



## SWANTON PACIFIC RAILROAD SOCIETY

Number 48

Feb. 1997

### All Aboard !!

Our workdays for February are Wednesday evening, February 5th. at Cal Poly, starting @ 6:00 P. M. and at the Swanton Ranch, Saturday morning, February 8th starting @ 9:00 A. M.

### On Track

with your Director,  
Ed Carnegie

Well, you heard of "the best laid plans of mice and men"-what we thought would be a productive workday of getting unfinished projects completed i.e., getting barn doors painted and installing new electrical outlets and lights in the carbarn--well it didn't happen. We all became track crew, since mother nature had more or less dictated what our work schedule was for this last workday, as well as what will be our work schedule for the next few workdays.

Apparently after New Years, it rained, and rained, and then rained some more. These continuous soft downpours that fell on already saturated grounds wreaked nothing but havoc with the seemingly calm creek waters and countryside. Trees fell, the creek changed its direction, and embankments just disappeared. We were first informed of this when we came on the ranch the Wed. prior to our scheduled workday. Not quite knowing what to expect

For those of you who were there and made the trek down the tracks you came, you saw, and some even helped conquer the problem. For those who were unable to be there let us describe. At Mile post 2 a buckeye tree had fallen across the tracks. At that same location, about 75 of creek embankment had literally disappeared. Further upstream from that location, trees within the creek had washed out causing the stream to be divereted towards the embankments next to the tracks thereby ,resulting in huge washouts and in one spot leaving only about 6 very unstable inches of ground

next to the tie. This section of track will eventually have to be moved over. The drop is a sheer ten feet at that point so work is/was immediately necessary.

To add to the list of "things-to-do"--down at the wye there was a small mudslide. So, the tracks down there are covered in at least a foot and a half feet of mud, brush, rock, sludge--you name we got it. As you can see, we definitely have our work cut out for us for the next few workdays plus. We will all need to pitch in to help get the track ready for the next run which is only two months away and we certainly have more work than just two workdays of work to do to make it ready!

At our recent board meeting it was also decided that starting in March we will be starting two workdays a month--the first and fourth Saturdays of each month. If you can make both it will be appreciated, but if not, one will certainly be better than none. We always appreciate all the help we can get. Many hands gets the work done quicker--Confucius say??? or EJC say??

On Friday, prior to the workday--Bill McNab, Jerry Kruz (from the ranch), and myself cut out two log jams.

Saturday, during the workday several members worked on various aspects of the getting the track back in order. We pulled out about 120 ft. of track removing the ties and separating the new ties from the old. We then tried an ingenious idea of putting the front end of the loader on a passenger truck and with a hydraulic system raised the front end of the tractor off the ground. This guaranteed that the rear tires would stay centered on the track. We were then able to drive our front end loader across the Scott Creek Bridge and all the way to the wash out. With the tractor's power and the expert driving ability of Bob Nicholas and rigging crew of Andys McLean and McMean, Greg Ackerman, FitzPatrick, and myself we righted a root ball and started pulling trees out of the creek. After many hours on Sat. and Sun. the old creek channel was reopened and we hope mother nature will now work in our favor.

Sunday we had our first board meeting with the newly elected officers. We are still working on the membership directory and hope to have it sent to the printers later this month to have available for distribution during the March workday.

---

### In the Caboose

with your Historian,  
Lou Haughey

#### BUILDING THE OVERFAIR RAILROAD 1913-1915

In the first half of 1913, MacDermot was awarded a concession to build and operate a miniature railroad at the Panama Pacific International Exposition. Like all the other concessionaires, he had to make a down payment for "bonuses and space" to the Concessions and Admission Committee. MacDermot's fee was \$5,000. In addition, the Exposition would take about 25% of the gross receipts of each concession.

Starting in mid-1913, MacDermot devoted all of his design room and machine shop resources to building the Overfair Railroad and its equipment. Five locomotives, sixty passenger cars, and five freight cars, all 1/3 scale, were planned. The first locomotive, no. 1500, was a 0-6-0T switcher to be used mainly during the installation of the railroad at the Exposition. The other four locomotives were the 4-6-2 Pacific type, modeled after the Southern Pacific's class P-6.

The design and machine shops in the backyard of the MacDermot lot must have been a busy place from mid-1913 to early 1915 while the locomotives were being built there. The only parts that were not fabricated on the premises were the air compressors for the brake system and the shaping of the boiler sheets. The passenger and the freight cars were designed by MacDermot's staff. However, much more space was needed to built them than was available in MacDermot's back yard. So, the production line for the cars was set up in an unused building of a cotton mill on 23rd Avenue in East Oakland, where cabinet makers fashioned and assembled the 65 cars. An old photograph, which gives only a partial view of the assembly room, shows about 20 cars under construction. At the Exposition grounds, three turntables, one round house with accompanying service shops, 2-1/2 miles of main line track (20-lb rail), and 1-1/2 mile of track in the yards, had to be laid down or erected.

I cannot find any information about the number of people involved in building the equipment and in constructing the railroad on the Exposition grounds. Probably 50 or more persons must have been employed in order to complete the project by February 1915, about 20 months after the start. Anyway, one source (Holmes) says that MacDermot had a "Golden Spike" ceremony on October 16, 1914. It is not clear whether this event marked the completion of the entire facility or just the completion of laying the track. I suspect it indicates the latter.

A potential delay, if not a stoppage, of the work occurred in late 1914 when MacDermot's mother, Flora Main MacDermot, died. In control of the family's wealth, she had been financing the construction of the Overfair Railroad. The estate's executors raised questions about the cost of such a risky venture; but, they finally allowed the work to continue because so much labor and funds had already been invested in the project. When the Panama Pacific International Exposition opened on February 20, 1915, the Overfair Railroad was in full operation. (A more detailed account of its operation and layout will be given in a future article.)

Despite all the hard work and the large investment of labor, talents, and funds, the Overfair Railroad was not a financial success. Many factors are attributed to its losses. The most important factor was probably the competition from other modes of conveying fairgoers throughout the grounds. The Exposition Concessions Committee had awarded contracts to four other people-mover groups, all of which were allowed much more convenient access to and within the Exposition's grounds than the Overfair Railroad was allotted. In describing the different modes of "intramural transportation", the Exposition's official historian tells, **unwittingly but plainly, why the Overfair railroad was the least profitable of the five transportation concessions.**

The most successful and popular was the Fadgl auto train, which consisted of two open passenger trailers pulled by an auto tractor. The inventor and builder was B. F. Fageol, also of Oakland. Fageol built his trains, sometimes called the "elephant trains", in south Oakland. These trains were allowed to operate through the grounds on the main avenues, whereas the Overfair Railroad was restricted to the northern perimeter.

Another popular mode was the "electricette", a wicker basket chair on wheels propelled by an electric motor powered from a lead storage battery. These 150 chairs, carrying 2 or 4 passengers and driven by a passenger, could be taken throughout the Exposition's streets, but not into the exhibit halls. The fair's historian was quite intrigued by these miniature, run-about, electric cars. "Their operation (at four or five miles per hour) was not wholly free from accident, owing to the fact that many inexperienced drivers took them out, and sometimes in a pinch lost their steering sense and bumped into a pedestrian or the travertine base of a lighting standard. But on the whole the value of their service more than counterbalanced the risk; and if one broke your ankle the Exposition Hospital was handy, or else you could enjoy a free ride to it in the ambulance."

Two other kinds of conveyances are described briefly, push chairs and bicycle chairs (pedicycles), both of which required an operator. (No freewheeling nor bumping pedestrians with these vehicles!) The push cars could enter exhibit halls at certain hours.

The historian lists the gross revenues of the different transportation concessions:

Fadgl auto trains	over \$307,000
Electricette chairs	over \$112,000
Push and bicycle chairs	over \$66,000
Overfair Railroad	over \$22,000

In another section of his report, the historian gives a "Table of Gross Receipts for the 15 concessions...that took in over \$100,00..." The Fadgl auto trains and the Electric Motor Cars (Electricette) are listed in that table, but not the Overfair Railroad. So, according to the Exposition's records, MacDermot grossed less than \$100,000. Other published reports (Shaw and Demoro) say, without giving a source, that MacDermot's gross receipts barely matched his costs of \$250,000. The Exposition's historian writes, "It (the Overfair Railroad) took in over \$22,000 and perhaps some misfortune of location prevented it from doing better, as it deserved to do."

However correct the writer was in analyzing the Overfair Railroad's losses, his somewhat apologetic statement did little to assuage MacDermot's disappointment. Perhaps, if MacDermot had been allowed to run a huge U-shaped loop around three sides of the grounds, the southern and western sides as well as the northern perimeter, as he had originally proposed, the Overfair Railroad would have been much more convenient for use.

The sources of the preceding information are principally the following:

Frank Morton Todd's THE STORY OF THE EXPOSITION...THE OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CELEBRATION HELD AT SAN FRANCISCO IN 1915..., five volumes, 1921.

A. K. Markwart's Report of the Activities of the Division of Works of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition...for the period ending February 20, 1915, one typescript volume, 1915. Markwart was Asst. Director of Works and Chief of Construction.

A few remarks are based on reports in these writings:

Norman W. Holmes' PRUNE COUNTRY RAILROADING, p. 176.

Frederic Shaw's LITTLE RAILWAYS OF THE WORLD, p. 28;

Harre Demoro's articles in THE OAKLAND TRIBUNE, esp. the issue of 1/5/69.

---

## Out of Steam ?

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 next 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 staying informed about the activities of the railroad. Hopefully we will be able to provide a completed roster to every member sometime during the latter part of March or early April. **If you want to be included please send in your dues soon.** We don't want you to run out of steam and be left out on the siding.

---

## Calendar

- Feb. 5 ..... Cal Poly work evening
- Feb. 8 ..... SPRS workday
- Mar. 5 ..... Cal Poly work evening
- Mar. 8 ..... SPRS workday
- Mar. 22 ..... SPRS workday
- Apr. 9 ..... Cal Poly work evening
- Apr. 12 ..... SPRS workday
- Apr. 26 ..... SPRS workday

**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  
 BioResource and Agricultural Engineering Department  
 Cal Poly State University  
 San Luis Obispo, CA 93407

(805) 756-2620  
 (805) 756-2626 FAX  
<http://www.calpoly.edu:80/~ae/swanton/sprs.html>

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 BioResource and Agricultural Engineering Department, Cal Poly State University. Anyone and everyone is welcome at these workdays. The phone number at the Swanton Pacific Railroad for messages is: (408) 423-8204

**Swanton Pacific Railroad Society  
 Executive Board**

- Director: ..... Ed Carnegie  
(805) 995-3695
- President: ..... Marty Campbell  
(707) 996-0942
- First Vice President: ..... Andy McLean  
(415) 427-3088
- Second Vice President: ..... Geoffrey Tobin  
(805) 544-7927
- Secretary/ Editor: ..... Jim Matheny  
(805) 543-0890
- Treasurer: ..... Ed Carnegie  
(805) 995-3695
- Engine & Rolling Stock: ..... Randy Jones  
(408) 425-5065
- Facilities & Grounds: ..... Bob Nichols  
(408) 356-5203
- History: ..... Lou Haughney  
(415) 592-2517
- Safety Engineer: ..... Andy McLean  
(415) 427-3088
- Track: ..... Elmer Stone  
(510) 537-8781
- Operations: ..... Vince Cipolla  
(818) 799-9636
- Social & Publicity: ..... Martha Neilsen  
(408) 257-2683

Cut here



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

Name \_\_\_\_\_ ( ) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Home Telephone

Address \_\_\_\_\_ ( ) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Business Telephone

Please make your check payable to \_\_\_\_\_ I wish to join as a \_\_\_\_\_ Endowment Levels

- Swanton Pacific Railroad Society
- 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)
- Ag. Engr. Department  
 Cal Poly  
 San Luis Obispo, CA 93407

Your gift may be deductible for income tax purposes.

Enclosed is my gift of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_