

SWANTON PACIFIC RAILROAD SOCIETY

Number 126

Cal Poly

December 2003

ON TRACK with your Director

Ed Carnegie:

Hope that all of you had a fulfilling turkey day and were able to spend it with family and friends. Now that autumn is upon and old man winter is soon to follow the cold weather has certainly moved into Swanton. With temperatures dipping into the low 30's with an occasional frost it sure makes the pot bellied stoves a warm welcome. The rainy season isn't officially here yet, but did make a big splash during our work day when working on the septic system.

By the way, the county decided that we needed a new septic system before allowing any further work on the premises. Sooo, Fitz, Andy, Richard Mehr, Pete, and I spent five days in the trenches. We planted 120 tons of rock for a new leach field, set a new septic tank, and we should have a new septic tank to last for another fifty years! Now that this project is completed, we can now move ahead to work on removing the red tag on the Cal Barn, and other areas. This will then allow us to complete various other projects in 2004.

With the year drawing to a close, and only one more work weekend left, before our gala New Year's Eve celebration, I would like to thank all of you for your dedication and involvement in the Swanton Pacific Railroad. Your involvement is greatly appreciated throughout the year by many, for often times I have received numerous complements either via emails, correspondence, or through general conversations from administrators, and friends of the University. I am always being told how good the facilities look, how it is always being improved, how welcomed they feel, and for

those who knew Al, how proud he would be to see his railroad dreams being fulfilled.

It is very gratifying that so many members are taking on projects and working on them at their own pace. We are reaching a broader segment of railroad enthusiasts from teens to retirees. Our organization has matured like a well arranged symphony and it is so gratifying to feel like a "conductor", as I wish you a Merry Christmas.

OBSERVATION CAR

In the Roundhouse

with Randy Jones

November was another very productive month at Swanton. Bob Wilkinson got some help from Sacramento volunteer Olin Anderson and his friend from Boston, no less, prepping and painting the 1913's frame. Together they finished the job! Bob then proceeded to remove the front cylinder and valve heads for inspection. I am generally pleased with the condition of the bores, being fairly well coated with cylinder oil, but I am disappointed to find the beginnings of pitting in the bottom of the valve cages. These are the bushings which contain the actual ports that the valves pass over, directing the steam to and from the main cylinders. When the valve spools and rings rest on the bridge between ports after shutdown, water can accumulate and begin rusting away the metal. If the pits get long enough, the next time the engine is operated, steam may pass by the rings from one port to the next. This can actually result in steam "cutting" further into the bushing, making the damage even worse. By the early 90's, this problem had developed on

the 1913 to the point where she exhibited severe "blowby". That is, when the throttle was opened, enough steam would "blow by" the valve rings that a loud whooshing sound would emanate from the stack, along with the wasted steam. Severn Edmonds made new valve bushings, and installed them with special tooling he designed, a couple of years before Al passed away. So the 1913 doesn't really have very many miles on these relatively new parts. We will be watching these conditions carefully when the engine goes back into service, and possibly a change of cylinder oils may be in order.

Marty Campbell has gotten a running start at the drivers, removing all the 20-some years' worth of grease, grime, and crud. He has researched a brand of 2-component urethane paint for the wheels that is certified for use in Calif. and is supposed to be "triple-extra-tough". We'll give it a try at the earliest opportunity. Frank Smith also assisted Marty in preparing the 1912 for the New Year's run.

Next up for the '13 is gettin' those wheels painted & under the frame! I've also spoken to John Greco, our boiler-maker, and he says that the engineering on the '13's boiler is his next order of business. Also this month, John supplied us with four new up-to-Code safety valves for the 1912 and 1914!

Over on the 1500, Mark Cooper, Corine Manroe, Mac Gaddis and Clinton Barr collaborated to assemble the reversing shaft. This included cleaning and polishing the links prior to assembly, prepping the shaft and taper-pin holes and keys, and then painting the shaft after assembly. Good work! Next up: more sand blastin' & paintin'!



Reversing Shaft

Not to be out-done, President Fitz and Rich Mehr began re-assembling the new ballast car after Eric and Aaron and other un-identified suspects applied a coat of paint. The 'dreadnaught' is now

back on its trucks and getting much closer to service.



Aaron and Eric painting hopper car

Andy, Pete, Ernie, and I have been 'working out' on the track a bit. We replaced the rotten ties under the frog of the passing track switch at San Vicenti Junction. Also the head ties. While we were at it, we trimmed the frog's flangeways, and drilled the mounting plates for lag screws instead of spikes. The throw bar was extended to facilitate adjusting the springs, and the switch stand re-located farther away from the rails. This was also done to the Junction switch throw. The whole section was then lifted and tamped, and we were able to provide a level section for engines to park on while waiting for in-bound trains.

As mentioned last month, Dave Izant has been busy making the prototype for our new Train Brake Valve. I've just heard from him that he's finished it, so if I can get it installed and tested, we can use it at New Years. Thanks to all of you, and to those I may have missed mentioning. Good Work!

Yours in Training, Randy

NEW SOCIETY SUPPORTERS received over the last month were as follows:

Jennifer Rubin

Santa Cruz

On behalf of the entire organization, we welcome you into our "train family" & we certainly look forward to seeing you at some of our next events. Many of our supporters may not recognize you right away so please

introduce yourselves so that we can get to better know you & vice versa.

REMINDER: BEFORE LEAVING SWANTON'S PREMISES, PLEASE, BE SURE TO FILL OUT & SIGN THE WORK LOG FOR HOURS YOU WORKED. THE WORK LOG IS IN THE MACHINE SHOP NEXT TO THE PHONE.

IMPORTANT news re: Redhouse: Right now we do not have access for overnight accommodations in the Redhouse. If you are so inclined to stay over, I suggest that you consider a tent to campout for the weekend. Please keep me informed of your plans.

UPCOMING EVENTS/PUBLICITY

Mary Ann Carnegie

Dec. 13/14 Work day/weekend
 Dec. 31 NEW YEAR'S EVE RUN
 Jan. 10/11 first workday of 2004

We have a mystery! Do you know who wrote this? We certainly don't, but it is sure a great idea.

Greetings to all:

We hope you can join us for the second annual Christmas Celebration at SPRR. Some of the activities include, but not limited to: carol's led by Mary Ann, Ed will be Santa, Marty and Randy will decorate the 1912 and the 1914, the kids will be elves in the Christmas pageant. Let Martie know if you are coming

(m.way@comcast.net

<<http://us.f805.mail.yahoo.com/ym/Compose?To=m.way@comcast.net>>) so she will know what size turkey to shoot and how many pigs Bob needs to hunt for at the wye.

We hope you and your families will join us and watch for Santa to arrive on the north bound train. Perhaps we can christen the new septic tank - how exciting- Ed will give tours!

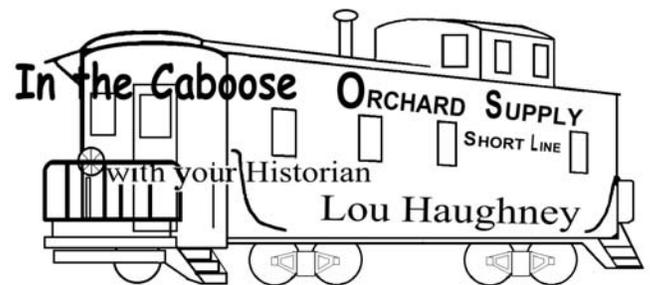
Remember Dec 13 & 14. Also the election of officers monitored by Scrooge (Fitz).

From the North Pole

Have not received **any** ideas yet for the upcoming New Year's Eve event—so if any of you have some brainstorming ideas, please be sure and let us know so that appropriate planning can take place! Your input will really be appreciated! Thanks, MAC.



The Big Dig



DECLINE OF THE MACDERMOT ESTATE

After the Panama Pacific International Exposition closed on December 4, 1915, the Overfair Railway's equipment and rolling stock was returned to the MacDermot estate in West Oakland. The locomotives were stored under sheds, but the passenger cars were placed haphazardly throughout the estate's grounds.

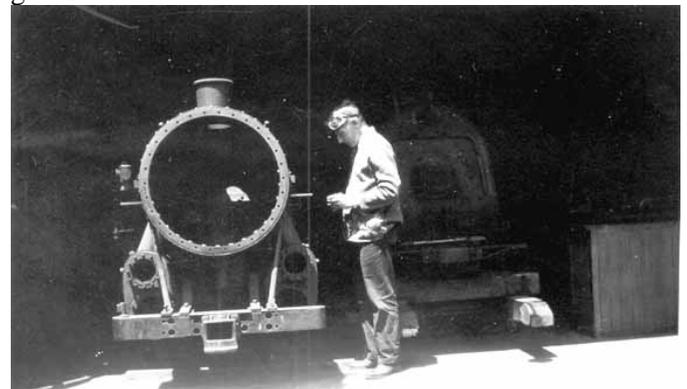


Photo 1: "MacDermot working in the shop [at the MacDermot estate] before 1940" and after the P.P.I.E. probably in the 1920's. SPRS Archive photo 1916-1940 LMM-0005 (w/cap) From the Al Smith collection

That Louis MacDermot would thereafter tinker with the engines is evidenced by revised drawings dated in 1917 and by an undated photo probably taken in the 1920's. (Photo 1) This print has the inscription on its back, "MacDermott working in shop before 1940". So, he must have been serious in maintaining the locomotives for future use, as Frederic Shaw writes in his book *Little Railways of the World*. (The spelling of his name suggests that Louis did not write that note.)

By the 1930's, however, MacDermot's inherited fortune was rapidly declining. The grounds were overgrown through neglect. And the house's exterior was deteriorating due to lack of maintenance. (Photo 2) Finally, in 1939 or 1940, he lost the family's property to the City of Oakland or the County of Alameda. The reason is not clear, whether for non-payment of taxes, for redevelopment, or for some other cause. One source says that "the old MacDermot place...remained intact until it was leveled for temporary housing for World War II". [*West Oakland - A Place to Start From...*, Anthropological studies Center, Sonoma State University Academic Foundation, Inc., 1994].



Photo 2: MacDermot grounds and mansion, view no. 5, probably in the 1930's. SPRS Archives Photo No. 1916-1940 LMM-0009 Original print and negative from the collection of Al Smith.



Photo 3: Demise of the MacDermot mansion, about 1939 or 1940. SPRS Archive Photo No. 1916-1940 LMM-0015 From the Al Smith collection, photographer is unknown.

Whatever the reason, the MacDermot property was put up for sale about 1939 or 1940. Another undated photograph shows the big sign placed at the corner of the lot with the grounds and mansion in the background. (Photo 3)

Details in the latter are obscured by the lack of contrast in the photo., but some features of the buildings are evident against the skyline. The roof-top balustrade a chimney, and large, upright cylinders left of the utility poles are noticeable. According to the source referenced above, those latter objects were probably huge water tanks for the mansion and gardens.

From an enlargement of the photograph, one can read most of the sign's announcement:

FOR SALE

THIS SPLENDID INDUSTRIAL SITE
100,000 SQ. FT. S. P. SPUR TRACK 1
BLOCK S. P. FRT. STA.
A FINE ADVERTISING LOCATION
A. AFLER

In the bottom two lines, a few letters are obscured by the corner fence post in front of the sign. One is tempted to suppose that the second last line should read, "a fine advertising site" although that attribute seems incongruous for a "a fine industrial site". Also unclear in the third line from the top is the reference to the "S. P. Spur Line". Does that refer to spur line running into the property? That seems very unlikely. Does it refer to a spur line running through a bordering street? This is more likely since the neighborhood was changing drastically its character from its being the site for luxurious estates in the 1870's to becoming commercial and industrial locations. Further, what was "one block away"? The spur line, the S. P. freight station, or both? Unfortunately, I can't make out any punctuation in the verbiage in an enlarged version of the digital image from the original 3x4 print. The location is the block in West Oakland bounded by Seventh and Eighth Streets and by Center and Cypress Streets. (The latter is now named as Mandela Parkway.) On the Seventh Street side, this block is across from the BART West Oakland Station. So, the area still has a link to railway transportation.

Certainly, that section of Oakland had been undergoing drastic changes in use and purpose. The MacDermot estate and fortune, although deteriorating rapidly, were one of the last vestiges of the neighborhood's former prestige. The time had come for Louis M. MacDermot, his wife, and the Overfair Railway to move on to a new phase of life and residence.