



# Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo  
Railroad Museum

Issue Number 65 – Fall 2018 San Luis Obispo, California [www.slormm.com](http://www.slormm.com)

*The Museum is open every Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm. It opens other times for groups by arrangement. Contact [media@slormm.com](mailto:media@slormm.com).*



## Central Coast Railroad Festival

October 5 through 7: swap meet; special presentations; model railroads; tours; book and art sales; *our first beer train excursion October 6.*

## Retired Camp Roberts veteran



*Jack Hutchinson photo*

The Plymouth Locomotive Company built this little switcher for the U.S. Army in 1941. It served at Camp Roberts near San Miguel for about six years. After working at a quarry and a “caboose-otel,” it’s now retired in private ownership. See page 5 (online) for more regional military railroad history, old and recent.

## Wine-rail excursions going fast!

Actually, they’re a leisurely way to experience Cuesta Grade and North County wine country with live music, afternoon northbound aboard Amtrak’s Coast Starlight with evening return by charter bus. The summer trips sold out; October 5 and 19 may still have seats available. For current information, email [media@slormm.com](mailto:media@slormm.com) or call 805 548-1894.



*The Museum’s freshly painted and lettered former Southern Pacific caboose #1886 basks in summer evening light, as if it were the most important car of all.*

## The Little Mineral Red and Daylight Orange Caboose almost always came last.

Caboose have disappeared from main-line freight trains, replaced by automatic trackside detectors and end-of-train devices, which both send data to locomotive cabs by radio. The Museum’s 1972-vintage bay window caboose last saw service on Southern Pacific’s (now Union Pacific’s) White Hills Branch, which runs from the coast through Lompoc to the end of track at a mine loading site.

Local runs to the mine still often have a caboose at the leading end, with the locomotive pushing from the rear, because there are no turning facilities there. The caboose allows brakemen or conductors to keep watch at road crossings between Lompoc and the mine (see page 4). The locomotive pulls the train back to Lompoc.

The mine produces diatomaceous earth, which has several uses including as a filtering aid and a mild abrasive. The mine once had its own little underground electric rail system, since removed.



## Are We Still In The Streamliner Era? ? ?

There will be two opportunities to hear some evidence. The first will be Saturday, September 8 at 1 p.m., with free admission, at the San Luis Obispo City-County Library (downtown at the corner of Palm and Osos streets). The second chance will be at the Museum on Saturday, October 6, at 11 a.m., during the Central Coast Railroad Festival (included with admission; free to members). Everyone from six to 106 should enjoy this.

The brief presentation will focus on the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s, but will look at the century before and up to the present, both locally and around the world.

Learn why an old-fashioned term for passenger trains was “varnish.” See the plan for Southern Pacific’s Coast Daylight that was not used. Find out what today’s high-speed trains and some waterfowl have in common. Share your views on the answer.

**Preserving California's  
Central Coast Railroad History**

The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum is a non-profit educational institution. Founded to preserve and present California Central Coast railroad history by collecting, restoring, displaying, and operating relevant railroad artifacts, photographs, models, and documents, its goal is to facilitate a better understanding of railroads' impact on our area's social, cultural, and economic history.

**Board of Directors**

John Marchetti .....*President*  
 Stephanie Hovanitz .....*Vice-president*  
 Norma Dengler Brad LaRose  
 Glen Matteson Duane Powell  
 Feride Schroeder

**Crew List**

*Museum Manager* ..... Diane Marchetti  
*Assistant Manager* ..... Stephanie Hovanitz  
*Curator* ..... Brad LaRose  
*Archivist, Newsletter Editor* .... Glen Matteson  
 (newsletter@slorrm.com)  
*Editor Emeritus* ..... Bill Pyper  
*Librarian* ..... Chris Hurd  
*Webmaster* ..... Jamie Foster  
*Operations Manager* ..... Stephanie Hovanitz  
*Events Coordinator:* ..... Tom Mitchell  
*Model RR Superintendent* ... Andrew Merriam  
*Membership Chairman* ..... John Marchetti

**Contact**

Telephone (message) 805 548-1894  
 e-mail: info@slorrm.com  
 Website: www.slorrm.com  
 Mail: 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue  
 San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

**DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE**

Anyone may access the Museum's *Bylaws, Collections Policy, Development & Operations Plan, Code of Conduct*, and other documents at slorrm.com. Or request a paper copy via info@slorrm.com.

**Museum Store**

To raise funds, the Museum offers several items for sale. T-shirts, baseball caps, belt buckles, mugs, enameled pins, embroidered patches, engineer hats, and videos are available through the Museum website www.slorrm.com. Click on **Company Store**.

*Coast Mail* is published quarterly by the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum.  
 © 2018. All rights reserved.

**Become a member**

Membership provides opportunities for anyone interested in today's railroads, railroad history, train travel, or model railroading.

Individual members pay \$36 per year, a family \$60, and a sustaining member \$100. Junior memberships (ages 12-18) for the model railroaders are available (see our Model Railroad Superintendent for details).

Application forms can be downloaded from the Museum's website and mailed with payment, or you can join online by clicking Membership and using PayPal. (Mailing and web addresses are in left-hand column.)

Membership benefits include free admission to the Museum and access to Members Only features of the website, including full current issues of *Coast Mail*.



O. B. Helbok photo

*Everett Railroad fireman S. Lane feeds a scoop into one of the nearly 150 North American coal-fired locomotives in operation. This rural Pennsylvania heritage line has helped test renewable bio-fuels, to avoid several problems obtaining and using suitable coal.*



UPRR photo

*Union Pacific welder D. Crerar works inside the boiler of Big Boy locomotive No. 4014, which the road that acquired Southern Pacific in 1996 is making operational, but now to be fueled with oil, as were nearly all late steam era locomotives in the western U.S.*



**Online extras are back** page

Mobbed by excursionists ..... 5  
 Rails before spaceflight ..... 5  
 Many faces of railroading ..... 6



**Art After Dark** at the Museum returns in February. So artists, start creating or choosing your favorite railroad-themed project now.

**TIMETABLE**

Board of Directors meetings are held at 6:00 p.m., at 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue, San Luis Obispo, on the second Tuesday of each month: September 11; October 9; November 13. For committee meetings, use the number or email in left-hand column.

**An Editorial**

**Some may not know  
what others know.**

Have you ever been bothered by the distinction some people make between "those who work with their hands and those who work with their minds?" Try doing anything with neither. Even for repetitive tasks seeming to need only strength and endurance, working efficiently and without anyone getting hurt requires clear thought.

What could be more hands and less mind than feeding a steam locomotive's appetite for coal? Leaving aside the problems of maintaining water level and steam pressure, and allowing for late steam era use of mechanical stokers augmented by steam jets to distribute the coal, coal is coal, right? Consider the words below from The Steam Locomotive, Volume 1, 1925, by the International Textbook Company, about 400 pages of information that few people need to know. Clinker is rock-like residue that can form in fossil fuel fires.

**23. Mixing Coals.**—Many coals may be mixed and burned without causing trouble from clinker. On the other hand, two coals, neither of which clinkers in burning, may cause considerable trouble from clinker if mixed and burned together, or if burned in the wrong order. For example, if anthracite or semianthracite is fired on a fire bed of bituminous coal, the result is almost sure to be disastrous, whereas bituminous coal can be fired on a fire bed of anthracite without the least trouble. It is well, therefore, for a fireman to know whether the coals at the two ends of a division can be burned together without causing trouble.

## Meet the Modelers

The Museum's model railroad display is the work of the Central Coast Model Railroaders (CCMR). It's hard to appreciate the breadth and depth of the group's expertise until you've closely examined all the scenes and even peeked behind them. In what we hope will be a regular feature here, CCMR Superintendent Andrew Merriam introduces some of the modelers.

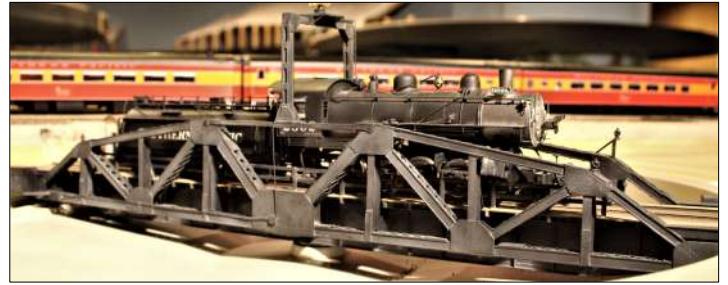
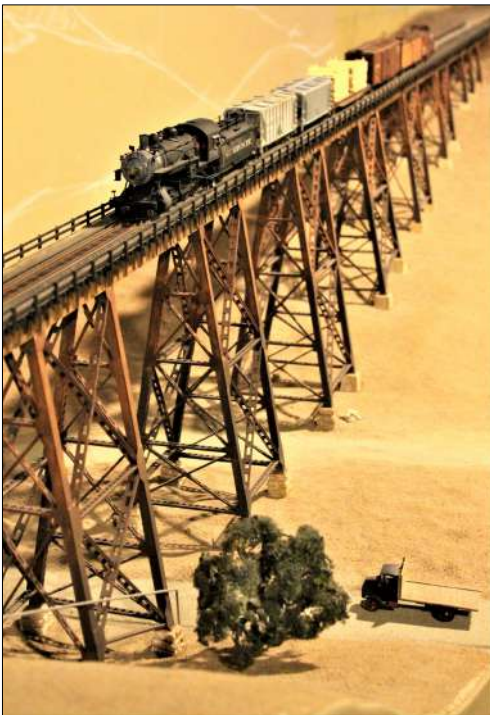


A frequent visitor question is, "Who built that huge trestle over Stenner Creek?" The answer is Pat Cully (above). He constructed the nearly eight-foot-long model (below) using styrene parts that he cut and shaped to match drawings and photographs of the actual steel trestle, which is northwest of San Luis Obispo. This local railroad landmark is still used daily by Amtrak passenger trains and Union Pacific freights.

Pat was born in Atascadero, and until age 10 lived on a small ranch overlooking the Southern Pacific tracks during the transition from steam to diesel locomotives. His first modeling project for the Museum was the truss bridge over Pismo Creek in Price Canyon, which also closely follows photos and railroad documents.

His crowning effort to date is replication of the 105-foot-long turntable at the heart of the S.L.O. engine facilities (photo top right). As with the trestle, the turntable was fabricated from styrene based on documents and photographs. It is probably the most accurate model of this structure ever built.

What's next on Pat's agenda? After completing the Museum model's track from Stenner Creek to Paso Robles, he'll continue work on some of the signature railroad and community structures in Templeton and Paso Robles. *Three CCMR photos by Andrew Merriam*



You can almost hear the electric motor humming and the gears meshing as the turntable at San Luis Obispo rotates a steamer used on local freights and the Coast Daylight glides by on the main. Pat Cully built the turntable bridge.

## Display track extension



In July and August some of our regular volunteers extended the display track southward, so there will be about 78 feet more room for rail cars.

Above, Brad LaRose (kneeling) starts a spike with a small sledgehammer, while Bob Wilson (at far left) checks his gear, Ted VanKlaveren (in yellow hardhat) warms up, and Dan Manion (far right) picks up a lining bar.

Below, Brad gets to stand, while Ted shows off his skill with the spike maul, and Dan uses the lining bar to pry up the end of the wood cross tie to get a snug fit with the spike. Spike mauls are long handled sledgehammers with small striking faces; the idea is to hit the head of the spike and not the rock ballast, the tie, the rail, your foot, or someone else's foot.



**“Don’t let fear of failure prevent you from trying something new.”**



Innovation requires taking chances, but we probably shouldn’t let our lives be ruled by inspirational posters. Readers may recall the account in the Spring 2017 *Coast Mail* of a new type of

burner tried in 1947 for Southern Pacific steam locomotives fueled by oil –thick, heavy oil. Because those qualities generally make oil cheaper, Southern Pacific experimented again in 1955 but with diesel locomotives. This time the heavier oil was blended with regular diesel fuel. The blended fuel had to be kept at 115 degrees to flow, easy during Yuma summers but a problem during Sierra Nevada winters.

SP locomotive expert Joe Strapac, writing in the Winter 2001 *SP Bulletin* (Southern Pacific Historical & Technical Society’s journal), explained that engines could not be relied on to idle or operate at low throttle with the blended fuel. The solution was to have two compartments in the fuel tank, one for the thicker, blended fuel, and one for straight diesel. At first engineers had to manually select diesel for starting and for shutting down (to sluice away the goo), switching to thicker oil only when running under load. Later installations used an automatic selector.

And guess what? Like the steam locomotives’ tender tanks fitted with steam pipes to keep the fuel warm, the diesels’ fuel tanks had a pipe to circulate hot water from the engine cooling system.

Of course whenever a new fuel is used, there must be facilities to store and dispense it. Roseville, near Sacramento, got the only installation. San Luis Obispo was mercifully spared.

The experiment lasted only a few years. “If the engine were shut down with [blended] oil in the injectors, the oil would cool and harden to a tarry consistency...” One imagines mechanics with tiny “slice bars” scraping out the result.



Bill Steck photo

In June 2018 Union Pacific crewmen guide a backup move toward the diatomaceous earth mine at the end of the White Hills Branch near Lompoc. Nationwide, a caboose is a rare sight these days.



Jeff Perry photo

A short freight rumbles down the street in Lompoc. It will probably next pick up a caboose to be used as a “pushing platform” for the trip to the nearby mine.

**Don’t guess who has the right-of-way.**

In a few California cities, and in many places throughout the country, railroad tracks run within city streets. They are not streetcar or interurban railway tracks. Some host relatively short switching moves in industrial districts. These are the places you’re likely to see a caboose, now often referred to as “pushing platform,” to coordinate with the locomotive engineer who can’t see around rail cars or buildings. But at a few locations main lines within streets carry, or carried, long passenger and freight trains. The Southern Pacific, now Union Pacific, track in Jack London Square in Oakland is one example. Street running is an awkward arrangement, fraught with problems for everyone involved. Improperly parked vehicles in industrial areas can bring progress to a quick stop.

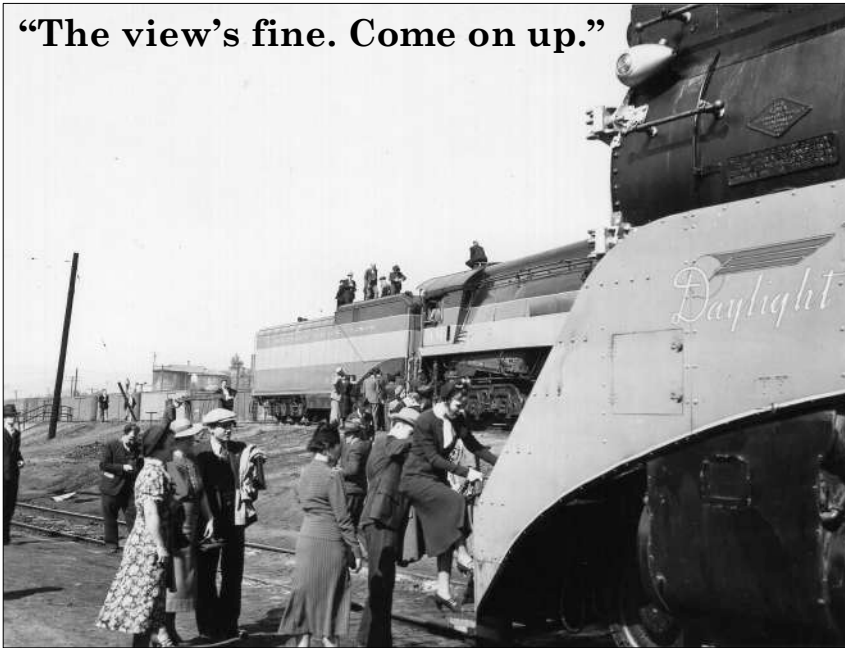
The 13-mile White Hills Branch from Surf through Lompoc is used like an industrial track, though it runs mostly through agricultural land. In Lompoc, the track runs in the middle of A Street and next to Laurel Avenue.



Kelly Kennedy photo

Crews replaced deteriorated track in Lompoc’s Laurel Avenue in September 2017, using pre-assembled panels to minimize disruption to street paving and traffic. A similar approach was used more recently to replace track between the concrete passenger platforms at the San Luis Obispo Amtrak station. Road crossings in the area also were rebuilt.

**“The view’s fine. Come on up.”**



*Apparently it wasn't a big deal in 1938 to have Pacific Coast Railway excursion riders in Southern Pacific's San Luis Obispo yard climbing all over GS-series Daylight locomotives. These days don't even think about doing such a thing, long skirt or not. Photo was donated to the Museum archives by Andrew Merriam.*

**Recent History**  
**Camp Roberts**

Unlike Camp San Luis Obispo, which had rail service into the 1950s via a nearly two-mile-long branch (*Coast Mail* #62 and #64), Camp Roberts, north of San Miguel, is still served by a short spur –but it has about two miles of track within the base, including a turning loop. Earlier this year several trainloads of military vehicles were brought from the north by Union Pacific Railroad, and later moved south (below).

*Greta Mart photo via KCBX*



**Rails First, Space Second**

The no-frills diesel locomotive shown below was used by a U.S. Air Force contractor to move Titan missile parts from the Southern Pacific connection on the coast to the interior of the Vandenberg base. This glamorous job started in 1979, but ended before 1986 when the engine was to be moved back to its previous home, a base in Maine. Mechanical problems complicated the proposed move, so it ended up at the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum near San Diego, where it apparently resides today. The photo is from 1998.

“No frills” isn't entirely true. The American Locomotive Company (Alco) built this military road switcher in 1953 with trucks (wheel assemblies) set up for use on track having gauges of 56.5 inches, the North American standard, as well as 60, 63, and 66 inches –common gauges in Russia, in Ireland, and in India, Spain, and Portugal, respectively. Why the options? So it could be used in any country the U.S. might decide to invade, mostly likely China (56.5 inches) or Russia (the metric equivalent of 60 inches). The Korean conflict was underway and the Cold War was warm. The Titan series of rockets carried several kinds of satellites, interplanetary probes, and nuclear warheads.



Randy Houk photo

## The Many Faces of Railroading in San Luis Obispo



On August 12, 1944, Southern Pacific employees pose in front of the Car Department office. They probably did not all work for the car department, which maintained and repaired freight cars, and sometime passenger cars, that couldn't or didn't need to visit the major shops in Sacramento and Los Angeles. Can you help us name them and their roles? Women are better represented in this war year than they were before or after.

The above image was donated recently by Ardie Duron Myers, who noted, "My dad Salvador Duron worked for the S.P. Railroad when he was a young boy along with so many more [who] became friends forever. The men all worked hard and sometimes they all worked out of town if they needed help elsewhere." The photographer has not been identified.

At right we see Eustorgio "Big Joe" Ramirez at the cab of Southern Pacific GS-4 Daylight-type steam locomotive #4451. It's much like the one shown at the bottom of page 1, but probably in its post-war "demoted" color scheme of basic black and silver. Because Mr. Ramirez is not listed as having an engineer or fireman seniority date, he must have been a hostler—a term held over from the days of horse-drawn vehicles—who moved engines onto and off the turntable and within the roundhouse and locomotive servicing area. There, speeds were not dramatic, but the consequences of misjudging track alignment could be severe. This image also was donated recently, by "Big Joe" Ramirez' grandson, Richard Ramirez.

