

SWANTON PACIFIC RAILROAD SOCIETY

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ON TRACK with your Director

Ed Carnegie:

Thanks for all the help in putting this month's newsletter together. It made it very easy. This past month we have had a lot of participation. Two very productive work weekends that were augmented by Boy Scouts visits, the Cal Poly Foundation Board, and a very well ran BAGER Short Line run. A lot of members have been busy working on special projects, such as a water tower that will allow watering the locomotives from the siding at the station. The additional watering station will allow a locomotive that needs water to clear the station. This enables the station train to load and depart the station.

Other projects included a spring fed irrigation system for the Redwood Square Grove, new brakes installed on the steel flat car, and the over-haul of the diesel engine for the small crawler tractor. An on board sound system for the passengers has been in the works for many months by Pete and Randy. This past week it was put to use during the Cal Poly Foundation Board meeting for the first time. The onboard sound system adds a new dimension to our operation. Thus allowing an ongoing discussion of project and points of interest along the track to be carried out as the train proceeds. At present, the sound system only works in a few cars, but as work continues it will be operational on all the passengers cars.

In the Roundhouse

with Randy Jones

This summer has been especially busy at the SPRR. The second June work weekend saw Matt and Eric devoting much time and elbow grease to hand cleaning the 1913's rods of rust and grime. It is a dirty, boring job, and very much appreciated! The 502 received some routine maintenance from Andy & me, consisting of belt adjustments, shift linkage repair, electrical repairs, and hand brake adjustment. For the July work weekend and Fun Run, the 1914 was put back in service so more volunteers could get some cab time. Good thing, too, because on the next-to-last run of the day, the 1912 sprang a major leak in the branch pipe. This cast iron pipe carries steam through the smoke box from the throttle and dry pipe to the cylinders. Debbie Johnson was guest engineer, with Dennis J. firing, and she was roundly teased for "breaking the engine". We were able to make our way from Folger to Cosgrove, but no further due to the loss of steam pressure and water. So the 1914 was called to the rescue, with Eric Johnson as guest engineer! More teasing ensued about Eric having to come "rescue his folks". The trip back was really something to hear, with the '14's exhaust barking sharply as she hauled possibly the heaviest train we've ever pulled up the hill. The rupture in the branch pipe was apparently caused by the casting wall being thin, which in turn seems to be the result of the core shifting in the mold during the casting process. There is a distinct ridge just inside the main flange that appears out of place, especially when compared to the 1913's branch pipe. Pete remarked that we should inquire about coverage under warranty. All of us together brainstormed the problem, and it was decided to again seek help and advise from Stan at Babbitt Bearing in San Jose. Stan's very talented welder

made a very stout repair, and I'm presently working to get the pipe installed.

This weekend also saw the first test of the emergency brake system being installed on several cars. A group of us piled into the car and coasted down the steep grade from the car barn to San Vicente Junction. We were going perhaps 10 to 12 MPH and stopped smoothly in only about two car lengths after Ed opened the conductor's switch! We were all very pleased. Pete has been devoting many extra hours to this project, and the P. A. system that shares the wiring. We tested the speakers in two cars at the second July work day, with very nice results.

Fitz, Andy, Richard, & Aaron worked at mounting the backhoe attachment to the new water car ("bomb car"). Some brackets needed adjusting to clear the coupler, but that's now done and looks real good. At the other end of the car, Andy and Richard installed the water pumps and hose reel that actually make the water car functional. This really entailed a lot of work. Geoff designed and machined the parts for the water swivel on the hose reel.

Mark Cooper and Clinton Barr came up two days ahead of the second work weekend to concentrate on the 1500. Using a pair of alignment disks I had make to support a precision rod on the cylinder center line, they worked patiently with indicators and shims to properly align the right side crosshead guides. We were surprised by how far off the original installation must have been, and we're speculating whether MacDermott may have been in a hurry to finish the loco so he could start building the railroad.

I apologize if I've forgotten to mention anyone this month. I have to echo Ed's remark from last month that so much is getting done, it's hard to remember it all. Thanks again to one and all!

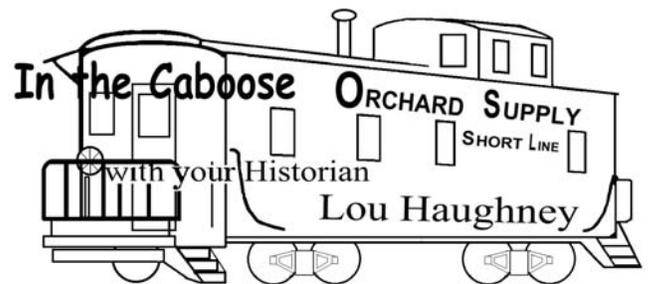
UPCOMING EVENTS/PUBLICITY

Mary Ann Carnegie

- Sept. 11 Ortiz Family Reunion-Run Day
- Sept. 12 Continuation of work weekend
- Sept. 25 Work day/get ready for Cal Poly Day

- Sept. 26 CAL POLY RUN DAY
- Oct. 3 Santa Cruz Land Trust Run

As hard as it is to believe, Autumn is soon upon us and with that comes two of our biggest events—Cal Poly Day and Santa Cruz Land Trust. For Cal Poly's Event we serve as hosts for everything so we call upon ALL our volunteers to come out and help contribute to make this day so memorable and successful for all attending. Everyone can assist with more than just one task. We will need assistance with all the usual—train crew, parking, station master, docents for our displays, food prep., cooking and serving, ticket taker, registration, setting up and then the all important task of cleaning up after the event. We will try to get slots filled as soon as possible, but if they remain vacant we will hope that when you may be called upon to assist you will step up to the plate without hesitation.



OVERFAIR LOCOMOTIVES FOR SALE!

Another turning point for the Overfair Railway is described in an *Oakland Tribune* news story of January 5, 1969. The estate of Billy Jones was offering for sale MacDermot's Pacific steam locomotives Nos. 1912 and 1913. The writer was Harre Demoro, who, like his father Ralph, was an historian of San Francisco Bay Area railroading. Demoro provides many interesting details about the Overfair Railroad's history and, particularly, about MacDermot's talents and characteristics, details not found elsewhere. The article as it appeared in the *Oakland Tribune* is reproduced below.

RAIL FAN'S DREAM TRAIN FOR SALE

By HARRE DEMORE
Oakland Tribune Staff Writer

January 5, 1969

For Sale: part of the dream of Oakland mystery man Louis M. MacDermot, with no guarantee it will bring the buyer good luck.

"Mac", who died in 1948, designed and built a one-third size steam railroad, and operated it on a 2-1/2 mile line at the 1915 San Francisco World's Fair.

Two of the steam locomotives and three cars are stored at Los Gatos. The heirs of the man who bought MacDermot's railroad about 20 years ago want to sell the items.

A few prospective buyers have inspected the equipment, said John F. Dair of San Jose, who is helping the family of the late Billy Jones dispose of the relics.

Because MacDermot was such a perfectionist the locomotives and cars were too big to easily maintain and operate, he said.

Dair, who retired last year as executive vice president of San Jose Brick and Tile Co., knew MacDermot in the 1940s when the craftsman, then in poor health, lived at Los Gatos with Jones. To Dair, interested in steam engines since he was a boy, MacDermot was a legend. He rode the trains at the 1915 fair.

"MacDermot was a perfectionist," he recalled. "He impressed me as man of good engineering skill and knowledge."

Shy and soft-spoken, MacDermot had few close friends. One person who knew him well is Ralph W. Demoro, [an] Alameda railroad historian. He visited MacDermot often in the 1930s and 1940s, and heard the story of a man's dream, and the bad luck it brought him. He, too, rode the trains in 1915.

He tells of MacDermot's dream: a railroad as efficient as the big-sized ones of his era, but small enough for use at the fair San Francisco was planning to celebrate the city's rise from the 1906 disaster and the opening of the Panama Canal.

Member of a wealthy family, MacDermot designed and financed construction of the locomotives and passenger cars.

There were five locomotives, four of which were sleek passenger models, and the other a switch engine for construction of the railroad.

The engines, one of which was never finished, were built in a workshop adjacent to the family home at Seventh and Center streets in Oakland.

"MacDermot always tried to do everything right," Demoro said. "to him it was unthinkable to use a passenger engine for construction, or to haul material around in a truck."

The 60 passenger and five freight cars were built to MacDermot's specifications by cabinet-makers who set up a production in an unused building of a cotton mill on 23rd Avenue in East Oakland.

"He thought the thing at the fair would run as efficiently as the Southern Pacific", Demoro said.

But it didn't.

Management of the fair was uncooperative, conductors stole some of the fares they collected, and when the exposition closed, MacDermot was unable to salvage rail and some other expensive materials.

The locomotives and cars were brought back to the family mansion.

MacDermot, bewildered by his painful experience at the fair, stored the equipment on the property. He became a recluse.

Intruders were "chased out," Demoro said. MacDermot had a dog to protect the privacy of the big old estate, by now beginning to deteriorate with age.

"You had to duck under the trees to get around the walk outside the garden," he said.

"There were remnants of the railroad scattered all over the property. MacDermot closed up part of the big house and he and his wife lived in the other portion. He never drank and didn't smoke, but loved candy, and always carried a bag of chocolates with him."

As an example of MacDermot's love of precision and engineering, he had an entire wall of his library covered with bound volumes of Scientific American magazine.

And so the craftsman lived in the midst of the relics of a dream, but he had one brief moment in the sun.

In 1940 it was announced one locomotive and some of the cars would be operated at Alameda Zoological gardens, today Knowland State Park. Assisted by friends, rails were spiked into place, MacDermot fixed up an engine, and one pleasant day a whistle echoed through the woods.

At about the same time, Jones, an SP locomotive engineer, bought a small engine that had been used at Venice near Los Angeles. Jones needed some rail and Dair had some available at the brickyard.

Jones and Dair became friends and soon Jones' Los Gatos prune orchard had a 1,970 - foot - long miniature railroad running around its edge. Dair became the regular engineer for Jones' "Wildcat Railroad", a position he held for 18 years.

MacDermot's health failed and Jones bought the equipment, reportedly for \$5,200, when "Mac" died.

The problem was that Jones' equipment ran on rails spaced 18 inches apart, Dair said. MacDermot, always the perfectionist, built his trains for rails 19 inches apart - exactly one-third the size of a real railroad.

"Jones wanted to keep the MacDermot collection intact," Dair said, and tried to run one of the engines, without success, by re-spacing the rails. But the curves on Jones' little line were too sharp, and the big engines, designed for a perfect railroad, remained in a big shed.

Steam buffs came quietly to look at the unbelievable handiwork of Louis M. MacDermot.

Jones' railroad never earned a profit. It was operated strictly for the enjoyment of the children of Los Gatos, Dair said. A non-profit organization recently bought it and will install the tracks and engine in a city park.

Three of the MacDermot engines were sold about eight years ago to a southern California firm, but were never used.

One of the pair remaining at Los Gatos is like new. It hasn't operated since the "Overfair Railroad shut down at the closure of the fair in 1915.

How much does a portion of MacDermot's dream cost these days?

The equipment and fair facilities cost about \$250,000 in 1915. Dair leaned against one of the engines and petted Jones' gray cat, "Tommy."

"We're holding both locomotives for \$25,000 for the pair," he said. Three of the old "Overfair" cars are still available, at \$500 each.

The locomotives stand about five feet high. "Tommy" jumped onto the engine boiler and Dair looked at the steamer and frowned. "There's never been a place large enough to accommodate them, he remarked.

No place big enough to hold Louis M. MacDermot's dream.

Update for this report.

This article was reprinted in the May 1969 edition of *The Western Railroader*, vol. 35, No. 5, Issue No. 351 with an update provided by Demoro. Four paragraphs inserted at the start announce that a buyer had been found. The first portion of the article now read:

"For Sale: part of the dream of Oakland mystery man Louis M. MacDermot, with no guarantee it will bring the buyer good luck.

Louis M. MacDermot's dream may come true after all, because part of the miniature steam railroad built more than 50 years ago by the Oakland craftsman has been sold to a Piedmont real estate appraiser.

Robert C. Maxfield has bought two locomotives and three cars from the estate of Los Gatos railroader William Jones.

He learned the locomotives were for sale from a story in the Jan. 5 *Oakland Tribune*, and immediately went to see the equipment and negotiate a purchase.

"I wanted to keep them in the area," Maxfield said. "There are several possibilities for sites to run the equipment in the Bay Area."

(Original article continues.)

The concept of "MacDermot's dream" is a continual aspect of the *Oakland Tribune's* stories about MacDermot and the Overfair Railway. The next episode in the *Tribune's* stories of MacDermot's (and Oakland's) "dream railroad" will be featured in a near future issue.

SPRS Newsletter No. 57, September 1997, contains a lengthy account of the Maxfield/Calistoga era.

Thanks to SRS member Hart Fairclough and to Brad La Rose of the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum for sending pertinent copies of *The Western Railroader*.