



Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo
Railroad Museum

Issue Number 70 – Winter 2019

San Luis Obispo, California

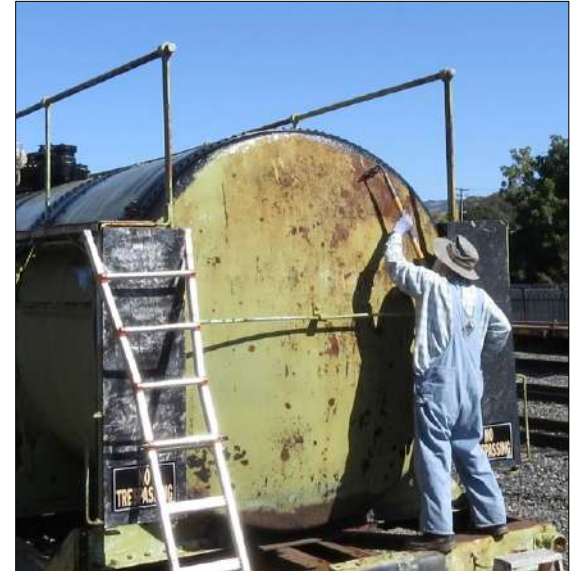
slorrm.com

The Museum is open every Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm. It opens other times for groups by arrangement. Contact media@slorrm.com.

Restoration Progress: Tank Car



On a beautiful October 1 morning, curator Brad LaRose applied gloss black paint to the Museum's former Southern Pacific tank car. It was rescued from obscurity north of Mount Shasta, where it had worn faded Forest Service green in water storage service.



"Farmer Dan, you can hoe that tater patch all day and still not get a better crop." In reality, regular volunteer Dan Manion scrapes rust from the end of the 1903 riveted steel car.

This was a treat

Around Halloween Danny the Diesel Locomotive (alias QMC #2038) was feeling a little envious of all the attention the Museum's tank car was receiving. To smooth things over, Brad LaRose and Peter Brazil did some battery charging and engine starting. That made Danny feel so much better that he showed off, moving the Museum's former Southern Pacific bay window caboose back and forth.



Gone, but not forgotten

It's the season to drop by Orchard Supply Hardware and pick up "the train calendar." But we can't, because the home and garden retailer produced its final calendar and closed its stores a year ago. OSH started as a non-profit cooperative, mostly of Santa Clara Valley fruit

growers, in 1931. In 1962, founder's son and Southern Pacific employee Al Smith became company president. Between 1974 and 2018, 23 artists produced over 450 unique images for OSH calendars, including several of Coast Route and Central Coast railroad subjects.



The 1991 OSH calendar celebrated 60 years of business and featured these two paintings by Michael F. Kotowski, who probably provided more scenes in total than any other artist.

Left, a Pacific Coast Railway freight steams into Santa Maria in 1931.

Right, a Southern Pacific passenger train stops at Salinas in the same year.



**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.

Contact

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Events/Publicity Coordinator: vacant
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Glen Matteson (newsletter@slorrm.com)

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.
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TIMETABLE

Board of Directors meetings will be held Dec. 10, Jan. 14, and Feb. 11, at 6:00 p.m., at 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue, San Luis Obispo.

Upcoming Events

December 7 – Santa arrives on Amtrak's Pacific Surfliner (2:15 – 5:00 p.m.)
January 25 – Modeling landscapes (12:00 to 1:00)

Big plans for a little theater

With the generous support of area resident and former Southern Pacific worker Bill Walther, the Museum plans to accelerate restoration of its Southern Pacific wood-sided boxcar. The car is stored nearby in the Museum's Emily Street Yard, where the heavy restoration work will be done.

After the car is moved to the display track, one end will be outfitted with seats and video screens. Visitors will be able to watch the people of S.P. in some of their daily activities and hear accounts of local workers. Special recognition will be given to those who passed away while in service.



Can you lend a hand? The Museum can always use more helpers. Contact: info@slorrm.com

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*.

Central Coast Railroad Festival

See a photo report on this year's event on pages 5 and 6, online.



A Pacific Surfliner with at least 28 axles rolls north in the Edna Valley in 2016.

Very Recent History – Hey Mister, Your Train's Too Short

According to reports among railfans, one of the major Western railroads has set a minimum number of axles per train at 28, while the other major Western railroad considers 30 the minimum. Why would they do that, when typical Amtrak/Caltrans *Surfliners* have five or six cars? With a single locomotive, that means 24 or 28 axles.

On reasonably good authority, the host railroads' concern is based on wheels, not axles themselves. Activation of trackside signals and grade-crossing safety devices (light, bells, and gates) depends on electrical contact between wheels and rails, which carry the track circuits. For many years, the small track motorcars and larger "hi-rail" pickup trucks used by track maintenance crews had to take precautions such as slowly approaching grade crossings, because their four wheels could not be counted on to activate the automatic devices. Sixty wheels should do it, even with some rust on the rails.

Presidents visited by train.

U.S. President William McKinley came to San Luis Obispo in May 1901, soon after Southern Pacific Railroad's coastal route to Los Angeles was completed. The Museum's "Whistle Stop" exhibit explained why he was lowered from a building roof to make his departure. (Hint: It had to do with overly enthusiastic fans.) That exhibit has been removed to make way for one featuring Amtrak on the Central Coast.

In May 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt also stopped in San Luis Obispo. At a speech in what is now Mitchell Park, speaking mainly of soil and forests, he admonished residents "Our aim must be to hand over our country to our children in better shape, not in worse shape, than we ourselves got it." The exhibit also described his 14,000-mile rail tour.

The exhibit was prepared by former San Luis Obispo city councilman John Ashbaugh and local historian James Papp. The Museum's model railroad superintendent Andrew Merriam provided the train, horses, and crowd of people.



More Recent History – Give Back Our Train

For a few days in mid-September, Amtrak's *Coast Starlights* detoured through the San Joaquin Valley and the Tehachapis. This happens occasionally due to work on the Coast Route. While disappointing for folks here, it's a treat for those wanting to ride around

the famous loop. And, the detour reflects continuing maintenance and improvements for coastal rail infrastructure.

Left image is a screen capture by Garrett A. Warren from a 2019 Tehachapi Depot Museum webcam video. Right is from a 2008 video of Tehachapi loop by James Davey via YouTube.



The doctor will see you now.

Hurting across the prairie ... go fifteen all-steel coaches holding a thousand people. – from “Limited” by Carl Sandburg, 1916

Those 1,000 people would feel better knowing that the locomotive engineer and fireman were in good health, with accurate perception and reliable judgment. Railroads were among the first organization to provide, and require, medical evaluations of their workers.

Below we see Southern Pacific No. 135, a Medical Examination Car, about the same vintage as Sandburg’s poem, at San Jose in April 1947. Such cars traveled around the railroad, stopping in places that did not have company hospitals. Now in the Museum’s archives, the image comes from the collection of W. C. Whittaker via a donation by Rod Aszman.



SLORRM Archives No. P2573.1



SLORRM Archives No. P2573.2

I’m getting hungry just thinking about it.

A fast-food chain boasts of “all-day breakfast.” Maybe even better, Southern Pacific had a car offering “All-day Lunch.” Above, No. 10503 is seen at Watsonville Junction in May 1953.

Judging from the window arrangement, like the Museum’s café-lounge car *La Cuesta*, this car must have had a very small area for food preparation. But sandwiches and drinks don’t require a lot of space. Does anyone know if, like contemporary airlines and now Amtrak, the car was provisioned with pre-made items?

This photo also comes from the collection of W. C. Whittaker via a donation by Rod Aszman.



Brad LaRose photos

Mystery Photo Answer

Did you guess what was shown in the Fall *Coast Mail* mystery photo?

We really shouldn’t be here, unless we’re Museum members working to restore the sugar beet gondola on display near the Freighthouse. This is a view inside the open-top car, looking through the drop-doors in the bottom that allowed beets to be unloaded into bins at the sugar refinery. There, via flumes and conveyor belts, beets were washed, shredded, and heated. Further processing, involving filtering, adding of lime, and evaporating, resulted in molasses and white granular sugar, and in leftover pulp that was fed to livestock.

From the 1920s through the 1970s, the Southern Pacific Railroad transported thousands of tons of sugar beets along the coast. Major growing areas included Imperial County, the Salinas Valley, and the San Joaquin Valley. Refineries were located at Betteravia near Santa Maria, Spreckels near Salinas, and Oxnard in Ventura County [see two articles in *Coast Mail* #61]. Now, only far Northern California sees beet cultivation. Most are grown in the upper Midwest and the Plains states, and California refineries have closed.

In the view below, we’re looking lengthwise along the car. The weathered, failing box contains spare parts.



Central Coast Railroad Festival – October 5, 2019



Very young guests could run trains on Bob Wilson's setup.



Santa Maria Valley RR demonstrated track maintenance.



Neil Fernbaugh's switching puzzle was a favorite activity.



Brad LaRose showed how to drive a spike, while Peter Brazil demonstrated opening the drop-doors on the sugar beet gondola.



Temporary shade for the platform was welcome on a day with bright morning sunlight (above). Locomotive headlights could also be very bright, but this one has a lower wattage bulb for display (right).



All photos are by Gary See.

Central Coast Railroad Festival – October 5, 2019



The play tables are popular wherever they are.



Visitors line up to enter.



Four photos by Gary See.



Alan Upshaw and others shared some great stories on the Freighthouse platform (above). But let's go back to the hands-on model train controls, where little sister will get a turn in a minute (right).



If you like what you see above and want to help make such things happen, consider stepping into one of the roles noted below. Knowledge of railroads or history is not required.

Contact us at info@slorrm.com or at 805 548-1894.

Events coordinator needed

If you like working with people and schedules, have we got a job for you! The only pay is satisfaction. But you don't need to know anything about trains or history.

This is a great opportunity for someone to get to know our community and to help its members discover us.



Publicity chair needed

If you're interested in print, broadcast, and online media, have we got a job for you! Publicity was previously part of the events coordinator's role, and will continue to work closely with that person.

Can you believe there are still some area residents who don't know about all we offer? Help us change that!