

## JOHN J. SULLIVAN VETERAN KNIGHT OF THE THROTTLE

Simple Story of a Man Who for More Than Forty Years Has Followed the Exciting and Dangerous Calling of Engineer and Modestly Says "There's Nothing to It."

It is no fault of John J. Sullivan that the casualties on American railroads are so great. Mr. Sullivan has been an engineer for more than forty years, he has drawn the finest and the fastest passenger trains in the country, in his hands have been placed the lives of hundreds of thousands of human beings and he has whirled flying express trains across the country an aggregate of millions of miles. But never in these forty years has a single one of his passengers been killed and none have been injured through any fault of his. This remarkable record stands almost without a parallel in the history of railroad engineering in this country.

Mr. Sullivan is now a citizen of Omaha. He moved to this city in September coming from North Platte, where he lived for many years, that being the end of the locomotive run which he had on the Union Pacific. When, in accordance with the rules and regulations of the company, he reached the age limit three years ago he retired on the pension provided by the company of \$700 a year. On this sum he is now enjoying the fruits of his long service, taking life easy like an old warrior who has been through many battles and has lived to tell the tale. But this old engineer is unscarred by the ordeals through which he has come. For a man of 67 years he is remarkably alert and active. A little man with weather beaten face seamed by winter's cold and summer's heat during the years that he spent flying at high speed across the plains of Nebraska is John J. Sullivan. With his keen blue eyes, his ragged moustache, his firm jaw and his straight lips he is the typical engineer, the type of the man who thinks it nothing to take his life in his hands and who does not know the meaning of the word fear from personal experience of the emotion.

### Danger a Daily Companion

If you ask this firm-jawed little man about the experiences of four decades during which he sat almost every day with his hand on the throttle of a great mountain of iron and flew through the country on the front of a mighty thousand-ton battering ram of steel and iron rushing at the rate of a mile a minute over two narrow bands of track, the little man will laugh, wave his hand depreciatingly and remark with a liberal Irish brogue that, "There's nothing to it. I just ran trains, that's all."

Which recalls the remarks of the man who was one of the famous "600" who "into the valley of death thundered." This man saw no reason for glorying in the bravery of the deed. "We got orders to storm the position, y'know," said he. "And so we stormed it." "But wasn't it fearfully dangerous?" they asked. "O, I expect it was some dangerous," he said, and added, "All war is, y'know."

Maybe these heroes lack imagination. Maybe they lack an appreciation of the bravery of their daily deeds merely because they are their daily duties. "Familiarity makes commonplace," is an old proverb and a true one. But viewed from the standpoint of the average man the locomotive engineer is one of the bravest of men; he runs greater risks than any other men and at the same time he carries in his hands not only his own life but the lives of those in the train behind him.

"Jack" Sullivan had lived in a good school for the cultivation of the courage, "nerve" and coolness required in an engineer for he had seen some exciting service in the confederate army at the opening of the civil war. He was born in Brookfield, Mass., June 13, 1840. His father was a sturdy pioneer having come over from land-lord burdened Ireland to try to hew a living from a rock ribbed New England farm. There John spent his boyhood like the average New England farm boy, doing chores and putting in his spare time picking stones. But it was not quite all work and no play for Jack. He found a little time for playing base ball and he early became a leader in this sport, being the star of the Brookfield team away back there in the '50s.

### Harper's Ferry and the War

When he was 12 years old he was sent south to live with a sister in Richmond, Va. As he grew up he began to show his taste for a life of adventure and of possible danger. He enlisted in the army when he was only 19 years old. He was assigned to duty at the United States arsenal at Harper's Ferry. He was on duty there at the time it was stormed by the famous "Osawatimie" John Brown and later he was at the last scene of the tragic career of that enthusiastic pioneer abolitionist.

"It was in December, 1859," he says. "John Brown had been tried for the crime of treason and had been convicted and sentenced to death for attacking the arsenal. I was assigned to guard duty at the gallows the day of his execution. I shall never forget the look on his face as he walked up the scaffold steps. He did not seem in the least afraid though he was weak with long confinement in the close air of the prison. I was very patriotic but I could not help feeling that there was a man being hanged for a crime which while technically treason was not really that. Within a year the great civil war had begun to settle the very question which John Brown had tried to settle by taking weapons forcibly from the government arsenal.

When the war began Sullivan found himself, almost before he knew it, a member of the rebel army. He fought perforce because he had to fight under the stars and bars of the confederacy, and gained a creditable and honorable record. He knew personally some of the famous leaders of the confederacy such as General "Joe" Johnson. But his northern sympathies brought about a revolt against the cause on which he was fighting and to get to the north he undertook the dangerous expedient of deserting and running the blockade. He left the camp one night and made his way through forests and morasses, across rivers, plains and mountains, swimming, rafting, rowing, undergoing great hardships and risking his life at every step. But he finally got within the union lines.

### Railroading in the Sixties

Railroading in those days was in its infancy and it offered an exciting career for a young man so inclined, particularly as the rebels had a pleasant little way of burning bridges and removing rails whenever they got the chance, thus providing sudden surprises for the engineer and all other human beings on the train. Sullivan applied for a position on the Baltimore & Ohio railroad and became a wiper in the roundhouse in 1862. Men were scarce and Sullivan showed the proper stuff in him, so it was only two months till he was made a fireman and sent out on one of the primitive engines which in that day were perambulating up and down the track of that line which became so famous for its serpentine shape. He was a fireman for three years, during which time he encountered sundry and divers adventures in connection with the unsettled condition of the country during the war. In 1866 he was given his first engine.

"It was one of those hook motion engines," says Mr. Sullivan. "We used to call them 'grasshoppers,' I guess because they jumped and jerked something like that insect. No, the B. & O. was not quite as fine a line as the Union Pacific is today, and I don't think there is very much exaggeration in that story about the road being so full of curves that the engineer could often light his pipe from the rear brakeman as the caboose passed the engine. There are two objections to this story, though. One is that the engineer being in the place where all the fire is wouldn't need a light for his pipe and the other is that engineers didn't have time to smoke their pipes while they were running one of those grasshoppers and especially on the B. & O. track, which, as I said before, was not wonderful for its smoothness."

—Meantime stories were coming out of the west of the building of the Union Pacific road. It ran through a country almost primeval, where the red men still amused themselves by killing train crews and by pulling up the iron rails which the white man had laid for his iron horse to travel over. The prospect of adventure appealed to Sullivan. He thought he would like to run an engine on this new



JOHN J. SULLIVAN.

road. So he resigned his place with the Baltimore & Ohio and came west in the spring of 1871.

He stopped first in Kansas City. Business in his line was very dull. But the base ball season was just opening up. So "Jack" Sullivan abandoned for a time the throttle and took up the willow stick, for his fame as a base ball player was not unknown even in that far western frontier and there were "fans" already in that early day supporting the game. He played with the Kansas City ball team all that summer. In the fall he determined to come to Omaha and try his fortune on the Union Pacific, which was getting well under operation. But there were too many engineers already. So he determined to push still further into the west and to find some place where they needed an engineer and a good one.

### Life on the Union Pacific

Success did not attend him at once. So he worked on the section for two months. Then a place was offered him as engineer running out of North Platte and he accepted it gladly. The firemen, however, were protesting against the employment of engineers who had not served on the road as firemen. In consequence of this con-

temptation a number of engineers resigned. Among them was Sullivan. He was immediately reappointed as a fireman. He was promoted in 1876 to be an engineer and for ten years he pulled freight trains, until in 1886, he was advanced to the passenger service. Then for fifteen years he was in the full bloom of his long career. His hand held the throttle of those powerful steam monsters which whirled across the continent such magnificent trains as the "Overland Limited," the "Golden Gate Flyer" and the "Fast Mail."

Strict attention to duty, natural courage and constant coolness, even in the face of great impending danger, are the qualities which have gained him his enviable record for Mr. Sullivan. He has had several narrow escapes and there were a number of instances where only his coolness and "nerve" prevented a calamity. But in all this time during which he has drawn the fastest trains hundreds of thousands of miles in all kinds of weather over all kinds of track he has had only one wreck. It happened at 2 o'clock in the morning of April 7, 1893. Sullivan was pulling the Pacific Mail west. The sky was overcast with clouds which made the night pitch dark. A fifty-mile gale was blowing directly against the laboring engine. Sullivan was doing his best to make running time against the wind. Suddenly out of the

blackness of the night a great object loomed up on the track almost directly ahead. It was so big that at first the engineer took it to be a building which had been blown across the track. But there was no time to speculate. Sullivan gave the engine "the gun in the big notch" and the next instant it struck the black object, there was the sound of splintering wood, of tearing tin, of iron striking against iron. Then the locomotive left the track and turned over on its side. Frank Reed jumped. The obstruction proved to be a box car which had been blown by the gale from a sidetrack at Cozad out on the main line and had run down the line twelve miles before the wind until it ran into the engine. The engine had plowed under the car body and it was lifted on top of the boiler.

### Souvenir of Bill Cody

Sullivan knew most of the big railroad officials of the Union Pacific and, of course, he has "pulled" many a man of national or international importance. Millions of golden treasure have been carried in the cars behind him, too. Once he was the engineer of a train that brought more than \$50,000,000 in gold from the west. A large force of soldiers accompanied the train as a guard.

One of the souvenirs which Mr. Sullivan prizes very highly was given him by Colonel Cody, "Buffalo Bill." It is a life pass for himself and family to the Buffalo Bill Wild West show, and was given to him by Buffalo Bill because Mr. Sullivan was the first engineer to pull the Wild West show train. The pass and letter accompanying it are both written by Colonel Cody. The letter is as follows:

PHILADELPHIA, April 24, 1895.—My Dear Sullivan: I take pleasure in sending you a life pass for yourself and family, and hope that some day you may be able to use it. This is the only life pass I ever gave to anyone. I now have fifty cars of my own, and should the "U. P." ever "fire" you let me know. Your friend always,  
W. F. CODY.

On the reverse of the ticket is the following:

This ticket is given to Jack Sullivan and his family, a life pass, for being the first engineer that ever pulled the Buffalo Bill Wild West.  
W. F. CODY.

The noble red man was not lacking in his reception of the men who drew the early-day trains across his former happy hunting ground. Sometimes he engaged in a pleasant little game. He fastened one end of a rope to the telegraph wire and the other end to the pommel of his saddle. Then he rode away at full speed. Sometimes he removed the track on which the iron horse made its puffing, snorting way and sometimes he engaged in the game which was most fascinating of all. This game consisted in stopping the train by removing the track and then seizing the engineer and rest of the crew and removing their scalplocks.

"I used to see evidences of these depredations, but the Indians never disturbed me personally," said Mr. Sullivan. "I knew some of the big chiefs, including Red Cloud, whom I saw at Pine Bluff on the occasion of a big pow wow or treaty meeting which was held at that place. Many Indians were present. The treaty commission presented a fine gold watch to Red Cloud. He knew as much about a watch as he did about the machinery of my engine. But someone told him what it was for and after the pow wow he came over to the engine and tried to set his timepiece by the steam gauge. I had a hard time convincing him that they were two entirely different kinds of meters.

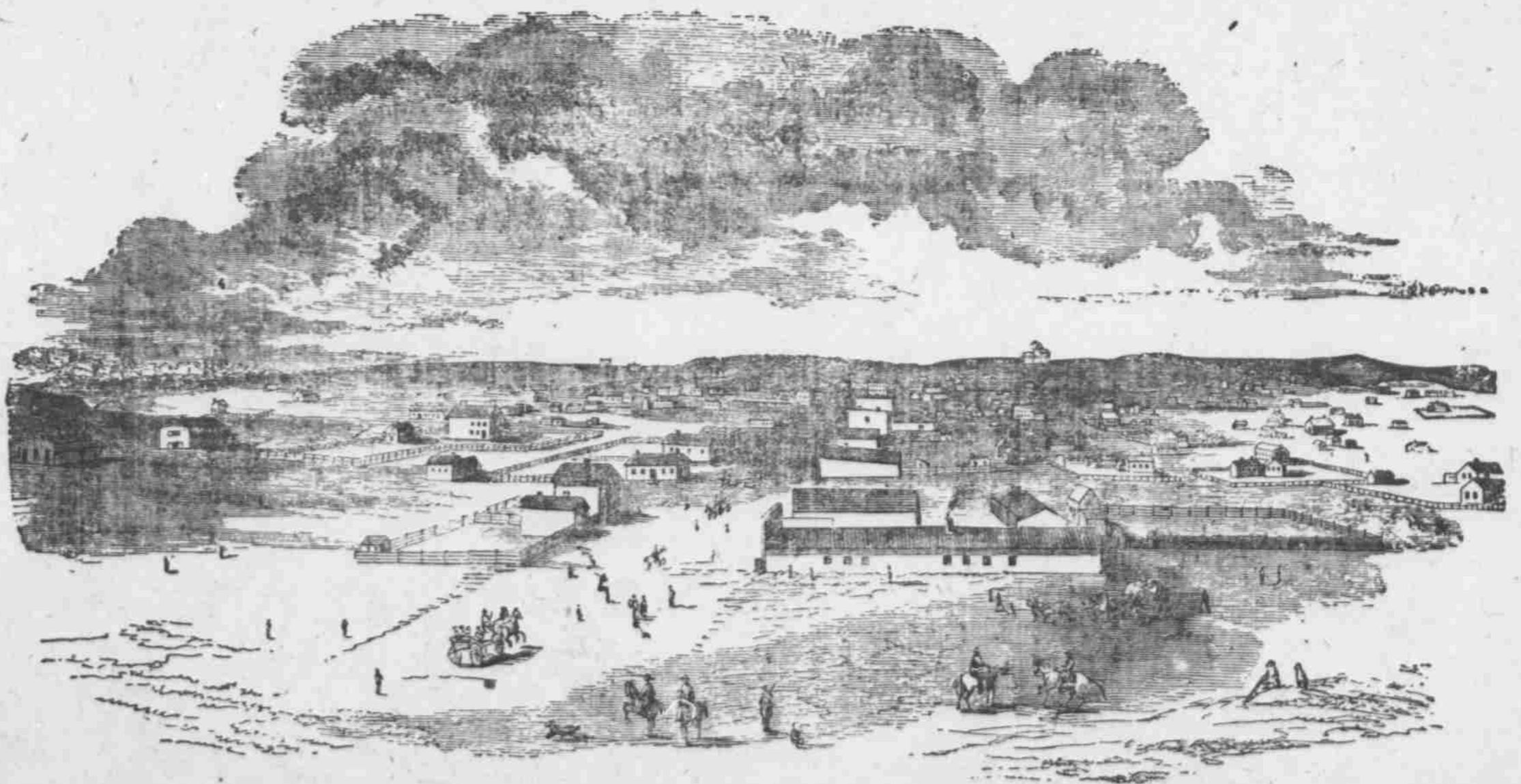
### "Mickey" Follows His Father

Since moving to Omaha Mr. Sullivan has resided at 2707 South Tenth street. He and Mrs. Sullivan have four children. There is D. Leo Sullivan who is following in his father's footsteps. He lives at home and is an engineer on the Union Pacific running from Omaha to Grand Island. He is better known as "Mickey." Locomotive engineers who do fancy work in their spare time are rare. But "Mickey" Sullivan does and he has a remarkably artistic eye and hand. Two sofa pillows, one embroidered with the red, white and blue shield, emblem of the Union Pacific and the other with a picture of the artist are among the productions of his fingers.

Frank J. Sullivan is chief clerk of the Heintze copper mining plant at Bingham, Utah. William Sullivan is a machinist in Salt Lake City. Miss Mary B. Sullivan lives at home. Her tastes are somewhat literary and during their residence in the west she wrote a number of articles for the papers, including a poem dedicated to her brother and entitled "Mickey the Engineer," which was published by a leading paper on its front page.

Few railway men are so widely known and so well liked as "Jack" Sullivan. He numbers his friends by the hundreds. He is a member of Division 88, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and has always been prominent in its affairs. Though retired he cannot root out from his heart the love of the great panting iron horses which he has guided so many miles and one of the favorite pastimes of his abundant leisure is to go to the station or the roundhouse and see the big engines come in or go out. They have a personality that is to him quite as real as though it were human and his love for them is as the love of man for man.

## How Omaha Appeared in Its Youthful Days of 1858



OMAHA CITY, CAPITAL OF NEBRASKA TERRITORY

Miss Janet McKay Cowing of Seneca Falls, N. Y., sends The Bee a drawing cut from Leslie's Illustrated Weekly of November 6, 1858, giving a view of Omaha as it then appeared. It is possible that

some of the residents of that time who are still citizens may be able to recognize some of the landmarks of fifty years ago. It doesn't very much resemble the Omaha of today and is valuable chiefly as

showing that even in its infancy the Gate City attracted attention in the east, and was thought worthy of being advertised abroad by the illustrated papers of the time.