

K & E mining transit, serial #9365, which dates it to 1904.

William Lacy's (original owner of the transit) English-born parents immigrated to America in 1858, stopping for a time in Illinois, where they had a daughter. Moving on to California in 1863, William Junior was born in Bolinas on November 12, 1864. The family settled in Los Angeles in 1877; William Senior, a man of inspiring lifelong spunk, quickly established himself as a banker and then as a sheet-iron-pipe manufacturer. Once his sons were getting old enough to take an interest in his business, William Senior turned his attention to oil fields and gold mines. He died on an inspection trip to one such of his own mines in Baja California in 1897. William Junior was a partner with his father in mineral speculation and while running Lacy Manufacturing with his brother, Richard (who was, by the way, married to a sister of Arthur Sullivan of Gilbert & Sullivan fame). While it was suggested in tributes at Junior's death that he had worked his way up from the bottom, the truth is, like many successful men, William had a familial leg up. A ton of money behind one always makes hanging out in overalls to learn a business a little easier. Which is not to say that William Lacy Junior wasn't a truly decent man. Even taking into consideration the natural tendency of the culture of the era to venerate its Masters of the Universe, few of us are likely to have our local newspaper of record editorialize our life at the end, as the *Times* did for William Lacy on June 13, 1932:

William Lacy was perhaps unusual for his era in that he was respected not only for his business acumen—admired for his material success rather than resented for it—but appreciated too for his bonhomie and tireless efforts on behalf of Los Angeles and unselfish desire to see the city grow and its citizens prosper accordingly. As a young man in Los Angeles from the time its first transcontinental rail connection would bring it out of its frontier era, the city's future seemed limitless, and he caught the booster bug. After Los Angeles High School and business college and establishing himself with his father and brother in the various Lacy enterprises—banking, iron, clay products, oil, gold—Lacy married Emma L. Gordon on February 2, 1892. After first living with the senior Lacs in Lincoln Heights, the couple moved across the river to larger houses as six children, four boys and two girls, began to come.

Pacific Clay Products formed as the result of a series of mergers of several Southern California commercial pipe and tile companies in the late 1800s, the earliest founded in 1886. By 1910 additional merger activity resulted in an entity called Pacific Sewer Pipe Company. The company changed their name to Pacific Clay Products Company in 1921. In 1923, a new holding company, The Pacific Clay Products, Inc., led by Los Angeles industrialist William Lacy, was formed, and in 1926 the company went public.

The K&E transit was most likely purchased by William Lacy in 1904 when he was 40 years old and pursuing his families mining interests. When he formed Pacific Clay Products in 1923, Lacy most likely brought his transit there, to be used in laying out the clay mines in Alberhill, where the clay was taken for their clay products. As a child, I went bird and rabbit hunting at the Alberhill mines with my father, who

started working for Pacific Clay Products in 1956. My father did not know William Lacy, he was only 1 year old when Lacy committed suicide, but my father did work for John Fredericks, who succeeded Lacy at Pacific Clay.

By 1930, many of Pacific's plants operated far below capacity. During this time, Pacific retooled their Lincoln Heights plant (located at 306 West Avenue 26, Los Angeles) to focus on architectural terracotta and garden pottery production. With the economy in free fall, Pacific manufactured only intermittently by 1931. The board of directors intended to keep the plants in operation as much as they could, "chiefly as a contribution to the efforts begin made to cope with the local unemployment situation." Throughout the Depression, Pacific made continuous investments in research and development, looking for new and better products as well as improvements in automation and efficiency. While commercial pottery and tile production continued to decline, production increased as a result of consumer demand. They introduced a new artware line in 1931.

Even with diversification, business declined dramatically with the plants operating at 12% of capacity by 1932. William Lacy, suffering from a nervous breakdown "induced in part of despondency over business conditions and the plight of the unemployed," committed suicide by asphyxiation in the laundry room of his house at age 67 in April of that year. Family members reported that he had been ill for more than a month and "had been depressed as a result of the constant association with unemployed men whom he sought to help." The directors of the company elected John D. Fredericks, former Congressman and vice-president of the company, to fill the vacancy.

My father remembers the transit being used around Pacific Clay Products over the decades. In 1985, I bought land in North Bend, Washington and built my first home in which I still live. My father came up from Los Angeles to help me, and brought Lacy's transit to layout my complicated concrete foundation. It was a little overkill, but the transit worked flawlessly. The wooden case for the transit still shows Lacy's name burned or carved into the top, and an early tag indicating that Pacific Clay was the owner in 1964. When the plant was decommissioned in the late 1970's, everything was sold off, and my father purchased the transit. I purchased an anvil at the sale, and salvaged a truckload of rebar. The transit remained in my father's shop until his passing in 2021, and now is in my shop, where I used it in 1985. It appears to still be in great working condition.



As a tireless civic booster and onetime president of the Chamber of Commerce, William Lacy never missed an opportunity to extoll the economic goldmine that was Los Angeles. Here, he stands atop a cargo of oranges being shipped from the harbor at San Pedro.

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