



The State Belt: San Francisco's Waterfront Railroad

Michelle S. Kaufman William H. Kaufman

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The State Belt: San Francisco's Waterfront Railroad Michelle S. Kaufman William H. Kaufman Released April 25, 2014 and re-released October 5, 2016 - The history of the railroad that served San Francisco's waterfront for over a century explained and documented. The entire area of the waterfront was owned by the State of California, and therefore so was the railroad. It served all the waterfront piers, from Fisherman's Wharf in the north, to China Basin in the south, and had track beyond Fisherman's Wharf, through a tunnel, to Army facilities at Fort Mason and the Presidio. But switching the piers was only part of the State Belt's duties. It also served many dozens of industries and warehouses adjoining the waterfront. Interchange with the rest of the United States took place by car float (with the Santa Fe, Northwestern Pacific and Western Pacific) and on land with the Southern Pacific near China Basin. Until 1946, the Belt used steam switch engines, but then in rapid succession acquired six Alco S-2 switchers, being among the first American railroads to achieve complete dieselization. A number of major events in San Francisco history, from the Earthquake of 1906, to the Panama Pacific Exposition of 1915, World Wars I and II, and the Great Depression, all affected the State Belt and in a number of cases, gave the Belt a role to play as well. In 1969, the City of San Francisco finally acquired title to its Port and to the State Belt; they soon contracted with Kyle Railways in 1973 to operate the railroad. This lasted until 1993. But many remnants of the Belt and its operation remain to be seen in San Francisco. Extensive research was required to locate photographs and history of a railroad that did a lot of its work at night. It is richly documented with 242 photos, most never before published, with informative maps and an index. This definitely is a book for rail historians and for anyone interested in rail-marine connections and in the operation of freight railroads.

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