

## SWANTON PACIFIC RAILROAD SOCIETY

Number 171

Cal Poly

Jan. 2008

### ON TRACK with your Director

Ed Carnegie:

It is hard to believe that 2007 has come and gone and that SPRR was blessed with NO catastrophes, washouts, or landslides. It will however, be noted as a year of steady positive progress. Progress in all SPRR activities/projects are accounted for in the over 6,000 volunteer hours contributed by approximately 40 of our active volunteers, of which the organization still attracts an average of about 150 volunteers per year. I'm sure we probably have more hours contributed and perhaps even more active volunteers, but data is based on what volunteers officially sign-in on the sign-up sheets each month. Just a subtle reminder to all of you on the importance of those sign-in sheets I so often bring to everyone's attention to be sure to sign.

#### **In the coming year:**

We are hoping to clear out all the red-tag issues with the County of Santa Cruz. Two of the major items to complete are to install a shear roof on the station for seismic loading, and to rebuild the car-barn storage area in order to meet current building codes.

Since the LED conversion to the signal lamps have worked out so well, we are planning next to develop a block detection system similar to that used in traffic light signals. So, if any of our readers have any expertise in this area, please let us know. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated. Thus far we have conducted an experiment, using Edski's tuned, coiled metal detector and recorded every axle that went over the detector. This indicates that the technology will work, we just need to put it together.

We are hoping to leave no Swantoons—new or returning behind in 2008. Your contributions are greatly appreciated, and can be forwarded anytime. **NOTE:** Please fill out & sign your contribution form [located on coversheet of the newsletter], this guarantees that your donations get credited to the proper accounts. ALSO, please indicate your current employer—or one from whom you retired in case they are participating in a matching fund program.

As a goal of this editor—I am hoping to have a broader contribution base to our newsletter and thus would like to see articles from other officers, committee chairs, or volunteers amplifying the activities and points of interest of SPRR. This editor is NOT a good reporter and gets too involved in a single project and thus is not roving enough to provide good information for those many other inquiring minds.

I am looking forward to fun times, successful events, our annual family camp week, and just a good time shared with and by all.

### Down Behind the Railway

With your President, air monkey, & car-barnist.

Reynold 'Fitz' FitzPatrick

RGBFitz@aol.com 650.737.9584

My Fellow Swantoons:

Not quite finished with the holidays? My friend, Mr. Tysowski, notes that Christmas is celebrated January 7<sup>th</sup> in the Ukraine with Dim Moroz in the role of Saint Nick.

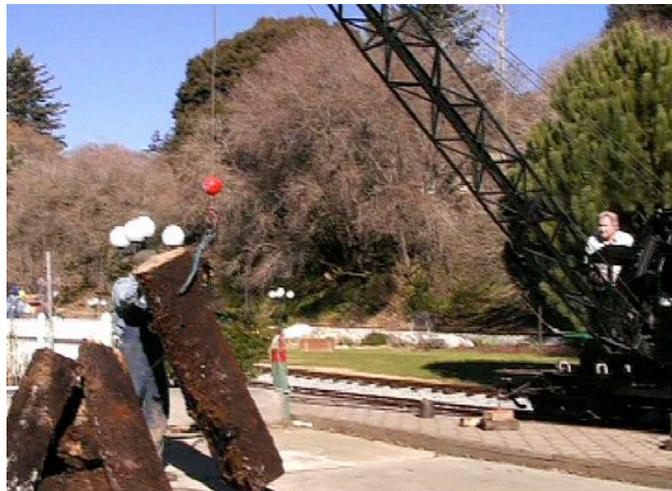
Some old projects on the list with lots of inside work, it is winter after all:

-  EdSki's Keystone car sides to be installed.
-  Keystone truck brake foundation.

- 🚂 Flat cars to have air brake angle cocks raised.
  - 🚂 Some ties need replacement.
  - 🚂 Improve hillside clearance near Windy Point.
  - 🚂 Permanently mount speakers in BBQ area.
  - 🚂 Repair the sink at the BBQ.
  - 🚂 Replace the BBQ grills.
  - 🚂 Design & build signal block detector system.
- Hope to see you next workday. Fitz



Wood gathering crew using crane to load logs



Placing logs for the News Years Eve bonfire

**UPCOMING EVENTS/PUBLICITY**

Mary Ann Carnegie

- Jan. 12/13 work week end
- Feb. 09/10 work weekend
- Mar. 08/09 work weekend

So time marched on and we welcomed 2008 with an enjoyable, scrumptious, and very well attended potluck. It appeared that all present had a grand time, left full and with few leftovers from an

estimated dinner crowd of approx 65-80. Many thanks to all that contributed in so many ways. The festivities then shifted down to the fire pit area where Ken McCrary continued to serve up his infamous hot mulled cider—a 29 year old tradition, and one in which the recipe has certainly been mastered! The bonfire, along with the hot cider, kept everyone warm and was a great gathering spot for neighbors and friends to visit before catching one of the several train rides offered throughout the evening.



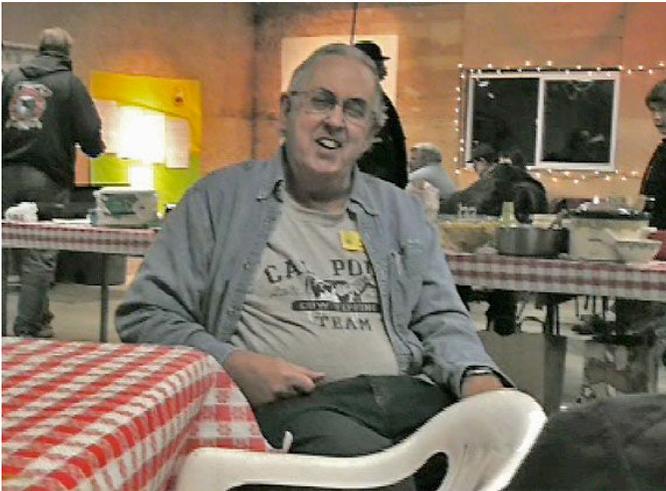
Potluck dinner News Years Eve

Regarding upcoming events in '08, the calendar is still being finely tuned. However, regarding scheduled Saturday workdays and Saturday dinners we are trying to work on getting individuals or teams to sign up for one of the workdays in advance. By advance we hope more than one or two days or even hours prior to serving. Currently the months of January, Feb. and March have been spoken for. In May when we start to have two work weekends each month, one in May and one in June have been taken. So that now leaves the choices of May 24, June 14, July 12 or 26, Aug. 9 or 23, Sept. 13, Oct. 11, Nov. 8 and Dec. 13. We know that the choices are few and that many of you will want to bless us with your culinary delights so please step up and pick a date before they will be spoken for and the opportunity will be lost. [call or email me with your selected Saturday]. Meals can be a simple or as complex as you would like them—you, or whomever you would like to help you with the meal preparation will be in charge. We are hoping to give all a chance and not have the same few always shop and

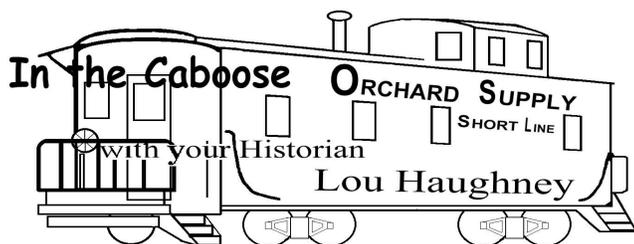
prepare. All we ask is that you provide receipts for your expenses.

More next month on calendar updates for events, etc. in 2008.

***PLEASE: anyone staying overnight for work weekends, call or e-mail reservations in ASAP. Call (805) 995-3659 or e-mail [ecarnegi@calpoly.edu](mailto:ecarnegi@calpoly.edu). Facilities are limited & we want to make sure we can accommodate all. This also helps in successfully planning our Sat. night dinner.***



One happy camper, ask Bob what is so funny.



## More on Mac Dermot & the Oakland Zoo, Part 2

Valuable information about MacDermot and his stay at the Oakland Zoo was recently uncovered by Bob Parkinson. This information comes from letters written by Ralph Demoro to Bob after the latter had entered the U. S. Army on March 15, 1943. Ralph and Bob had been friends since 1937 when Bob, as a teenager, became active in the California-Nevada Railroad Historical Society. Ralph Demoro was secretary of that group and editor of its newsletter. MacDermot was also an active member, and many of its meetings were held

at the old MacDermot mansion in West Oakland. Bob recalls attending a few of those gatherings.

Here are excerpts from Ralph Demoro's letters that pertain to MacDermot and his operations at the Oakland Zoo, known in the early 1940's as Durant Park and/or the Oakland Zoological Gardens.

### May 23, 1943

"Have been to the Zoo once this year so far. Everything about the same except they are using part of the grounds as a trailer park.

Pennington is still engineer on the W.P. working long hours he says."

### July 17, 1943

"Have been out to Uncle Louie MacDermot's on several occasions this year. Met Guy Dunscomb out there on the 5th of July. Also Pennington out there quite often. The place is well patronized on account of Gas Rationing and the little R.R. is doing fine. The Pacific Bridge Co. had a picnic there on July 11th. I helped Mac by taking tickets. We carried 2300 passengers or a little over. General Eng. was there the week previous but I was working. Gen. had the best picnic of the two."

[The phrase "Uncle Louie" signifies the close friendship of MacDermot and Demoro. Bob Parkinson explains that usage: "Ralph had known Mac for a long time. The 'Uncle Louie' was how he (MacDermot) was addressed by Harre (Ralph Demoro's young son). As small boys my brother and I (the Parkinson boys) were taught to call an old friend of my mother's family as 'Aunt Sophie'... Such may have been customary at that time."]

### March 7, 1945

"Our little girl is now over 14 months old and is walking. She is quite a girl. Our boy Harre is 5-1/2 years and a big fellow and is going to school since last September.

With my help he is turning out to be quite a rail fan. He knows his pantographs monkey motion, mallets, etc.

Harre and I have a tinplate set up in the attic, O gauge 3 rail. It is known as the Yolo and Yuba RY, THE DOUBLE Y LINE. We have 3

steam type locos, and one NYC electric type, 3 transformers, 5 switches, and about 50 feet of track and never mind about how many wrecks.

MacDermot is still out at the Zoo but has been in poor health and I understand the train has not run in some time.

We have not been able to get out there much during the last year on account of no longer having a car and the little girl makes it difficult to travel on crowded buses."

#### October 1, 1945

"Louis MacDermot and his engines have pulled out of the Zoo Gardens after a misunderstanding with Sid Snow. Louis took his stuff down San Jose way somewhere. I do not know the location. Too bad. Things had been in a bad way out there for some time. The little train ran irregularly if at all during the past year. So that ends that."

End of quotations from Ralph Demoro's letters.

The two 1945 letters provide definite information on the decline of the operation at the Oakland Zoo and on the approximate date when MacDermot moved, or was moved, from the Oakland Zoo to Billy Jones' ranch in Los Gatos, between early March and October 1, 1945. Other sources about the Oakland Zoo operation are more indefinite. Frederic Shaw in his book *Little Railways of the World*, p. 29, does not give a date for the closing of the Oakland Zoo venture.

"MacDermot's eccentricities had grown with the passing years and cost him the loss of many friends. His conduct finally reached the point where the Zoo management [Sid Snow] had to sever all connections with the creator of the Overfair Railway and compel the removal of his equipment from the grounds."

Another interesting and more cheerful reference is found in Norman Holmes's book, *Prune Country Railroads/Steel Trails to San Jose*. On pages 175-176, Holmes describes the formal opening of Billy Jones' Wildcat Railroad.

"Some 300 townspeople and the Los Gatos School Band turned out for a celebration on October 16, 1943, when a gold plated spike was driven into a redwood tie by Louis M.

MacDermott (sic). The date was the twenty-ninth anniversary of a similar ceremony on the Overfair Railroad at the 1915 San Francisco World's Fair. The Overfair equipment was then operating at an Alameda County park. All of this equipment was later obtained by Jones and eventually moved to his ranch."

Note that the date, October 16, 1943, is only three months after the well patronized, Sunday runs in July 1943 that are described in Demoro's letters. So, in the summer and the fall of 1943, MacDermot was still healthy and thriving in the train's operation at the Oakland Zoo. Apparently, his health started to decline seriously in 1944; and, by 1945, as Demoro indicates, "the train has not run in some time". An intriguing aspect is that Demoro does not appear to be aware of Billy Jones' involvement with MacDermot in those last years at the Oakland Zoo. Even Frederic Shaw does not explicitly connect Jones with MacDermot until an indefinite, later period.

"The Fates, which had dealt roughly with MacDermot during his lifetime, finally relented when the equipment came up for sale. (No date given) It fell into the hands of a retired locomotive engineer, Mr. Billy Jones, of Los Gatos, California, for the sum of \$5,200."

A previous article in the SPRS newsletter presents a more detailed account of Jones' acquisition of the Overfair Railway.

Correction: In last month's article about Jim Anderson's association as a lad with MacDermot at the Oakland Zoo, I misplaced the location of Foothill College where Jim taught for many years. Foothill College is located in Los Altos Hills, just off Interstate 280 in the northern part of Santa Clara County. Thanks to the reader who noticed that error.

Thanks to Bob Parkinson for sharing that correspondence which he found when he moved last spring from Berkeley to Orangevale, south of Sacramento. By courtesy of Bob's voluminous files, more information about the California-Nevada Railroad Historical Society's meetings at MacDermot's mansion and about Ralph Demoro will be described in the next installment.