



SWANTON PACIFIC RAILROAD SOCIETY

Number 36

February 1996

Reminder

Our workdays for February are Wednesday evening, **February 7th.** at Cal Poly, starting @ 6:00 P. M. and at the Swanton Ranch, Saturday morning, **February 10th.** beginning @ 9:00A. M.

On Track

with your Director,
Ed Carnegie

January of 1992 was the first work day of the Swanton Pacific Railroad Society. When you think about what has taken place in just 4 years, we have been very, very busy. The progress that has been and still is being accomplished are the results of a lot of efforts by many of our members. I what to thank you all for your continued support.

A special thanks goes to Bud McCrary for keeping a sharp eye out for our well-being. This last weekend during the special run for the Cal Poly's Forestry Department, Bud noticed that Scott Creek had divided into two fairly rampant streams. This was due to a **fallen Alder tree**, south of the Scott Creek Bridge. The root ball was now in the center of the stream and the trunk was across the main channel. A new channel was forming that was washing toward our South Loop. A few years ago this washed out a section of track and required a lot of work to repair. We would hate to see that happen again, so Bud gave me the name of the fish biologist for the Santa Cruz area. I contacted her and asked for permission to remove the tree and root ball. Bud followed through, got permission and with help from Kevin Piper and the farm crew they cut the tree out before the Wednesday storm arrived. The Swanton Railroad once again is very grateful for the Cal Poly farm team coming to the rescue.

More work has been done on the car storage barn, it now has a North wall. Plans are being developed for the irrigation system to be installed in and around College Station. If all goes according to plans we will start "planting" pipe and sprinklers this coming workday. This is a big *IF*; i.e., if it isn't raining, if we can obtain a trencher, and if the parts arrive. The University has been given some grass seed that should be able to survive most of the conditions and/or elements given in the station area. We should be ready to plant so the grass can take advantage of the Spring rains. If you would like to help with this project see me during the work day.

Track work to the car barn extension will be delayed until creosote and drilled ties arrive. Then we will finish the grading and lay the track and switches. During this past January work day a new culvert was installed at the wye. For those of us that were present we were able to see a master back-hoe operator at work. Bob Nichols maneuvered the back-hoe with such fine mastery and in no time he had a trench dug under the track that required only a few shovels full to finish. I am happy to report that this last weekend water was running through and the water backup problem was removed.

We have lots of jobs both indoors and outdoors so no matter what the weather is like there is something to do. Hope to see you at Swanton this Feb. 10.

Also, as a reminder to some of you that may not be aware we have two of our members that will not be at the upcoming workday—not by choice, but because of "doctors orders". We will miss their presence, and their great sense of humor that always enlightens us, but want them to know that we are definitely thinking of them. Elmer Stone will be going in for by-pass surgery soon, and Vera McLean will be recovering from knee surgery that was scheduled for Feb. 8th. All of us are wishing you well.

Behind the Throttle

with your President,
Bill McNab

The February workday weekend will include the Executive committee on Sunday to plan the year ahead as to projects, events, and hopefully an outing for the RR group. Speak to committee people on Saturday. We'll be discussing everything from A to Z so get your 2 cents worth in before hand.

We need membership fees turned in so we can get a new roster out. If you do not have or have lost your name tag badge, please let us know so we can negotiate accordingly.

I had a long conversation with fellow member, Hart Fairclough, who started back with Al Smith in Boy Scouts. Hart's introduction to Al Smith's ways were at Scout Camp here at Swanton when Hart as a tenderfoot was asked to hike down the hill to the scout supply building (now the machine shop) and get a can of **striped paint**. Poor Hart, not the right color so back down the hill time after time to get the right color. It went on most of the afternoon. Hart and Al got along great after Al had finished the old paint can routine.

Hart has many stories of how Al ventured about over the years. I have mentioned to our historian Lou Haughney that maybe we could get Hart and some of the long time friends of Al's to put the recollections on tape for everyone's enjoyment.

Hart also mentioned that he had collected volunteer redwood seedlings around the ranch and over the years planted about **100 redwoods on his property near Mt. Diablo**. The RR now has **three trees planted at the south end of the track**. Vera McLean is **rounding up seedlings to grow for** a couple of years before adding to our "grove". **Let's see now if we planted 10 a year in 10 years we would have the 100 like Hart planted over the years**. That would sure be prettier than **poison oak all over the hillside**. Our patch of volunteer seedlings is coming from the big redwood by the car barn.

Cal Poly alumnus (and member) Jim Boster visited on the January workday. He is a member of the Cal Poly South Bay Alumni Chapter. He is going to work on getting area alumni interested in a summer outing at Swanton. There are about 8,000 alumni spread around the bay and outlying areas, wouldn't it be great to get 500-600 to a train barbecue eventually?

In the Caboose

with
Lou Haughney

Here is a puzzle for you about the year of Louis MacDermot's birth. Research in the Federal Census records reveals conflicting accounts about when he was born. The 1880 census lists Louis as 3 years old on June 1, 1880. The 1890 census files were destroyed in a fire. The 1900 census gives his age as 19 on June 1, 1900; but according to the 1880 census, he should have been 23 years old then. His mother and older sister had also undergone similar losses of years by 1900. Strangely enough, **the 1910 census does not list Louis MacDermot. However, he was already operating his machine shop on the estate grounds in 1910 according to other records, such as his ledger book and his early engineering drawings. The 1920 census, the latest one now open to the public, says that Louis was 42 years old on January 1, 1920. Thus, the 1880 and the 1920 censuses are in agreement if he was born between January 1 and June 1 in 1877.**

These records give other interesting information about **the family**. Louis was the second of the four children born to Charles F and Flora Main MacDermot. He had an older sister, Mary, a younger sister, Flora, and a younger brother, Alfred. The family had four servants in 1880 and five in 1900. In the 1880 census, his father is listed as a "capitalist", the same description used in the heading of an Oakland newspaper's obituary telling of the father's death in 1898, That obituary called Charles a "millionaire, (who) was extensively interested in real estate across the bay, from which he derived a large income". His mother was the daughter of Charles Main, a prominent San Francisco resident, after whom Main Street in San Francisco was named.

The 1920 census shows that Louis was then married to Hortense, age 32, who was born in Massachusetts. **Louis' occupation is given as "mechanical engineer"; Hortense's occupation is blank.** The very curious item in this 1920 record is that they were residing on "river boats" in the County of San Francisco! This is another mysterious aspect of MacDermot's highly individualistic life. (I have found only one other mention of his wife; that was a passing reference to "MacDermot's wife" in one of Harre Demoro's article in the *Oakland Tribune*.)

Any additional information or elucidation's of these accounts will be appreciated. This research was done by my neighbors, long time genealogists, who have many years of experience in examining the census records at the Federal Archives in San Bruno.

Rail Tails

Swanton Pacific's Movers and Shakers
by Steve and Cindy Huffstetter

(This is the first in a series of columns on the giants who made the Swanton Pacific Railroad what it is today.)

Sometimes the little details go unnoticed. How many of us who enjoy the railroads are real track enthusiasts? Track is just something we ride on. Most of us love the engines, or the structures or some other aspect. Yet if the rails aren't laid properly, the train goes nowhere. A railroad is nothing without good track. Swanton Pacific owes a large debt to a large man for the quality of its track work -- **Mr. Elmer Stone.**

When asked how he would describe himself, Elmer says he's a "ferroequinologist." Now that's a rather unusual word, one that our spell checker will balk on every time. Reason it out though -- it's the science of the Iron Horse. And that is an excellent description of Mr. Stone, a man devoted to the study and lore of the railroads. His home, shared with his wife Francis, is filled with railroad trinkets, art, and historic collectibles.

His interest in trains and track began early, watching the section gangs at age 6, often finding ways to get a ride on the motorcar with the foreman. Growing up in Depression era Illinois produced a number of hardships for his family, and much assistance was provided them by the railroaders. Elmer figured that if that's the kind of people railroaders were, that that's what he wanted to be. His first railroad job was on the old Burlington Line in 1944. Eventually he started with SP in 1949. Today, he still enjoys riding the strap steps on Swanton's motorcar.

Elmer devoted his professional career, and in many ways, his life, to track work on the railroad. He spent 32 years with the Southern Pacific working and supervising track gangs. He was District Maintenance Manager, responsible for trackage from San Carlos (MP22) to Gilroy (MP82) when he retired in 1982. In all the years he carried that responsibility, not one derailment on that division was attributed to bad track. Elmer has a remarkable ability that is a treat to watch. He can look at a section of track, without any instruments or special tools. Just by looking at it, he can tell you what's wrong with it, and what needs to be done to fix it. More importantly, he can teach you, even if you have little prior skill, how to do it yourself. Imagine the best teacher you ever had in all your classroom experience. Elmer's that kind of teacher, a person who inspires you, makes you want to learn, and brings out the best in you.

Elmer began his friendship with Al Smith many years ago, when he needed to establish an account with the budding Orchard Supply Hardware. When the two met, Elmer commented on Al's tie bar, noting that he had a collection of tie bars. Al promptly removed his and gave it to Elmer. The two became fast friends from the moment they first shook hands, and were as close as brothers.

Many of you have seen the Orchard Supply Short Line caboose 1001 that now sits in the meadow. Many of you know that was Al Smith's office at Orchard Supply. It was Elmer who helped arrange for Al to purchase that caboose. When the 1001 was delivered to Al's spur at the main store on San Carlos Street, he called up Elmer and asked, "Who can I get to put that caboose where I want it? Should I call a crane company?" Elmer suggested that Al simply lay temporary track from the spur to the desired site. Al wondered about the feasibility of such a project, and Elmer assured him that it could be done in four hours using the store's help. Al responded by saying, "Come on over!"

During the course of the work, the caboose derailed from the temporary track. They all thought they were done for, when Al mentioned that some re-railing frogs had come with the caboose. He ran to get them, the caboose was re-railed, and Al pushed it to spot with the tractor. Afterwards, while surveying their work, he said, "You know, Elmer, I should have had you push the car -- then I could have ridden it to spot!" Total job time, from start to finish: 3 hours, 45 minutes.

Elmer's one wish is that he had more volunteers at Swanton workdays to work on the track. "Track is the backbone of a railroad, and a man with a bad back cannot do any real work," he says. "We need people to come out and learn how to do this work." His goal is to replace the ties throughout the railroad, smooth the track, establish a maintenance routine, and impart the skills of traditional railroading to us, the generation who must follow. And of course to fulfill Al's dream and build the North Loop.

If you want to learn, and want to make a contribution to the Swanton Pacific Railroad that everyone can appreciate, come on down one Saturday and work on the section gang. Bring your work clothes and gloves. Join Elmer changing ties, tamping ballast, getting sore muscles -- and learning the skills that made America's railroads great.

1500

What To Do With the 1500 (What To Do, What to Do...)
by Mark Cooper

Since lots of us have been weighing in on this issue, I thought I might as well do so too. At least it is a way for me to participate while sitting home recovering from surgery instead of being where I'd rather be -- up at Swanton with all of you having fun!

Toward a Decision-Making Framework

Though we have had a general forum for this discussion via the Newsletter, what seems to be missing is some sort of framework in which we can sort the basic ideas, and (ultimately) rank the relative impact they should have on the outcome. While this does not mean that issues such as how many will fit in the cab are not important, it tends to stress that we need to decide fundamental direction first. So what follows is my simplistic idea for a structure that might help lead us to the wisest possible decision regarding the basic direction for this treasured equipment that we now guard.

A Proposed Structure

It seems to me that what has evolved from the discussion are three basic alternatives, with all the pro and con arguments that came readily to mind:

1. Let her sit, at least until we get a clear consensus ("consensus" doesn't necessarily mean that everyone fully agrees).

Con:

- We are stumbling over her bones every month
- She is rusting by degrees

Pro:

- She's not likely to go anywhere
- We ought to be sure of what we want to do before moving further

2. Restore her completely.

Con:

- She is not road worthy, and with a tendency to derail, may be downright dangerous
- You are not going to get a lot of folks signing up to the long hours needed to restore and operate her in this museum condition
- Extensive modifications to make her operationally safe have already begun, and it would take some effort to undo them

Pro:

- We are, in the main, the keepers of the MacDermot flame
- She could be our Tom Thumb, run for very short distances only on very special occasions

3. Complete her as a 2-6-0 or 2-6-2, perhaps with a tender, but looking insofar as possible in that context, like the 1500 she was designed to be.

Con:

- We don't need another road engine; This abrogates our responsibility to MacDermot preservation

Pro:

- We DO need another road engine -- one that is smaller, and more readily and economically run each month than the Pacific's
- Safe operation of a live steam railroad demands that we have an opportunity to give continual experience to our new live steam trainees, firemen and engineers -- not just once every 2-6 months when we have a scheduled steam-up
- The 1500 is the perfect engine for training and a month-to-month working operational role -- in contrast to her larger Pacific sisters
- No modifications should be done that are not ultimately reversible, should we ever decide to go back to a complete restoration later

Proceeding From Here

Sometime in the near future, I'd like to post a copy of this in the Roundhouse near the 1500's skeleton, and invite all of you to jot your own thoughts under the Alternative Pros and Cons. Or add other basic alternatives if you see them!

Telephone

We wanted to remind you that the Swanton Pacific Railroad Society now has an operating phone in the machine-shop. The phone number is (408) 423-8204 and is listed under Swanton Pacific Railroad in Davenport. The phone service is set up for "credit card calls only" for out going calls. It accepts all incoming calls, except for collect calls. The SPRS also has their own answering machine for those of you that need to leave a message. Please note this number at your home in case someone needs to contact you during our workdays.

Dues

You will find enclosed with this newsletter, a membership form. We hope that you can fill it out and bring it along with your dues to our February workday. If you are unable to attend we ask that you mail it to our address at Cal Poly. These dues will enable you to continue receiving this newsletter and stay informed about the activities of the railroad. If you want to be included on the membership roster please send in your dues now. We don't want you to "run out of steam".

Swanton Pacific Railroad Society Executive Board

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Membership

Annual dues to the society is \$25.00 per person. Dues are collected during the first of each year. Any correspondence to this newsletter or change of address and/or phone number should be sent to:

Swanton Pacific Railroad Society
Agricultural Engineering Department
Cal Poly State University
San Luis Obispo, CA 93405

(805) 756-2378
(805) 756-2626 FAX

Workdays are held at the Swanton Pacific Ranch near Davenport, CA., the second Saturday of the month and the Wednesday evening, prior to that Saturday at the Agricultural Engineering Department, Cal Poly State University. Anyone and everyone is welcome at these workdays.

Cut here



Yes, I want to support the Swanton Pacific Railroad Society. Please enter my membership at the level indicated below.

Name ()
Address ()
Home Telephone
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Please make your check payable to Swanton Pacific Railroad Society
I wish to join as a Gandy Dancer Mem. (\$25 per year) Conductor Member (\$1,000)
Attendant Member (\$100 per year) Station Master Mem. (\$5,000)
Inspector Member (\$500 per year) Engineer's Club (\$10,000)

Your gift may be deductible for income tax purposes.

Enclosed is my gift of \$
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