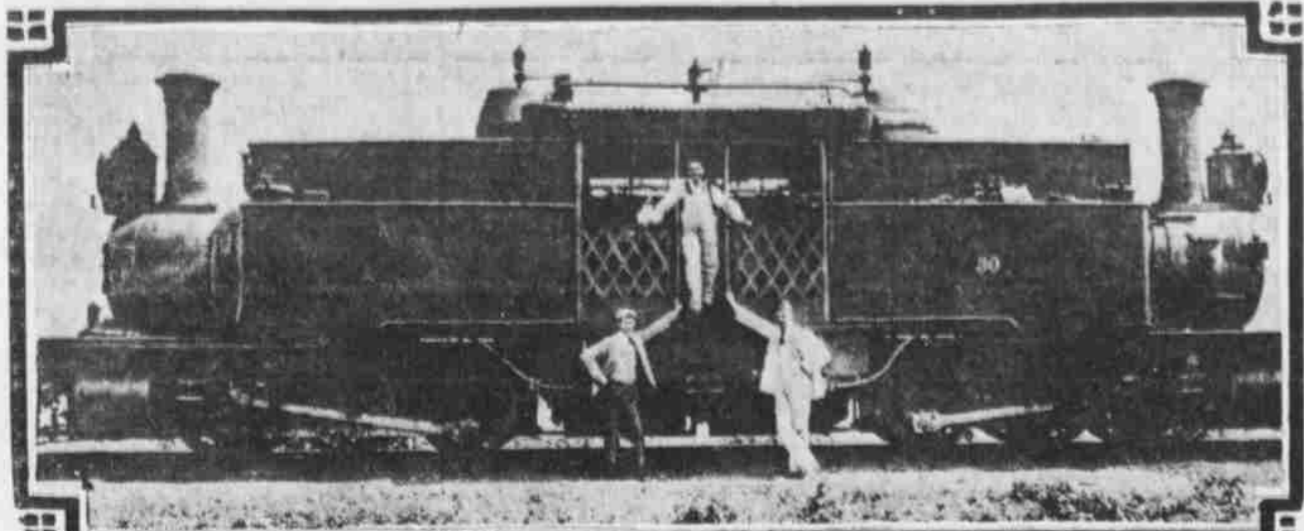


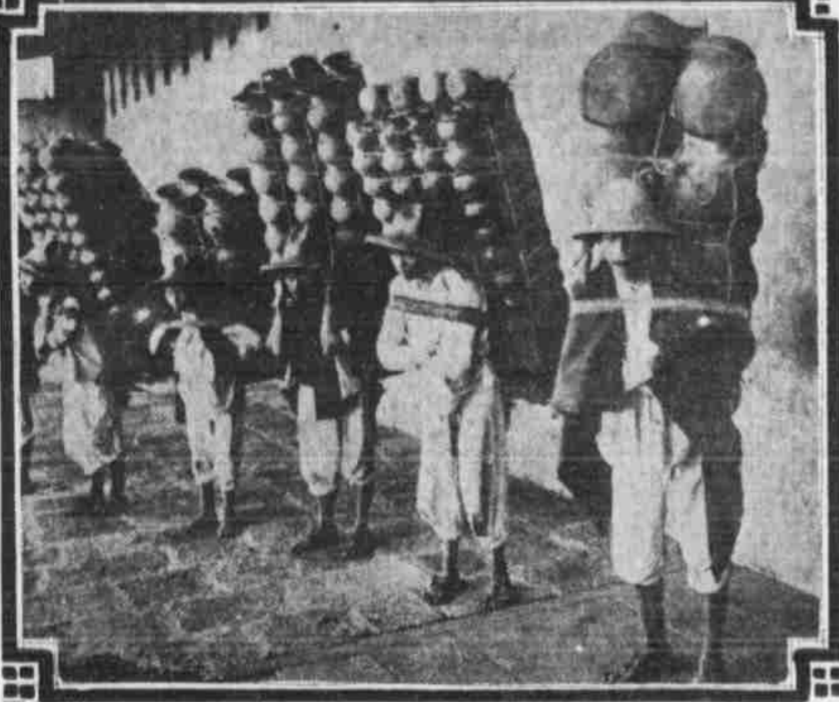
# Mexico Still Building Railways



Siamese Twin Engine

Copyright, 1913, by Frank G. Carpenter.)  
 EXICO CITY.—Railway travel in Mexico just now is mighty uncertain, although the railway officials say they expect things to quiet down from now on and the travel and business conditions to show a steady improvement. For the last few months things have been decidedly bad on the roads from here to the north. The Mexican Central to El Paso was out of commission for more than a year, and the Laredo road has had many holdups and bridge burnings. Conditions upon it were especially bad shortly after Madero was killed, and some of the regions through which it passes had many rebels and brigands.

As I came here over that route, some months before the battle of Mexico City, the passengers on my train discussed the possibility of a tunnel being blown up, and since then some of the bridges have been burned and rebuilt. Holdups by bandits and rebels frequently occur between here and Vera Cruz, and, in fact, there are but few regions where travel is positively safe. If there are soldiers on your train, there is liable to be shooting by anti-administration brigades, and your life is in danger. If there are no soldiers the train may be held up and robbed by the rebels or bandits, and the passengers, without regard to nationality, be forced to hand over their money, watches and jewelry at the point of the revolver. In some such cases the passengers are searched to see if they are carrying anything that they have, and if others foreigners are freed after their pocketbooks and money rolls have been ransacked over. For this reason I am hiding my money. I always carry a number of good yellow bills as a reserve fund for accidents, and these I now keep in my socks while traveling by train. I would say, however, that in several hundred thousand miles of travel all over the world, this is the first time I have done so.



Some of the railroad's competitors

auspices, 15 per cent by the English and other foreigners and 15 per cent by the Mexicans.

The general idea is that the government owns or controls all the roads. This is not so. The Mexican railways are now operated by forty independent corporations. The government has the majority of the stock of the National Railways of Mexico only, which have altogether about 8,000 miles, and it operates some other railways, such as the Inter-Oceanic, under long-time leases. The government is improving these lines, and it is now building eight branch lines which average over 1,115 miles. The most important of these is a road from Tampico to Vera Cruz, with a short line connecting with Mexico City.

The government roads are known as the National Railways of Mexico. They consist chiefly of three main lines, which were merged into the one system in 1900. These lines are the old National railway, the old Mexican Pacific Company and the old Mexican International railway. In addition to this they include the Vera Cruz and Isthmus railways and Pan-American railway, which has been built to the Guatemala border. These lines belong to the government in the sense that it owns the majority of the stock. The bonds are held abroad, as is also a little more than 49 per cent of the stock.

The bondholders are operating the property and the chief officials are Americans. The net capitalization of the road, including bonds and stock outstanding, is about \$135,000,000, upon which it had in 1911 a net income of 3 per cent. Preferred stock pays a 4 per cent dividend.

**Southern Pacific Railway in Mexico**  
 Outside of the National railways the most important system in the republic is that of the Southern Pacific Company of Mexico. This was projected by Harriman as a connection with our Southern Pacific, and includes a number of lines along the west coast. It has now almost 1,000 miles of railroad and has concessions which entail the building of about 500 miles more. The road has been seriously injured during the revolution, but many of the bridges destroyed have been replaced, and improvements will be made as soon as possible and the road completed. The Southern Pacific lines connect the northwestern part of the country with the port of Guaymas, and they are now in operation as far south as Tepic. They will be extended to Guadaluajara in connection with a short strip of the National railways, as soon as conditions are settled.

**Mexico's Oldest Railway.**  
 The first railway in Mexico was a line two and one-half miles long, which ran from Mexico City to the Shrine of Guadalupe. This was built in 1854, and three years later the concession was granted for the old Mexican railroad, which ran from Vera Cruz to Mexico City. This was built by British capital under a good concession, and it was completed in 1873.

It had at that time received something like \$12,000,000 in subsidies. The road is about 300 miles long, including its branches, and it cost over \$30,000,000, or about \$100,000 a mile. When it was begun the Indians objected to its construction, and in order to pacify them the work was begun at both ends and carried on to the meeting point, half way between the coast and the capital. As all the materials came from England, this entailed an enormous expense, it costing as much as \$5 to bring a steel rail from Vera Cruz to the capital by wagon. The same was so for a time of the Mexican Central railroad, which runs from El Paso to Mexico City.

The road from Vera Cruz was capitalized at \$46,000,000, and it has always paid a good profit on the investment. For a long time it had a monopoly, and at the start its freight rates for this haul of less than 300 miles were \$75 a ton, and its passenger fares were 10 cents a mile. The road is a marvel of engineering and it has some of the steepest grades upon record. It runs from the lowlands at Vera Cruz right up the mountains, and it has some grades so steep that a Siamese twin engine, with a double-header, has been constructed to mount them. This engine has two fire boxes, two boilers and two sets of driving wheels to make it go. With it the train climbs an altitude of 2,500 feet in twelve miles, and more than 4,000 feet in twenty-five miles, lifting you out of the tropics and into the temperate zone.

A large part of the old Mexican road had ties of mahogany and ebony. The chief objection to the ebony ties was that it was hard to drive the spikes into them and almost impossible to get them out.

when the rails had to be changed. On the Tehuantepec road some of the track is laid on mahogany ties which cost three times as much as the mahogany ties do not grow so large as the mahogany trees and their ties are more expensive to make. On the Mexican road many steel ties have been employed. These are hollow plates, about four inches wide and of the same length as an ordinary tie, so made that when turned upside down they look like a trough. The inter-oceanic road uses steel disks to hold the rails, tying them together with a cross piece of iron, but these do not work as well as the solid steel ties.

A large part of the Mexican Central railway is laid with wooden ties, and this reminds me of a story one of the constructors tells as to Mexican contractors. Said he:

"The average hacendado here has queer ideas of business. I found a strip of forest along the line of the Mexican Central which might have supplied us with a goodly number of ties. I called upon the owner and asked him at what rate he could supply us with 5,000. He replied that the price would be 50 cents each. I then said, 'But suppose I take 50,000 ties?'"

"Oh," replied the man. "In that case I could not let you have them for less than 75 cents apiece."

"And if I want 100,000?"

"One hundred thousand ties!" exclaimed the farmer, raising his hands. "I doubt whether I could get them out. It would be a great deal of trouble. I could not think of undertaking to supply that number for less than \$1.50 each."

**Passenger Travel.**  
 I find the Mexican railways well managed and the cars exceedingly comfortable. There are Pullman sleepers on all the main lines and under ordinary conditions one can take his berth or drawing room at St. Louis and go to Mexico City without change. The eating arrangements are excellent and the fares are about the same as in the states.

As to local travel, the rates are less than those of our country, the usual first-class fare being 2-10 cents in gold a mile and the second-class about 1 1/2 cents per mile. All of the principal railways have first and second-class coaches, but only the common people and the Indians use the latter. Nevertheless 75 per cent of the passenger revenues come from the second-class. The peons love to travel, and whenever one of them gets a few dollars ahead he spends it by giving himself and his family a railway journey. Sometimes he rides as far as he can and then comes back upon foot. One of the great sources of such traffic is the religious shrines. The peons go upon pilgrimages to them and they sometimes travel hundreds of miles by rail in that way. The passenger head of the National railway tells me that his road brings thousands every year to the church of Guadalupe, and that this traffic alone pays his road \$100,000 in gold every year. The railroads receive a large revenue by running excursions, and among the events which add to the traffic are the celebrations of saint days, fiestas and such attractions as bull fights, cock fights, horse races and balloon ascensions.

During my travels here I have spent considerable time on these second class coaches watching the people. The cars are of the cheapest description. Their seats are hard wooden benches which run along under the windows like an old-fashioned street car and have another double row of benches running through the center of the car with their seats back to back. There are no cushions and no rests for the arms. The cars are usually packed with men, women and children, ranging in color from white to a dark copper, the Indian types predominating. Most of the men are clad in cotton, wearing sombreros and serapes. The women are usually without hats or bonnets and they have shawls of cotton or silk over their heads. All are bare-footed, except for sandals of sole leather tied to their bare feet with strings of the same material. They have but little baggage, with the exception of baskets or bundles, which they bring into the cars.

The highest officials and the clerical force in the general offices here are largely Americans, but the rank and file, who do the operating and running the trains, are Mexicans.

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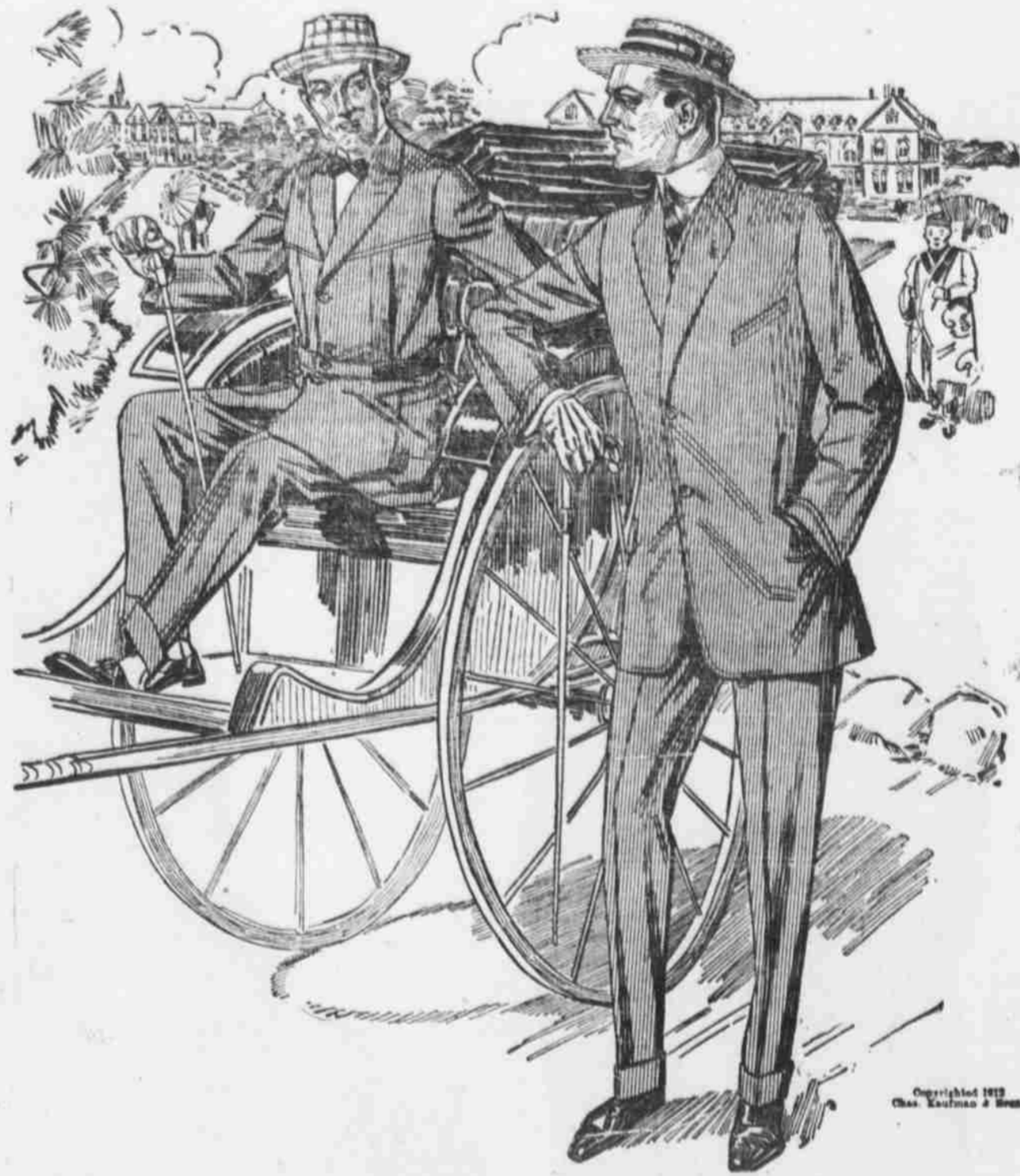
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