

# SWANTON PACIFIC RAILROAD

Number 82

Cal Poly

March 2000

## On Track

With your director,

Ed Carnegie



February's workday, even with all the rain, was quite productive. We were lucky in that most of the day was only light drizzles, but even so we concentrated on inside projects. More progress was made on the remodel of the machine shop, the entire south wall is now insulated, paneled and painted. Randy was able to install the electrical feeder for the air compressor. Fitz spearheaded the activity of building an enclosure for the air compressor sitting outside on the south wall of the machine shop. A little more insulation and paneling was installed in the roundhouse. Working right behind the paneling crew were Bob Wilkerson and Dick Toulson who were painting.

Ed-ski and Andy were tending to housekeeping and other projects in the carbarn. Geoff Tobin had purchased some shelves and brought them over to be assembled. After they get painted they will be used to organize the spare parts within the machine shop and roundhouse. The weather didn't permit too much work to be done in the way of gardening, but some weedin' and tendin' did occur.

Would also like to express our thanks to Bruce Sherman who came a week earlier to get some welding done on the hopper car. If you haven't seen it, be sure to stop by and take a look at it as it is really beginning to take shape. The next project on the hopper car is to come up with some prototypical side re-enforcement members, which we haven't done as of yet. We haven't found any yet, but if any of you know of where some might be, let myself or Fitz know so that we can obtain them.

A Board Meeting was held on Sunday and will be covered later in the newsletter. Most of us left following the Board Meeting since a storm came in. Our original plans were to stay and leave Monday morning. However, as the day and evening wore on the rains kept coming. Wally came by to say that water was starting to go over Swanton Rd. so we decided to pack up and leave. Maybe selling our boat wasn't such a good idea! As we proceeded south on Swanton Rd. water was running over the road along with some relatively large rocks. We made it across alright, but as we proceeded into town we kept hearing a thump, thump sound. A rock had gotten lodged between our dual wheels. We finally stopped and pried it

out and thought everything was O.K. The next day we discovered we had a flat tire as a result of the thump thump. The rock had damaged the side wall so we will have to purchase a new tire (cheaper than a boat).

A few days later we received news that several trees came down as a result of the storm. One of the trees landed on the Little Creek Bridge and the confluence between Little Creek and Scott Creek is now getting closer and closer to the bridge. We were informed that we have another washout south of our existing washout, which is very discouraging, as mother nature is operating faster than bureaucracy is on getting a permit to replace storm damage from three years ago! Luckily we had already reinforced the Cal Barn. Apparently two trees had fallen on it, but no damage was incurred.

 Don't forget the upcoming Al Smith Day on April 9.

We will be getting everything ready on the workdays before the event, March 11/12 and April 8. We have a lot of cleanup to do so any help will be greatly appreciated. An invitation to the event is



## PUBLICITY AND EVENT COORDINATION

Mary Ann Carnegie

### Calendar of events

Saturday	March	11	Workday
Sunday	March	12	Executive Board meeting/ Workday
Saturday	April	08	Workday in preparation for Sunday's run
Sunday	April	09	Al Smith's Day/Run General Meeting to vote on Bylaw revision.
Saturday	May	13	Workday
Saturday	May	27	Workday
Saturday	June	10	Workday

Depending on the weather, and projects that we may undertake, we will hopefully start having our two work weekends a month beginning in May/June. That means the second and fourth Saturday/Sunday of each month. We will keep you posted. However, if any of you want to contribute time other than on the work weekends you are more than welcome to come when it best fits your schedule. Just be sure to let the Director, Ed Carnegie know that you will be on the premises.

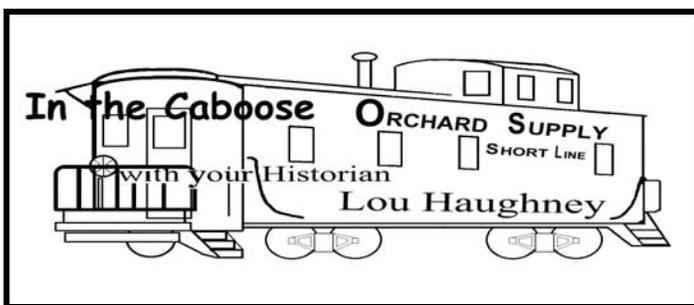
April is not that far around the corner and our "Opening" railroad event of the year will be Al Smith Day. Mark your calendar for April 9--Sunday. There will be lots of sprucing up pre-preparations to do the day before at our scheduled workday. At the March workday we will be taking sign-ups for various duties that will need to be accomplished to make the event successful. If you prefer to choose what you want to volunteer for be at the March workday to sign up specifically for the task, otherwise you may get assigned to help out on something else.

REMINDER: Please return your RSVP form for the Al Smith Day as it helps us to better plan on ordering food, etc.

## BYLAWS

Have you read over the proposed by-law changes? Have questions or concerns? Call Fitz to discuss or have them clarified. All Swanton Pacific members will be voting on the proposed by-law changes on Al Smith Day. Be an informed voter, after all it is your society.

If you did not receive a copy of the proposed by-law changes, please contact Fitz, the President, and



### The MacDermot's in West Oakland: 1880's and 1890's

Information about the MacDermot family and their mansion in the late 1800's was found by Bob Parkinson in an unexpected report prepared for Caltrans in regards to the replacement of the I-880 Cypress Freeway that. This report, entitled West Oakland: A Place to Start From, Volume I: Historical Archaeology, was prepared by the Anthropological Studies Center at Sonoma State University.

The report was required to determine the historical and potential archaeological value of the neighborhoods in West Oakland through which a new I-880 Cypress Freeway would be located to replace the one destroyed in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

The MacDermot estate occupied the block bounded by Seventh and Eighth Streets and between Center and Cypress (now Mandela Parkway) Streets. The grounds and the house have been gone over 50 years. Why are they included in an archaeological history of West Oakland? They are described "because of the enduring presence of this elaborate estate in West Oakland" and because "perhaps the wealthiest capitalist in West Oakland was millionaire Charles F. MacDermott (sic), who died in November 1898". The report reprints the Oakland Enquirer obituary. (See the SPRS Newsletter issue of May 1999)

The following material is taken verbatim or rewritten from the section on the residents of West Oakland one hundred years ago; that section was written by Nancy Leigh Olmstead.

"The Oakland Times gave a detailed description of this mansion and grounds in 1878.

The place has a half mile or more of walk and drive ... which may be described as having an avenue running from the house towards each corner. ... The main lawn faces Eighth street ... separated by a low hedge, trimmed with the appearance of sentry boxes at regular distances. ... The lawn has for a center piece, a fountain of white marble, composed of several basins with the water falling from the smallest above to the larger below... different portions sustained by appropriate water animals of the purest white marble. ... One may look in vain for any plan to produce a striking view from any street, all efforts in this direction being intended for the benefit of the residents, rather than the public at large. All walks and drives are meandering in their lines, wandering from one object to another, and so arranged as to indicate something beyond and just out of view. ... High lattice work is covered with climbing roses and vines, which separates the poultry yard from the stables, and offices from the lawns...The avenue to the south disappears in a cluster of oaks and a grove of pines, and further on a pepperwood tree. ... Avenues are designed with curves to permit the easy turning of carriages, and are generally bordered with flowers. ... Occasionally a young Alderney cow...may be seen grazing. ... In the stable is a young Hambletonian mare of great promise.

The house which is about 36 feet square [either an error or a reference to the central section of the house], two stories in height with wings and extensions and verandas gives no indications by its exterior of the wealth, luxury and taste displayed in the interior. The rooms are beautifully frescoed in oil colors, and have elegant French furniture. The windows all have elegant silk hangings with rich curtains to match. In the parlor may be seen a Watteau painting of great value...bric a brac from the Paris Exposition. ... In another room a pair of screens, Chinese work, embroidered on white silk, birds, nearly a hundred in number flying about and at rest among flowers. ... In this room and in all rooms are elegant

clocks. Mr. McDermott (sic) seems determined that the passing of time shall be pleasantly marked. [Oakland Times, August 10, 1878]

The West Oakland... account continues:

"For some time, the income from San Francisco real-estate investments allowed Louis "Mac" McDermott (the son of Charles McDermott) to devote himself to crafting scale model railroad equipment in his own machine shops, hidden among the luxuriant vegetation of the mature gardens of his estate. The miniature trains received wide publicity during the 1915 Panama Pacific Exposition, where they carried passengers around the amusement zone (sic)."

"It was during the depression of the 1930s that Vernon Sappers and his father visited Louis McDermott. By then, there was no servant to greet visitors, and the cultivated arbors of the 1870s had become densely overgrown:

We would go down to visit the old McDermott place on Sunday morning. We couldn't get in. We would toss a rock against the side of the house and he would let us in. He would lead us down a secret passage, all overgrown--to me it was like the jungles of Africa. Lots of vines. Ivy. We always went to the machine shop. Mac had a wonderful library out in the barn--all those beautiful books on mechanics. He was a gifted machinist. He built large-scale model trains, big enough for adults to ride on. They were absolutely perfect--real works of machine art. He made his own trucks. My dad helped him build the passenger coaches.

He lived to make his trains. They never seemed to pay any attention to their declining income. Or know what to do about it. So in time they were really poor. Finally, they became paupers and were taken in to live by a man they had lent money to and befriended in the past. They moved into his big estate down near Los Gatos. All those trains went with them [Sappers/Olmstead interview, April 20, 1993].

The McDermott house and its gardens survived until 1942, when the Federal Housing Authority bulldozed the historic estate to build temporary barracks for war workers."

[End of excerpts from the text in West Oakland... about the MacDermot mansion.]

Three photographs from the "Collection of Vernon J. Sappers" are included in the report. Vernon J. Sappers was a member of a long-time Oakland family. He knew the history of Oakland and its residents. He had collected a large number of valuable and rare photographs about Oakland, the East Bay, the railroads of the area, etc.

The photograph, captioned "The MacDermot Estate in the 1880s", shows the front of the MacDermot house with a small part of the garden in the foreground. Louis MacDermot and his sister Florence, together with a large dog at their feet, are standing in a walkway in front of a corner of the house. They appear to be of school age, about ten and eight years old, more or less.

The U.S. Census records indicate that Louis was born in 1878 and Florence two years later. The other two photographs

are interior views of the front and the rear parlors. The front parlor was the formal one; the rear parlor was the family room. Both were furnished and decorated in the crowded Victorian manner of that era with Oriental, Parisian, and a few American furnishings. Shelves, tables, and all flat surfaces were densely covered with hand-painted plates, photographs, odds and ends, etc.

The lengthy captions under the photographs include two short but informative quotations from a local publication called the West of Market Boy's Journal.

"The MacDermot children had two governesses. Two highly cultured and refined spinsters who hailed from England..." (Dr. Ed Anthony, June 1941). [The Census records of 1880 and 1900 list two sisters, Annie and Maggie Bone, natives of England, as residents of the household.]

"Remember those grand blow-outs at the McDermott house." [Unfortunately, that comment was not explained further. It suggests that the MacDermot home was a popular site of social events in Oakland around the turn of the century.]

This account of the MacDermot family and estate has provided more valuable information about Louis MacDermot. The photographs are especially useful, particularly that of Louis and Florence as children. The report tells us about the fate of the house and grounds, that the mansion was torn down in 1942, information for which we have been searching.

Newspaper accounts in late November 1941 tell about MacDermot's moving all the Overfair Railroad equipment to the Oakland Zoo at that time; but, they do not mention the pending demise of the house. Our SPRS archives contain photographs of draymen loading the locomotives onto their trucks from the "back yard" of the estate. Also, we have a photograph showing a large "For Sale" sign at a corner of the grounds. Was the property taken over by the County for lack of tax payments? Had Louis MacDermot become aware earlier that he was going to lose his family home and grounds? If so, maybe that is why he arranged to move to the Oakland Zoo. So, the next question is: Where did he live during the time, 1941-1943, when he was running the #1913 train at the Oakland Zoo?

Sappers makes a puzzling comment about MacDermot's last years. "Finally they became paupers and were taken in by a man they lent money to and befriended in the past..." That "man" was Billy Jones, an engineer on the Southern Pacific "Daylight" express train and the owner of his own miniature railroad, the Wildcat Railroad. The intriguing statement is that MacDermot had loaned money to Jones in the past.

Does anyone of the early Jones/Wildcat RR era know of Jones' borrowing money from MacDermot? Or, could it have been the opposite, that Jones lent money to MacDermot in the latter's last years. Certainly, Billy Jones and others of the SP/Wildcat group, particularly, Charlie Hoyle, did take care of Louis MacDermot from 1943 until his death in 1948.

Another puzzling part of Sapper's account is his changing from the use of "he" to "they" during the interview when he, Sappers, is referring to Louis MacDermot.

For example, "He lived to make his trains. They never seemed to pay any attention to their declining income...." Was Sappers referring to Louis and his wife Hortense? As I have stated in earlier articles, very little is known about his wife

other than her name. I have not seen any reference to Hortense's being with Louis when the latter moved, or was moved, to Los Gatos.

All in all, this account in West Oakland... has significantly increased our knowledge of the MacDermot family. The photographs, in particular, give insights into the MacDermot family of 100 years ago!

#### Acknowledgments:

Bob Parkinson, SPRS member in Berkeley, found the report when he was researching information in the Oakland Public Library. William Strum, Director of the Oakland History Room, helped Bob to find this and other old accounts of the MacDermot's.

Mary Praetzellis, Editor of West Oakland... and Operations Manager of the Anthropological Studies Center at Sonoma State University, graciously provided us with a copy of the report and with information about the source of the photographs.

We are indebted to Nancy Leigh Olmstead for the valuable information in her chapter on the history of West Oakland. Her research and writing has answered many of our questions.

The large collection of photographs gathered by the late Vernon J. Sappers are now in the archives of the Bay Area Electric Railroad Society at Rio Vista, California. Ted Miles, a member of the Board of Directors, has kindly granted us permission to reproduce those photographs pertaining to the MacDermot's.

## NEW MEMBERS

New memberships received last month:

Carl Becker	Felton
Carl Halbach	Palo Alto
Robert Poole	Sherman Oaks
Richard Toulson	Los Altos

On behalf of the entire organization we welcome you into our "train family" and we certainly look forward to seeing you at some of our next events. Many of our members may not recognize you right away so please introduce yourself so that we can get to better know you

## Down Behind the Railway

With your president, air monkey, and carbarnist;

Reynold 'Fitz' FitzPatrick

RGBFitz@aol.com

Voice: 650.737.9584

Fax: 650.737.9583

### Al Smith Day celebration, General Meeting and Bylaws

I know you have all read the proposed bylaw changes. I've received a comment from Bill Floyd who pointed out that State non-discrimination clauses now include sexual orientation and, as we are de facto a State organization, we should be in conformity with those clauses. To that end the revision will include in Article IV., Section E., Discrimination, the phrase "sexual orientation"

Next month we will send out yet another copy of the proposed bylaw revision for your reading pleasure and procedures for the special General Meeting. (I've also posted it at <http://members.aol.com/swantoon/bylaw2000.html>) You may be asking why we're having the balloting on Al Smith Day? It is probably the only day when we can have a quorum of the membership and so we hope to make the meeting short and sweet, so as not to detract from the celebration and still accomplish these necessary revisions. Current members, when you check in on Al Smith Day be sure to pick up your ballot.

## Champions wanted!

No, not the dragon slaying type. Dragons are an endangered species and are handy to have around in cold weather. We need you to take on a project, such as the restoration of the Santa Fe Caboose or the maintenance of the Overfair style railcars - the woodwork in particular, or one of the other needful things. You could be a star! and get your name in the newsletter. Cosmo DiFrancesco has taken on the inspection and maintenance records of the railcars (see, there's a star already) and has noted several cars that need cosmetic work. We'll even give you a title - Railcar Cosmetologist. The pay is the same, whatever you can afford to donate.

I look forward to seeing you next workday, Saturday, March 11th.

Fitz

Safety Simon Says: **Don't learn safety by accident!**

# Ride the Swanton Pacific Railroad

# All Aboard!

For the **Seventh Annual**

# Al Smith

# Day

Enjoy a fun-filled Sunday to remember and honor our friend

# Sunday, April 9, 2000

Train Rides	10:00-12:00
BBQ Lunch/comments	12:00- 2:00
Ranch Tour/Dog Demonstration	1:30- 4:00
More Train Rides	1:00- 4:00

Hear an update on Swanton Ranch activities & tour the Ranch, or see a sheep dog demonstration  
A casual Western style meal will be served/soft drink provided.

**Adults \$12.00**

To cover the cost of the BBQ and train rides

**Children \$6.00**  
8 & younger.

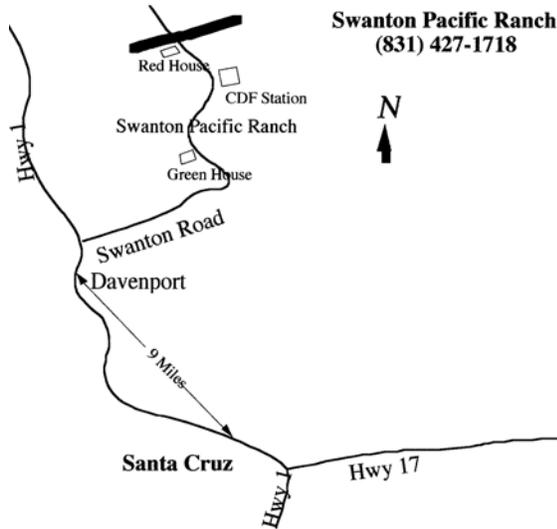
## RSVP by April 2, 2000:

To: E. J. Carnegie  
BioRes & Ag Engineering Dept. Cal Poly  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407 or Phone in at: (805) 995-3659

Please return this form, with pertinent information, and your check made payable to:  
**Swanton Pacific Railroad      i      (SPRR)**

=====  
=====  
=====  
=====  
===== Detach and return information below with check

From: Name(s)  
Indicate  
(a) = adult  
(c) = child =  
8 yrs. & younger



**Redhouse Reservations**

The Ranch Director has been working with the Railroad to ensure that we have some space available at the Redhouse for our workdays. However, I do need to know at least one week in advance whether room reservations are needed or not. That way I can better coordinate with Wally Mark to make sure that things move smoothly. If you do not call in to reserve a room you may not have a place to stay.

## Have you sent in your 2000 gift?

Dear Member:

If you have not yet made your membership contribution for this year we hope that this is an oversight as we would hate to lose a good member.

Of particular importance this year is the *General Meeting on Al Smith Day, Sunday, April 9, 2000* where we will vote to accept the proposed revision to our bylaws. Only active members will be able to participate and cast a ballot. If you have not done so, please return the form below with your gift before the end of March so you will be included on our roster of active members.

### MEMBERSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

2000



N a m e :

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse/Partner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

C h i l d r e n n a m e s & a g e s :

Home Ph: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ FAX: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Business/Other Ph: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Page: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

E - m a i l :

*I wish to support The Swanton Pacific Railroad Society with a gift of \$25. or more*

Gandy Dancer: \$ 25./year \_\_\_ Inspector: \$ 500./year \_\_\_ Station Master: \$ 5,000./year \_\_\_

Attendant: \$100./year \_\_\_ Conductor: \$1,000./year \_\_\_ Engineer's Club: \$10,000./year \_\_\_

New Application: \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal Application: \_\_\_\_\_ My 2000 gift is \$ \_\_\_\_\_

In addition, as time permits, I would like to assist as a volunteer and I have checked areas of expertise or interest in which I would like to be of help.

- |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Barbecue & Food Service/Event Days  | <input type="checkbox"/> Food Service /Work Weekend  | <input type="checkbox"/> Docent/Event Days                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archives & library Management   | <input type="checkbox"/> Concessions/ Event Days     | <input type="checkbox"/> Membership Services                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter  | <input type="checkbox"/> Car Repairs and Maintenance | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Repair & Maintenance             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gardening & Grounds   | <input type="checkbox"/> Track Maintenance           | <input type="checkbox"/> Train Crews/Training & Educational Programs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure Improvements & Maintenance; (i.e. painting, carpentry, etc.) |  |  |

Shop Skills (Machinists, welders, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*We sincerely thank you! Your gift may be deductible for income tax purposes.*