

Kaleidoscope



Stop by No. 8444 churns memories

No. 8444 looked like it turned off at the wrong track in 1932.

It roared and blew steam and whistled long and low and rolled along the tracks into Lincoln.

The old steam engine, the last one ordered by Union Pacific in 1944, caught the fancy of hundreds of citizens.

They lined the roads along the track and packed the small UP railyard under the West O. Street viaduct.

It looked out of place and time, and the people who came to see it wanted some remembrance of the machine.

They held tape recorders up to catch the sound of the steam whistle and the chug-chug of the engine. They photographed it from every conceivable angle.

No. 8444 was pulling a load of dignitaries to the World's Fair in New Orleans.

Dale Mohlman, a UP freight agent, said the attraction was in the memories No. 8444 brought to older people, and in the curiosity it created in younger ones.

"This is the first time some people have seen a steam engine, and it's probably the last time many people will see one."

Jim Fitzpatrick, a fireman on No. 8444, gave a different reason for the train's popularity.

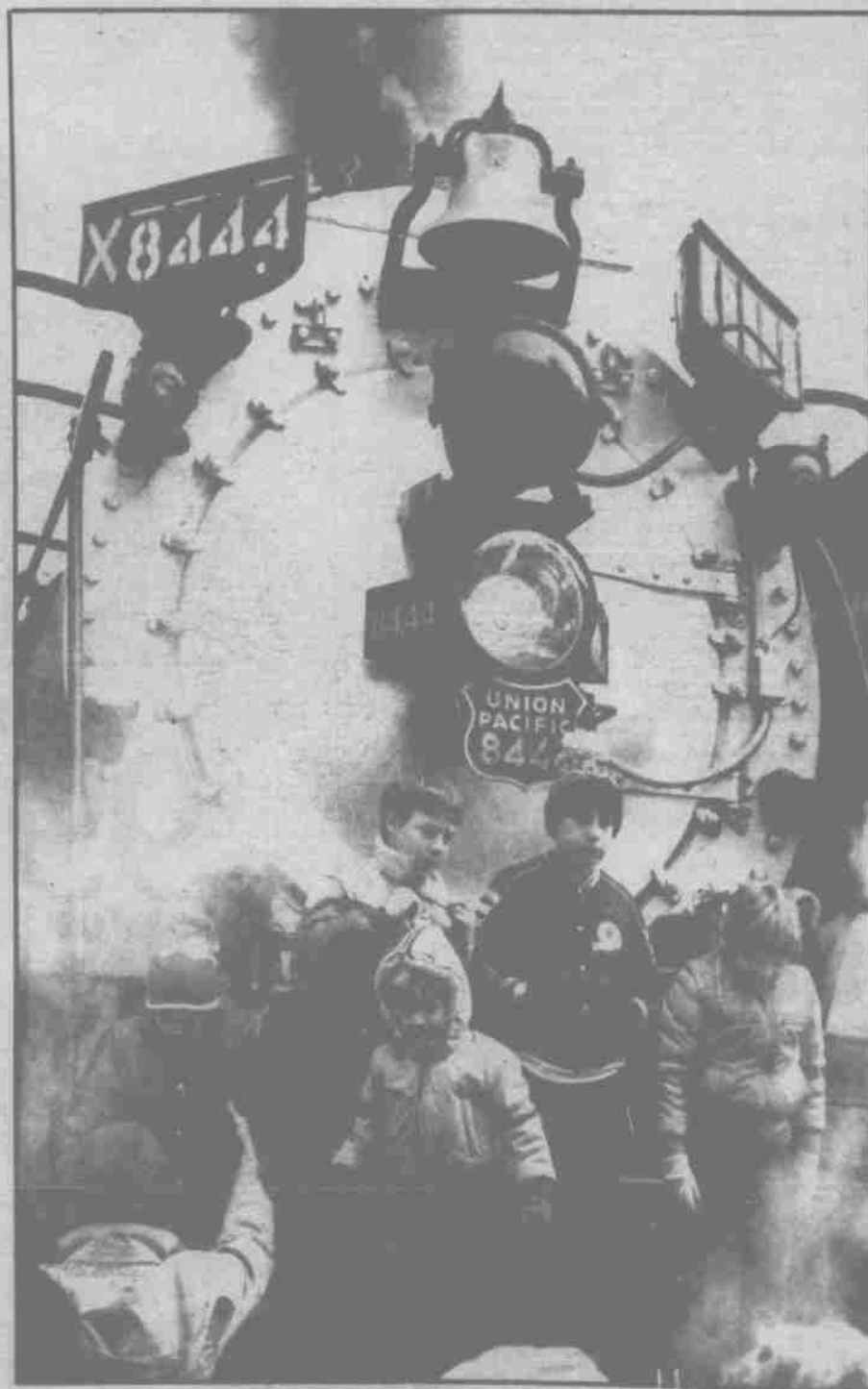
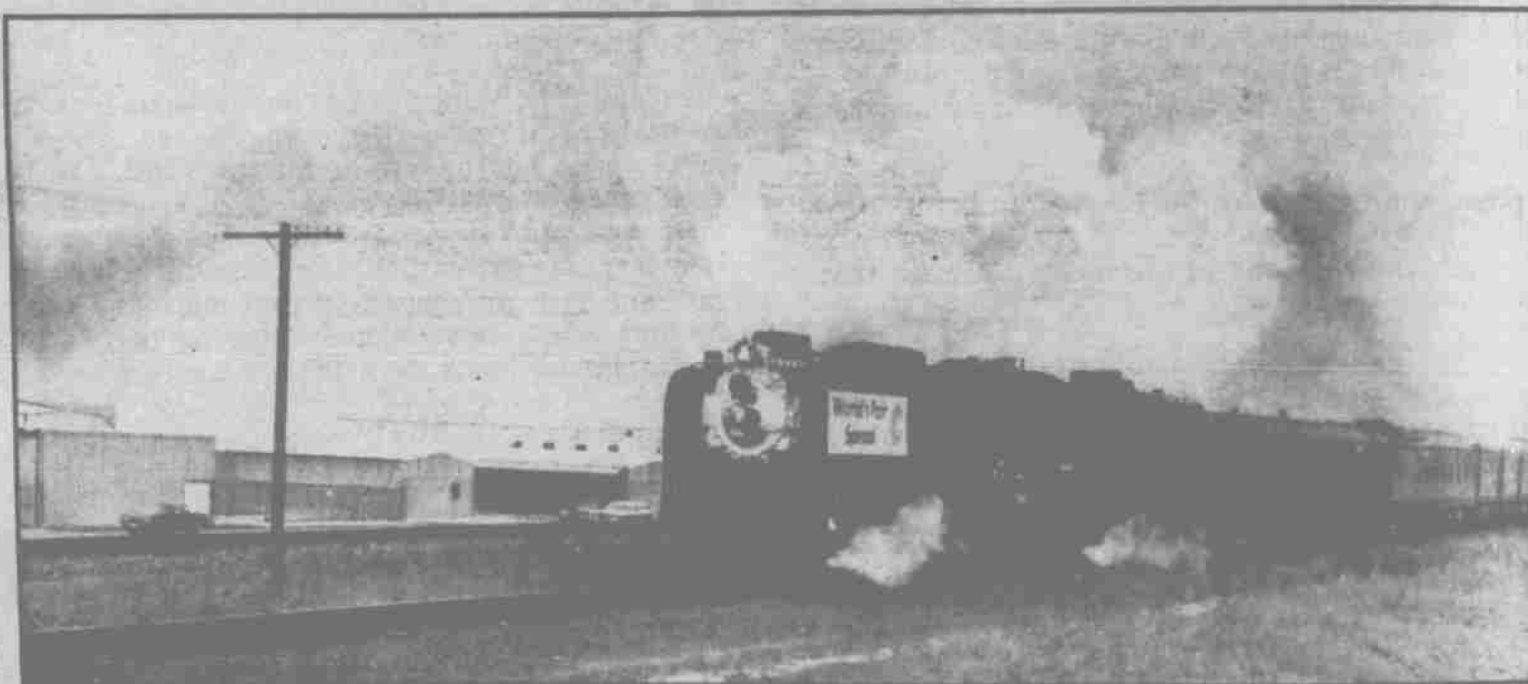
"It's the romance of it," he said.

Fitzpatrick, who has been working on No. 8444 for three years, said a steam engine takes more care and involvement from its crew than a new diesel one. He and several other crew members ran water from a fire hose into the train's water car and greased the huge steel wheels during the train's 40-minute stop Sunday morning.

As the train prepared to leave, people began walking along the tracks to watch it as long as they could. Mohlman said cars lined the road waiting for the train's arrival at Cortland later that day.

Although No. 8444 is out of time, as long as it runs, it won't be out of fans.

Story and Photos
by
Chris Welsch



Top: The crowd mills around No. 8444. Center: The steam engine rolls toward the UP station. This photo was taken near the municipal airport. Bottom left: Children climbing on the engine while it was stopped. Bottom right: The end.

