

# Southern Pacific Bulletin



NOVEMBER 1927

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# Behind the Scenes in the Dining Car Dept.

By ALLAN POLLOK

Manager, Dining Cars, Hotels, Restaurants and Railway Clubs

**W**HAT is the Dining Car Department? On the pay roll there are 2100 employees. We have altogether a total of 140



Allan Pollok

dining cars, 26 all-day-lunch cars, 20 steamer restaurants, 7 hotels and station restaurants, 10 railway clubs, 36 club cars, and 73 news agents employed on our trains. We have a General Store at Kirkham Street, West Oakland, with an average

stock of over \$100,000.

During the year 1926 we served 3,260,000 meals on our dining cars, 2,243,000 meals in our steamer restaurants, 1,000,000 meals in our station restaurants, and 679,000 meals at our railway clubs.

I wish you would take a little time some day and go through the very fine Commissary we have right here in San Francisco at the Ferry Landing. I am sure it would be worth your time to see for yourselves just what we have to offer in this fine and modern plant, with all the latest appliances of all kinds. We also have commissaries at Oakland, Los Angeles, Portland, El Paso, Houston, San Antonio and New Orleans. The last three, however, are operated by the Atlantic Lines and are not under our supervision.

We also draw supplies from commissaries at Ogden, Omaha and Chicago, and I may say, without criticism, that these foreign commissaries only serve to show the very high excellence of our own, and in particular our Steamer Commissary, which is the last word in commissary efficiency. Any time you are on the line you can judge as to this for yourselves. Just drop off at any of these

**T**HIS article is taken from Mr. Pollok's address before the Chief Clerk's Council at San Francisco, October 4, 1927. Mr. Pollok gives many interesting sidelights on the many important details of dining car operation. The attention given these details is an important reason for the high standard of our dining car service.

places and go in the commissary and inspect it.

## Must Have Good Men

The difficulty in getting men for catering departments everywhere is getting greater and greater each year. Men are not being brought in from Europe, and we are not training stewards, cooks and waiters in America. American boys don't take to this profession. Most of our stewards are foreign born and foreign trained, and more and more the Dining Car Departments of the railroads throughout this country are coming to realize the importance of training their own stewards.

I would rather get a young fellow without any experience, take him through the various branches of our commissaries, from the commissaries to our dining cars, and thus teach him our system. In this regard, I don't know of any profession in the country today that offers the opportunity to young men of ability and ambition, who want to get into a business that will make them independent, as quickly as the catering business. You may smile at this, but, after a close study of the situation, I make that statement. I don't mean as a cook or a steward, but as a proprietor. The difficulty in getting trained men is evidenced by the fact that when the St. Francis Hotel wanted a Maitre d'Hotel, after making inquiries throughout California, the management finally had to go to New York and get a man from the Plaza Hotel at

\$10,000 a year. They are paying that amount today. Mr. Mainwaring at the "Palace" had the same experience, and also pays that much.

Of course, these are the high marks, such as for positions at Biltmore and Ambassador hotels in Los Angeles, and at other fine hotels throughout the country, and these places must have competent help.

As to the training of stewards, we have to pick our men carefully for many reasons, for a steward, without more than a turn of his hand in laying down a menu card, can affront a patron.

We have very severe discipline and inspection. The severest discipline we have is of course from our passengers. It is a peculiar thing, but a man will go for a year to the Palace Hotel and take luncheon every day and be well satisfied. If he does see some little inattention or lack of service, or perhaps receive a tough steak, he will pass it off as all right and not think, because of the tough steak, that the "service in the Palace Hotel is the worst of any hotel in the country."

## Diplomacy Needed

As manager of hotels I have been in, I don't recall such an incident. Nor would we ask the assistant manager of the hotel to ask the guests: "Well, how was the dining room service?" Nor say that any complaint the guest might make "would be taken up for correction." The guest in a hotel would, of course, say everything was all right, and be surprised at being approached in the matter. Unfortunately many a passenger who gets on one of our dining cars is seemingly a proprietor of that dining car, and if he sees any chance to complain he does not hesitate in calling attention to it. However, that is something we have to put up with.

Our stewards must be in the dining car ready to serve breakfast to passengers at six-thirty, that is to say,



East end of Southern Pacific's fine Steamer Commissary Kitchen, San Francisco.





they have to get up at five o'clock. The cooks have to start breakfast at five in order to be prepared to serve the train crew at six o'clock. The dining car has to be cleaned, swept up, tables set up and everything ready at six-thirty to commence serving breakfast to passengers.

Breakfast lasts until ten o'clock. In the winter time passengers get up later, and breakfast drags along until ten o'clock. At ten o'clock, with nobody else to come in, the dining car is closed. The crew then sets to work to clean the silver, clean the pantries, wash the dishes, glasses, etc., get the soiled

#### Our Instructing Forces

Then we have an Instructing Chef and an Instructing Waiter operating out of Los Angeles, and an Instructing Chef and Instructing Waiter covering the northern lines from Oakland Commissary. They report to the Supervising Chef, Mr. Reiss, who is a European, a Frenchman who received all his education in the "Old Country," and who is a past master in the art of catering. He gets up our menus; writes our instruction book for guidance of dining car chefs and cooks; is responsible for the recipes

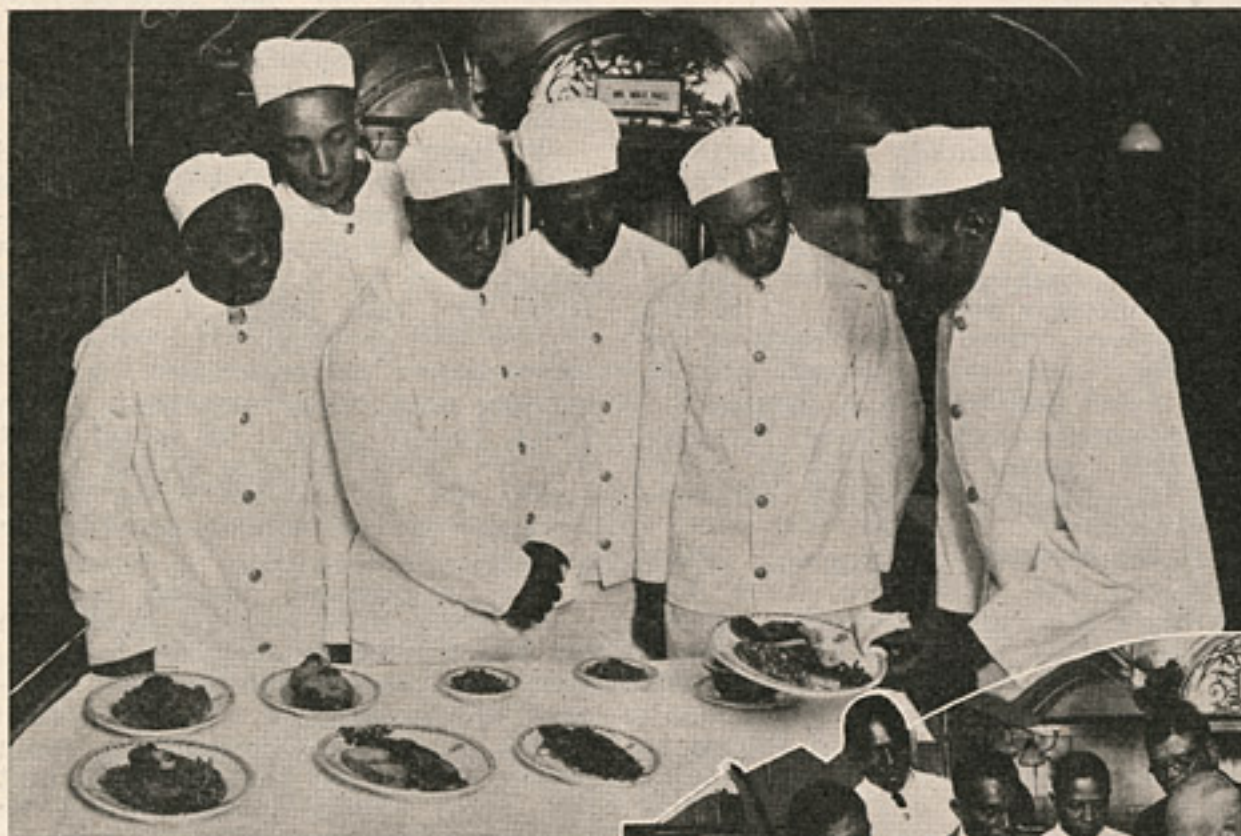
tion of the cook on that dining car. If the cooking of that particular cook is found to be deficient in any manner, he is sent for further instruction to our commissary kitchen at West Oakland or Los Angeles, where schools are maintained for instruction of cooks and waiters.

As to instructing waiters: Their duty is to work in cooperation with the commissaries and inspectors. If any dining car is deficient in service, one of the instructing waiters is assigned to that particular car to make a round trip, or two if necessary, and if any waiters are not up to standard they are sent to the "school car" for further instruction. If an employe shows he is unsuitable as a waiter, we discharge him, but we take great pains in instructing our employes.

#### The School Car

The "school car" for waiters is an obsolete dining car, completely set up in the yard for instruction of waiters, where "make believe" meals are served. Everything is exactly as it would be on a dining car in service, only food, of course, is not cooked or served. We have one of these cars at Los Angeles and another at West Oakland.

The service on a dining car is quite different from that in a hotel or restaurant. Owing to the swaying of the car, waiters have to have "sea legs," and yet it is the rarest kind of



linen stored away, and the clean linen out. By that time it is eleven o'clock and they have to dress themselves and get prepared for luncheon at twelve o'clock. The dining car must be in perfect condition, everything ship-shape, clean, without a single thing out of place. Luncheon goes on until nearly two o'clock. The men are on the floor all the time working.

At two or two-fifteen p. m. the diner is closed down again and the same preparations made for serving the evening meal at five-thirty. The trainmen have to be served between meals. I mention these things to show that the duty of a steward is arduous work. He must be up and coming every moment, on his toes, and yet be diplomatic and courteous to all kinds of passengers. A traveler going to Chicago, for instance, eats heartily the first meal out and after that is tired and cross; sleeps most of the time and is loggy. The steward has to take all these things into consideration and endeavor to please the most exacting patrons.

Our inspectors are selected and promoted from our best stewards. They must know everything about dining car service; how to make up menus; how every item should be served; must watch all delinquencies in cooking and service and lecture and instruct the dining car crew in all details of good service.



These scenes show new cooks and waiters being trained in the school car at Oakland Commissary. Max Hall, instructing waiter, is demonstrating the proper way to serve patrons, while Jefferson Davis, instructing chef, is showing how various dishes should be arranged.

and for proper cooking and instruction of the chefs.

Under him are the Instructing Chefs, colored men, whom we select from the very cream of our colored cooks. And let me say some of our colored cooks are able to go anywhere in the catering field. We have some exceptionally fine colored cooks. The Supervising Chef goes over all the new recipes with these Traveling and Instructing Chefs, or, if he has any complaint regarding the cooking on any dining car, it is called to atten-

a thing for one of them to meet with an accident. I have never seen a tray overturned or anything spilled on a guest in a dining car, and yet it is a most difficult thing to handle a full tray under such conditions. Of course I know that accidents occasionally occur, but I have never seen one.

As soon as a dining car gets into the yard, an inspector immediately boards the car and makes a thorough inspection of the kitchen, pantries, lockers and ice boxes. All perishable





supplies are removed and a report is made as to their condition. The kitchen is washed and all woodwork in the dining room is thoroughly cleaned. All kitchen utensils are stripped from the car, taken to the Commissary, where they are washed and thoroughly sterilized in a big steam sterilizer, so that once a trip every utensil is thoroughly cleaned. Once a trip the faucet and all parts of the coffee urn are cleaned to take away caffeine.

Menu planning is very important. We have a man at each commissary who gives careful attention to this. Most of our stewards have been many years in the service and are well posted as to preparation and "balancing" of menus. That is, the various foods such as vegetables, fruits, salads, meats, fish, etc., are all properly balanced. We can't have all expensive articles, nor all cheap ones, as we must cater to every class of patronage.

At the Palace Hotel they cater to one class, which can afford to pay whatever is asked. At other places they cater to people who want good service but can't afford such high prices. The Dining Car caters to all kinds of people mixed together. The man who comes from the Palace Hotel goes into the dining car and expects to find the best, while another expects to get a meal at a price to fit a modest purse, so that the menu builders have to study all these things out and make arrangements accordingly.

In the purchase of supplies, we are very big buyers in this market. For instance, we make the following purchases daily: Eggs, 900 dozen; beef, 2150 lbs.; lamb, 640 lbs.; poultry, 750 lbs.; pork, 690 lbs.; fish, 685 lbs.; ham and bacon, 825 lbs.; butter, 710 lbs.; milk, 530 gals.; coffee, 570 lbs.; potatoes, 2500 lbs.; flour, 1800 lbs.; vegetables, not including potatoes, 5750 lbs.; shortening, lard, etc., 600 lbs.; sugar, 1900 lbs.; apples, oranges, grapefruit, 70 boxes.

#### A Big Market Basket

In buying in such volume, a wide field is open to us, and has to be watched. Take cantaloupes, for instance. About the first of June we commence drawing cantaloupes from the Imperial Valley and Arizona. Around the middle of July from the Turlock district and the central part of the state. Later, in September and October, from the Fallon district in Nevada.

Lettuce is secured in similar manner throughout the entire year; first from the Imperial Valley and Arizona, and later from the Watsonville district. The latter district has developed a tremendous volume of new business in the past few years.

Tomatoes are first secured in Mexico, later from southern California, and then throughout central California.

Formerly we drew a great many things from other states, but the western states are coming to be self-supporting and we now need to go out of this territory for very few supplies. We used to secure rice from Japan, but now California is a large

## S. P. Aviators!

SOUTHERN PACIFIC aviators are to be given a special article in an early issue of the BULLETIN. If you are an aviator or a student of aviation write the editor about your flying career and about your most interesting experiences. Photograph of yourself with your plane is particularly desired.

A number of articles with photographs have already been received from division correspondents of the BULLETIN, and this final opportunity is given for the benefit of those not reached by the correspondents.

Material for this special feature must be in the BULLETIN office by December 1.

producer of this commodity and we can fill our requirements right at home. The same with sugar; and with flour—another great industry in California.

Avocados formerly cost a great deal of money, but thousands of acres have been developed around Los Angeles, a tremendous business has been established, and the demand is spreading all over the country.

#### The Best in the Market

We have four buyers. In San Francisco and Los Angeles each morning at 5:00 o'clock they go into the markets for the very finest perishable supplies, vegetables, fish, etc. These are brought into the markets very early in the morning, and the first man into the markets gets the cream of the lot.

We are very insistent upon quality. Above everything, quality first—then price. We can get some of the best fish in the country at Portland, San Francisco and Los Angeles, and as for fruits and vegetables, California is the leading state in the Union. Our buyers go down to the packing houses for our meats, where they inspect hundreds of cattle and select and stamp only the very prime for our service. When the meat reaches the Commissary, the man who receives it is responsible for its reception. He thoroughly inspects and places it under refrigeration in our ice boxes, so that if there is any inferior quality we know exactly who is to blame.

Eggs are one of the most difficult commodities to handle in a business like ours. We give great attention to quality, and draw our principal supply from farms throughout the state. The majority of eggs served on our diners are received the evening before or early that morning and immediately put under refrigeration on the dining cars. There is no place in the country that you can get eggs of better quality than on our dining cars.

We send samples of eggs from various sources to the Nutrition Department of the University of California, and Professor Jaffa, who is in charge of that department, has made a thorough study of our supplies. Formerly there was no way we knew of to tell the age of an egg, but Professor Jaffa, through long study, has devised a means of telling the age of an egg almost to within a day. It

was found that, as the egg grows older, the air space beneath the shell enlarges; that air enters through the shell, which is porous. Eggs are also candled to show condition of the whites and yolks.

#### Handling of Cream

Samples of milk, butter and cream also are sent periodically to the University for test. We pay great attention to our cream. The state requirements call for 18 per cent of butterfat, but we will not use any cream having a butterfat content of less than 24 per cent. Our cream is put up at the dairies in non-refillable 3-quart tins, sent to us in refrigerated containers, placed in ice boxes at our commissaries, and from there issued to the dining cars and kept under constant refrigeration. These tins cost us about 10 cents a piece, and we don't use them again for cream, distributing them over the line for use as water or oil cans. It is a very expensive thing for the Dining Car Department, but in the course of a year we have had almost no sour cream, perhaps not more than two or three tins during a very hot spell.

We purchase our meats in wholesale quantities. In the butcher shop at West Oakland, these meats are cut into standard sizes for our dining cars. We handled last year, through this butcher shop, 400,000 pounds of beef, 100,000 pounds of lamb, 175,000 pounds of pork.

From the pork we made over 177,000 pounds of our famous pork sausage. Formerly we had difficulty in securing good pork sausage. We decided to make our own, and I don't know where you can get as fine pork sausage, with nothing in it but the finest ingredients, as we now serve on our dining cars.

We cure and smoke our own bacon. And don't be afraid to eat a "hot dog" on our dining cars—last year we produced more than 50,000 pounds of Frankfurters and other sausages, and we know the quality is the very best that can be had.

At the Steamer Commissary we have the best equipment that I know of anywhere. We had great difficulty in getting a really good, "home-made" doughnut, so we equipped this commissary with a doughnut department and now make over 250 dozen doughnuts a day.

At this commissary we have two electric bake ovens of the latest type, and bake 200 loaves of bread, 300 pies and 855 cuts of coffee-cake per day.

#### Get Uniform Quality

We used to experience difficulty in getting uniform hot cakes, bran muffins, corn bread and biscuits, etc., on our dining cars, as on nearly every car there was a difference. So we experimented and now have a Blending Department, where we blend the ingredients for all of these articles.

Chef Reiss, with his great experience, studied and perfected his recipes, so that the blends contain so much flour, so much dried milk and dried eggs, so much shortening, so much sugar, so much baking powder, etc. The different blends are put in





7-pound packages and issued to the dining cars. Instead of preparing his dough in the old manner, all the chef has to do is to take a cup of one of the blends, pour it into his mixer, add sufficient water or milk, and in five minutes he has a pan of fine hot biscuits, or whatever is wanted. And the quality is always uniform.

This also has resulted in considerable saving in money, as it enables us to know exactly what these things cost. We know just how many packages are issued to the cars, and how many pans a 7-pound package can make up.

At the Steamer Commissary, we also put up our own mayonnaise, Thousand Island, and other dressings. Some years ago I noticed a cook on one of the dining cars making mayonnaise. It curdled, as very often happens in heated atmosphere, and he threw it out, commencing to mix a fresh lot.

We talked this over at the Commissary and commenced to make our own dressings. The first month we saved \$500 on olive oil alone. We put up our mayonnaise under refrigeration and issue it to the dining cars in quart Mason jars. This not only relieves the chefs of this work, but enables us to keep a line on the expense, and also gives us a check on the number of salads served.

#### A Careful Check

We have a check sheet which shows every item on the menu, the cost price and the number of orders served on each dining car—so many salads, so many jars of mayonnaise, etc. The same with steaks. We have a machine which cuts all our hams and bacons, and the number of slices issued and the number of orders sold should tally, as should the number of eggs issued and the number of orders sold. If these do not tally, an investigation is made.

We buy the finest prunes in the market. We used to boil them, and half of the lot would break and turn to mush. So we studied this out and now we never boil or stew our prunes, but bake them and put them up in quart Mason jars. We are very careful in purchasing prunes and only get the best sun-dried quality, then select them carefully so that not one damaged prune goes into the jars. A prune broken in baking is used for other purposes. Last year I believe we sold over a ton of prunes a month.

In 1926 we got an average of ninety-five cents for every meal served on our dining cars. Against this are many expenses. Food costs us forty-six cents per meal served—just about 48 per cent of the amount received goes into raw materials. Crews' wages amount to forty-four cents; fuel, ice and water, six cents; breakage of crockery and glassware, two cents; laundry and upkeep of linen, six cents. Other expenses amount to sixteen cents, making a total commissary expense of \$1.20 for each meal served, for which we receive 95c. That is to say, we lose twenty-five cents for every meal served in our dining cars. These figures are for commissary expense only, and do not include car repairs, interior or exterior car cleaning, etc., which are charged to the Operating Department.

We buy very fine linen, "Old Country" linen of the finest flax. We must have linen of good wearing quality. When we buy linen, our specifications call for so many threads to the square inch; such and such a count of threads for warp and weft; then anybody can bid on our requirements. This new theory the Southern Pacific has worked out and it is the method now followed by the General Purchasing Department and other branches of the Company. Also, it is being put into effect by nearly every railroad

in the country. We don't care from whom we purchase, so long as our specifications are lived up to and the price is right. When we receive linen on these bids, samples are sent to the Testing Bureau in Washington for analysis. Thorough tests are made and the Testing Bureau renders detailed reports, which are compared with the specifications stated in our bids.

#### A Modern Laundry

At West Oakland we have a fine laundry, and last year laundered over 12,000,000 pieces. This is a modern plant, with all the latest machinery, and it employs an average of seventy people. Over the laundry a repair unit is maintained to mend and keep the stock of linen in good shape. Nineteen seamstresses devote their entire time to this work, and make repairs on 200,000 pieces of linen annually, cut and hem towels of all kinds and prepare other linen for use. They use electric sewing machines and the new articles thus prepared amount to 120,000 pieces a year.

One of the difficulties we have is the handling of big conventions, which invariably are held during the season of year when travel is heaviest. During a recent convention over 56,000 extra meals were served within a period of 10 days—with 100 per cent efficiency. This involved 105 distinct special dining car trips, and could only have been accomplished through the greatest of cooperation, not only on the part of our own department, but of the Passenger and Operating departments as well.

When you go into a dining car and find some little deficiency, speak to the steward about it in a nice way. If everything is all right, walk up to him and congratulate him. Give the steward the benefit of a doubt if possible—he needs it. The same with the waiters and the chefs. If the food and service is good, tell the waiter so, and, as you pass the kitchen on your way out, tell the chef that everything was first rate. That's the sort of thing the dining car crew likes to hear, and I can assure you it's appreciated more than your tips.

#### NEW ORLEANS RACING SEASON

Much attention is being attracted this season to the horse-racing program to be held at New Orleans. The 1927-28 dates are as follows: Jefferson Race Track—Thanksgiving Day, November 24 to January 1. Fair Grounds—January 1, 1928, to February 21, inclusive.

#### His Party

A matron of determined character was encountered by a young woman reporter on a country paper, who was sent out to interview leading citizens as to their politics.

"May I see Mr. \_\_\_\_\_?" she asked of a stern looking woman who opened the door at one house.

"No, you can't," answered the matron decisively.

"But I want to know what party he belongs to," pleaded the girl.

The woman drew up her tall figure. "Well, take a good look at me," she said. "I'm the party he belongs to!"—Capper's Weekly.



This is one of the yard crews that keeps things on the move at Mission Bay yard near San Francisco. Front row, left to right—Thomas Lacey, engineer; P. Fergon, yardman; H. D. Miner, engine foreman; J. C. Johnson, fireman; N. L. Sudduth, yardman; J. H. Stepp, engine foreman; S. Lanzi, trackwalker; C. H. Kason, yardman; E. Broberg, yardmaster; E. G. Mailloux, yardman. Back row—J. K. Baccich, car repairer; and T. Leonard, yardman.