Paso on April 21, 1891; two days later he was at Riverside, California; and at 7 pm he was at Pasadena.¹⁵

¹⁴ The criticism prompted Harrison to give Wanamaker a personal check for \$10,000.

¹⁵ *Weekly Californian*, Apr 18, 1891



(Harrison at Santa Ana, April 23, 1891. Photo: Santa Ana Public Library)

Awaiting the President at Los Angeles was the largest public assemblage in the town's history. The following day the party left for San Fernando, Saugus, Santa Paula, and San Buenaventura. On Friday, April 24 Harrison was at Santa Barbara where he stayed one day. In the early hours of Saturday, April 25 his train doubled back to Saugus where it switched to the branch line to Mojave, Tehachapi, and into the San Joaquin Valley.

Compared to President Hayes' night whistle-stop in 1880, President Harrison's welcome to Bakersfield was extravagant. Mr. Harrison had served with bravery and distinction in the Civil War, but a more local action also boosting his welcome: Some months earlier he had appointed Truxtun Beale as US Minister to Persia. Of course the

Daily Californian's politics also influenced the effusive coverage of Harrison's visit on Saturday, April 25, 1891.

On Friday prominent women headed by Mrs. Emile Dinkelspiel, wife of the department store owner, met at the Baker and Sumner depot to adorn the esplanade with flags, rose garlands, and palm and pepper tree branches. The party was not alone there. Wrote the *Californian*, "Some of the Mexican residents of Sumner asked permission to hang a Mexican flag with the others, and permission was gladly given, for it was a very happy thought of our adopted countrymen."¹⁶

Two hours before Harrison arrived, the crowd at Sumner was already swelling, "and by the time the flower-covered engine came slowly steaming in, there must have been a thousand people gathered, all eager to see the Chief Magistrate of the United States. There were six cars to the train, and in the vestibule of the rear car, which stopped just beyond the depot right at the street crossing, Pres. Harrison and his party were seen seated. As the train stopped the President arose, took off his hat and bowed to the assembled spectators."¹⁷

Kern County Judge A. R. Conklin, Charles E. Sherman, and W. E. Houghton, who was an acquaintance of Truxtun Beale, stepped to the platform to greet the presidential party as it emerged, and when the President appeared, the huge crowd cheered enthusiastically and began throwing roses.¹⁸

Harrison's speeches for the past week had been patriotic but non-political, and today Harrison was in excellent oratorical form. "My friends, I am very much obliged to you for your friendly greeting and for these bouquets. You must excuse me if I seem a little shy of the

¹⁶ *Kern County Californian*, May 2, 1891

¹⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁸ *Ibid*

bouquets. I received one in my eye the other day, which gave me a good deal of trouble... It has been a very long journey and has been accompanied with some fatigue of travel, but we feel this morning, in this exhilarating air and this sweet sunshine, refreshed with your kind greeting, as bright and more happy than when we left the National Capital." He concluded, "We are one people absolutely. The government at Washington... is dependent upon no man. It is lodged safely in the affections of the people, and has its impregnable defense and it's assured perpetually in their love and veneration for law." Eager spectators grasped the President's hand, and he seemed glad to extend it and offer pleasant words.¹⁹

Women called loudly for Mrs. Harrison, but the answer came back that she was at breakfast. It caused a good deal of disappointment, but Mrs. Wanamaker appeared instead and waved, and the crowd seemed satisfied. After the cheering and applause, loud calls were made for Postmaster-General Wanamaker to step forward. He gave only a brief good-morning and goodbye because the car then gave a little lurch and the train moved slowly out of the station. Two or three eager spectators held on to the Vacuna's railing to get a last hand shake and goodbye.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid



Harrison at Tulare. Photo: San Joaquin Valley Public Library System

Mrs. Caroline Scott Harrison's breakfast table didn't prevent her from greeting Bakersfield: she was showing the first symptoms of tuberculosis. Several months after the tour, Republicans nominated Harrison for a second term, and it was much later before the public learned about Carrie Harrison's illness. The First Lady died October 25, 1892. She and Mr. Harrison had been married 40 years.

San Diego Historical Society



Postmaster Gen. Wagonmaster Mrs. Baker President A. R. Harrison Ex. & Mrs. F. Plummer Cary Harrison holding flowers, center right

As Mrs. Harrison's health worsened, the President devoted much more time to her care, and in deference to the family's tragedy his opponent, Grover Cleveland, stopped almost all of his own campaigning.

The vote for president in California was Cleveland 118,151 and Harrison 118,027, but the vote nationwide went decisively to Cleveland, and so did the Electoral College. Americans probably made the right decision. Harrison wrote in later years, "After the heavy blow of the death of my wife, I do not think I could have stood re-election." ²¹

As rancorous as politics was 100 years ago, the *Californian* was gentle and almost affectionate with Harrison's visit. The paper wrote that old Peter Wible had been awaiting President Harrison's arrival. Wible had arrived quite early, and a chair was set out for him on the esplanade; he watched the gathering crowd with great interest. Sometime later he remarked, "I voted for Jackson in 1828 and have had the best health and good fortune to vote at every presidential election since." That meant that for 15 presidential elections, for the past six decades, he had cast his vote. The *Californian* noted, "When the train arrived, Mr. Wible wished to shake hands with the President, but the crowd was so dense and eager that Wible concluded not to risk the effort for fear of being rudely hustled by younger and more active men. And yet there was not one in the whole crowd but if he had known of the old gentleman's wish would have cheerfully and hardily made way for him."

²¹ John Whitcomb, *Real Life At The White House: 200 Years Of Daily Life At America's Most Famous Residence*. New York : Routledge, 2000