

## SWANTON PACIFIC RAILROAD SOCIETY

Number 139

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Feb. 2005

### ON TRACK with your Director

Ed Carnegie:

For those of you who may not have heard, George Dela Torr , care-taker, and long time friend of Swanton and the railroad, passed away this month. A service was held for him on Sunday, Jan. 23, attended by approximately 75 of his relatives, friends, and neighbors. George will be duly missed, as he always welcomed us and visitors to the railroad. Those of us who attended felt good in celebrating George's life, and wishing him well on his continuing journey. We all know he is now where he has always wanted to be.

January started off with rains, and our first weekend was no different with winds and rains. However, it provided a nice opportunity to take care of some of the loose ends and to stay inside and dry. Between showers, Pete, Dennis, & Frank extended the station platform for handicap loading, along with a proper entrance to the platform next to the semi-fors. While bob, Fitz, Richard, Edski and I got the Chinese crawler running, off the trailer, and made fairly good progress. Lou, Bill, Martha and Mary Ann diligently worked on the grounds, roses, and shrubs, while Andy worked on the sprinkler system. Even though it was a relative restful weekend, eighteen volunteers weathered the elements to participate in our various activities.

As a side-car. I ran across an interesting tidbit of history. A standard locomotive whistle—2 longs, a short and a long in Morse code is the letter "Q". Supposedly this warning call would say, "Here comes the Queen of the rail!" And, at first, was primarily used by large steam locomotives. Just thought this was interesting.

Hope to see you in the coming work weekends, if the creek doesn't rise, and we're able to, we'll work on the track getting ready for Al Smith Day.

### Down Behind the Railway

With your President, air monkey, & carbarnist.

Reynold 'Fitz' FitzPatrick

RGBFitz@aol.com 650.737.9584

My Fellow Swantoons:

Starting with the historical tidbits; February is the last month of the old Roman calendar, a 'winter' month added about 2700 years ago. Before then winter didn't deserve a month so the Romans just had a party until the days became long enough to be able to do useful work. All good things come to an end they say.

I don't have a Roman bone in my body whereas my darlin' bride has 'a root in the boot', so I pay attention. For those of the Celtic persuasion it's Feabhra, the first of which is dedicated to Brigid, Saint Brigid in later days, the goddess of smithcraft – an appropriate time for us.

A hundred years ago Watsonville dedicated a Carnegie library.

Carnegie funding of \$10,000 was promised in April, 1903, and was increased to \$12,000 in 1904. The sum of \$2,000 was raised from citizens for the purchase of a lot. The architect, William H. Weeks of Watsonville, designed the building in the Classical Revival style. Granite Rock Company bid \$11,290 to construct the building. The cornerstone was laid on February 11, 1905, and the building was completed October 12, 1905. This note is of interest to locals and us, especially the Granite Rock Company.

And looking forward; **Al Smith Day April 10<sup>th</sup>**. That's only three workdays away!

We have the train crews, (more on this later), but we need your participation helping with parking

control, tours, crowd control, setup and cleanup. It's almost like the circus coming to town, set up the show, exhibition, and knock it down. And all the clowns have double duty. OK I'm the clown, you're the valued volunteer. We, meaning you, need your help. Many hands, lighter work. Come on over, we have fun while serving.

What can I say to you to get you to join in becoming a conductor, fireman, and engineer? These steaming ladies are a beautiful sight, but without a train crew they may as well set static in a barn. It's their traversing the right-of-way, the motion of the valve gear, their very breath of steam and smoke that gives life to iron wrought by man. That life doesn't exist without your hand on the wheel. So tell me – what do you need to become an active participant?

As always we have the ongoing projects and maintenance. Come over and join the Swanton Fitness and Exercise club. I'm looking forward to seeing you.

Fitz



The Reverend, George's Sister, and Susan leading singing

**UPCOMING EVENTS/PUBLICITY**

Mary Ann Carnegie

- Feb. 12/13 Work weekend
- Mar. 12/13 Work weekend
- April 9/10 work day/Al Smith Day

The upcoming months will see everyone busily working away to get all in order to showcase the railroad and grounds for Al Smith Day, Sunday,

April 10. Be thinking of what all you may want to help out with to make the event successful. A list will be circulating for sign-ups. We will also be trying different displays to promote what we do. If any of you have names of people you would like to invite to Al Smith Day, please be sure to get that pertinent information to me ASAP. Invites will be going to the printers in the next few weeks.

As mentioned last month, plans for 2005 are to hopefully reduce the cooking/dinner load on the constant few that cook, and to give any one of the rest of you the opportunity to express your gourmet delights. The sign-up sheet, can be found in the machine shop, by the telephone. Be sure to check it out, and more importantly pick a Saturday night that fits your schedule best.

Reservations for wanting to stay overnight for the work weekends should be called or emailed in ASAP. Facilities are limited & we want to make sure we can accommodate everyone. Call (805) 995-3659 or email [ecarnegi@calpoly.edu](mailto:ecarnegi@calpoly.edu) .



The station at the McNab Grove being set

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

Brooks Lane

Seaside

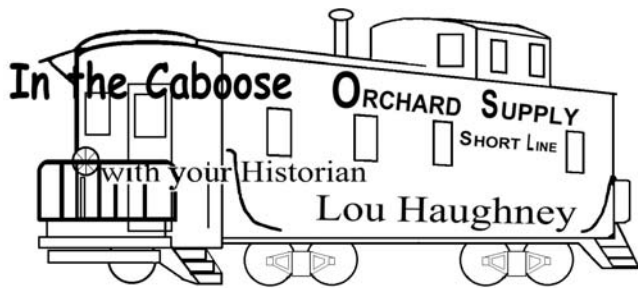
On behalf of the entire organization, we welcome each of you into our "train family" & we certainly look forward to seeing you at some of our next events. Many of our supporters may not recognize you right away so please introduce yourselves so that we can get to better know you & vice versa. Also be sure to introduce yourself to both Pete McFall, Secretary to obtain your membership book

with bylaws, etc. & then to Bob Wilkinson so that he can make up your very own "gold", laminated nametag with all pertinent information.



Finishing Station platform

Note: more photos will be available on the WEB



### THE SAGA OF THE OVERFAIR RAILWAY'S RETURN TO OAKLAND - PART 3

Recent articles told how the *Oakland Tribune* followed the purchase of two Overfair Railway locomotives by Robert C. Maxfield in early 1969. A few years passed before the *Tribune* reported on the next step in Maxfield's revival of the steam locomotives. Once again, Harre Demoro, the *Tribune's* transportation writer and railroad historian, wrote in glowing and prideful terms of Maxfield's plans. As usual, Demoro included in his article insights into Louis MacDermot's personality and life. His article is reprinted below.



*Oakland Tribune* Sun., June 2, 1974, page 49

### Locomotive Fan's Ghost Smiling? Favorite Is Being Restored

By Harre Demoro  
Tribune Staff Writer

If there are ghosts, then the spirit of Louis M. MacDermot must be smiling.

His favorite steam locomotive, the 7-1/2 ton No. 1913, is being gently restored in a West Oakland warehouse by machinists who also could be described as artisans.

The locomotive's owner, Robert C. Maxfield, has never heard the sharp bark of her exhaust. He can only imagine the sound of the 1913's shrill steam whistle.

But he will know soon because the engine not only will look as good as the day it first steamed through the 1915 World's Fair in San Francisco, it will run as if it was brand new.

Maxfield, a Piedmont real estate appraiser, bought the 1913 and a mate, probably No. 1912, in 1969 from the estate of William Jones, a Los Gatos train buff. Jones had rescued the two engines as well as three others from the scrap pile after their builder, MacDermot, died in 1978.

There is a myth about MacDermot and his stable of beautiful locomotives. It holds that the steamers brought "Mac" bad luck and they will forever be a jinx to whomever owns them.

Maxfield plans to break that jinx. It does seem apparent ill luck still haunts the plans MacDermot first dreamed when he built a complete railroad, one-third actual size, for the 1915 fair.

Although restoration of both locomotives is assured Maxfield still doesn't know where they can be run. He has several ideas and even has dreamed of running them from Fisherman's Wharf to the old fort under the Golden Gate Bridge.

But so far, success has eluded his plans, just as it did MacDermot's.

The shy and soft-spoken MacDermot came from a wealthy family and lived in a mansion at Seventh and Cypress streets in West Oakland.

He was an expert at mechanical details. He was a railroad enthusiast.

After hearing of plans to celebrate the completion of the Panama Canal by staging a gala exposition in San Francisco, MacDermot decided to build a miniature railroad. It would carry fairgoers through the grounds of the exposition, located generally in what today is the Marina Green.

Five locomotives were built in a machine shop adjacent to the West Oakland home. They were almost perfect in all details, in fact probably too perfect, observed Steven Rives, a machinist who is rebuilding the 1913.

"It's too big. It's impractical", Rives said, pointing at the engine which, with tender, is 28 feet long.

"It is just such a big engine. It takes so much space to turn it around. It is too big for park use", he said.

But he said the 1913 and its mates were "well built. There's sure fine workmanship in there," Rives said, peering into the open smoke box. "It follows standard practice. It is actually true scale."

The 1913 was MacDermot's favorite and that is why it is being restored first.

"It's my favorite, too," Maxfield said.

Four locomotives did run at the fair, but MacDermot's lack of business skills hurt him. He lost money and the engines and cars were returned to the West Oakland mansion.

They sat there, the engines under cover, the passenger cars slowly rotting, under trees and in weedy areas that once were nicely landscaped. The garden became so overgrown visitors had to duck under tree limbs.

There weren't many visitors, anyway, because MacDermot wouldn't answer the door. Only a few close friends had access and they alerted the recluse by throwing a rock against an upper window.

"Mac" did get the 1913 back into running condition in 1941 and ran it, assisted by devoted steam locomotive fans, over a hastily-built line in the Alameda Zoological Gardens, today Knowland Park.

Maxfield says the 1913 will be painted green and have copper trim, just like it did in 1915.

He said he learned the engines were for sale from a Tribune story, and immediately went to Los Gatos to see the equipment. "Once I looked through the window of the shed there, I couldn't believe a model of that size existed," he said. "The locomotives were beautiful. They were a bit of history to be preserved."

The 1913 should be ready for both steam and display in August when the National Railway Historical Society holds its annual convention in San Francisco.

The other MacDermot engines were sold to a Los Angeles locomotive enthusiast and there is no place for them to run, either.

But perhaps soon, Maxfield hopes, the railroad of MacDermot's dreams can be built and the jinx finally will be broken.

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Comments by LCH: Demoro's account of MacDermot's later years in Oakland, "there weren't many friends...only a few close friends" [of MacDermot] led to a conversation with SPRS member Doug Richter. Doug says that MacDermot's "break through into the outer world" [from his isolation during the 1930's] was due to his forming a friendship with Grahame Hardy, owner of a well known bookstore in Oakland. Hardy, together with Clement Fisher Jr., and Ralph Demoro (father of Harre Demoro), started the California-Nevada Historical Railroad Society. In the late 1930's, Hardy persuaded MacDermot to allow the CNHRS members to make an informal visit to the MacDermot estate to inspect the Overfair Railway locomotives and cars. There may have been one or two more such informal visits by dedicated railroading enthusiasts, as Doug Richter and Bob Parkinson recall having been at the MacDermot mansion.