

SWANTON PACIFIC RAILROAD SOCIETY

Number 50

April 1997

All Aboard !!

Our workdays for April are **Wednesday evening, April 9th.** at Cal Poly, starting @ 6:00 P. M. and at the Swanton Ranch, **Saturday morning, April 12th.** and **Saturday morning, April 26th.** starting @ 9:00 A. M.

On Track

with your Director,
Ed Carnegie

March came and went—there were very little rains, but it was still a solid month of repairs for Swanton. As a result, I am happy to report that the washout and both mud slides were repaired and the track was made ready to handle the scheduled train runs on Al's Day. Having the two work weekends sure made a difference. By the end of the first work weekend the washout was regraded and the track was back in place. The week before the second work weekend, Andy McLean who took a week's vacation, and Reynold "Fitz" FitzPatrick joined the two of us to spend a grand week of fun and enjoyment at Swanton grading, spreading underlayment, laying ties and spiking rail in place! The track crew on the second work weekend could then spread ballast and level track. By the end of the day we were able to make it through the wye. An extremely productive two work weekends and a full work week in-between allowed for what we thought would be the impossible to accomplish, became a reality. The trains will be able to run on opening day for the train season—Al's Day. Without the efforts of all of you this would not have been possible. A great big thanks to all of you who helped and could come for one or both of the workdays. As for some of the other accomplishments:

- Fitz was originally lured into coming up to Swanton for the week to work on getting the carbarn organized! His arm didn't have to be pulled too much to come for that reason as his hidden desire has always been to "organize the unique collection" of RR supplies in the carbarn

area. So he jumped at the opportunity to get this done in hopes that work on workdays would become more efficient. Little did he know that Andy had other types of harder RR work in mind—i.e., RR work with real grunting and groaning! During the week, we had three truck and trailers of ballast delivered and got most of it laid—26 tons each and whatta you get? [Extremely sore muscles and tired backs!]. Between getting the track repaired and other track work done, Fitz was still determined to get the carbarn cleaned up. In order to accomplish this he would get up bright and early (0530 or so) and go out to the shop to begin sorting and organizing things in the new shelves and bins. All this before going out to work on the track (0800). I encourage all of you to go over to the carbarn and notice the organization and extra room that seemed to evolve from all of Fitz's efforts. You will also notice that a passage way was placed between the carbarn and workarea.

- The carbarn is getting so clean, spacious and thus a pleasure to work in that Bill Engleman came down a few extra days after the workday to work on getting the crane cab back in shape. He has busily been doing "body work" on it and restoring it back to its original condition. Consequently it is really beginning to look good again. Bill enjoyed the barn so much that he even spent his birthday at Swanton to celebrate with Linda and Molly!
- Randy Jones and crew (Geoff Tobin/Andrew Martin) worked on and fine tuned "The Chief" car enough this last workday to have it back on the tracks. It successfully made a round trip down the tracks. It will certainly be appropriate to having "The Chief" running in time for Al's Day. Randy has also been busy with contacting various local "water system" contractors to have them come out to the ranch to look at improving our present water system. For those of you who may be wondering why we are looking at improving the water system, we need to have better potable

water as well as improved water quality in the water used for the steam engines. Right now nothing is finalized, but we will keep you informed.

- On your next trip down the track take time to notice the "McNab" grove of redwood trees. This is around mile marker 4.9. A poison oak area was cleared and leveled in spots. It was in this area that Bill "went-to-town" planting several of the redwood seedlings started last year in smaller containers. Some time in the near future the grove could become a really nice rest area along the track.
- The month of April is almost here and the Sunday after our first work day (April 13) weekend will be Al Smith's Day. That Sunday has been designated to celebrate Al's birthday, and to celebrate the "opening ceremony" for the first train operating day of the year. If you know of someone that you would like to invite to the Al Smith Day Celebration, you can either make a copy of your invitation or give me their name and address and I will be happy to send them an invitation. Also, please RSVP for the event ASAP, if you haven't already. An accurate number of those attending sure makes ordering the food, etc. a lot easier.
- After the run for Al's Day, the meadow will be disked once again and planted with a new lawn. The buffalo grass from last year just didn't grow (you could say we got buffaloed!). The weeds however did. Maybe buffaloes were needed to make that grass grow. Oh well with irrigating the meadow area, at least the weeds kept the area green and dust to a minimum, but a new lawn will be attempted. This time however, we will try a "playground" mix that when established should be able to take the type of abuse that this area is usually subjected to.
- Speaking of the lawn and the meadow area—some of you may have noticed that we have purchased a new "John Deere-sit-down lawnmower". To mow the area now only takes a little less than 2 hours as opposed to the former 6 hours; that is barring any mechanical breakdowns. With it being so much easier to mow the lawn, and having a new toy, I am sure people will be standing in line to try out the new toy! If you are willing to mow the lawn, we can check you out on this piece of equipment

and let you enjoy mowing!

Besides car brakes and track to work on, there are always some general cleaning, maintenance, and other preparatory work that needs to be done before celebrating Al Smith's Day on Sunday, April 13. We will also need help with serving, cooking, selling merchandise, taking tickets, etc. on the day of the event. So, as you can see, we have a lot of different projects that can be worked on by different individuals, with different interests and/or skills. All you need to do is show up and be ready, willing and able to contribute your talents. Every little bit that is done, all adds up, and that way things do get accomplished. Finished projects are always such a pleasure to see and to be enjoyed by all. Having us all work together certainly helps make our events so successful.

In the Caboose

with your Historian,
Lou Haughney

RIDING BEHIND THE OVERFAIR ENGINES FOR 50 YEARS

(and more information on the Oakland Zoo operation)

Warren K. Miller of El Cerrito, California, a new member of the Swanton Pacific Railroad, has literally followed the tracks of MacDermot's Overfair Railroad equipment for over 50 years since his first ride behind Engine #1913 on May 17, 1942 at Durant Park, Oakland with MacDermot at the throttle. Then, he rode on the Calistoga Steam Railroad in 1978. Finally, he rode the Swanton Pacific Railroad last April, 1996, on Al Smith Day festivities. Warren's interest in the Overfair Railroad was stimulated by his parents' telling him about their riding the Overfair Railroad at the Panama Pacific International Exposition in 1915. (Note: What most people now call the Oakland Zoo has had many names over its years; such as, Durant Park, Alameda County Zoological Gardens, and Knowland State Park.)

Warren has sent us interesting letters and good photographs of his adventures in following the Overfair equipment. Two of his well preserved photographs are included in this newsletter. All of them will be displayed in the Orchard Supply caboose. Here is an excerpt from his letter.

"I was only at Durant that one time in 1942 (May 17) along with Jerry Graham and Bert Ward, both

deceased. At the time I was working the swing shift at Richmond, Kaiser Shipyard No. 2, so I had time in the day to visit some places. I am a native of San Francisco and was living there and commuting to Richmond. If I can remember correctly he (MacDermot) started the line in 1941 and ran until early 1943. I lost track of the operation when I entered the Army in May 1943. Because of the war the attendance at the Park was very poor, there was not much to see and public transport was terrible.

I lost track of the Overfair over the years until it reappeared in Calistoga, I never went to the Billy Jones operation in Los Gatos. I visited the Calistoga operation several times...

I have only been to Swanton once and I was so impressed with what has been accomplished I joined as a member."

Note in the photographs the absence of the 1913's leading truck and of the middle, exterior jacket on the boiler. MacDermot is at the throttle. Also, see how the passenger cars are stored unprotected in a field at the Zoo, just as they had been stored previously in the MacDermot estate grounds in Oakland. Warren Miller is the middle person in the photo of passenger car #4003.

MacDermot's operation at the Oakland Zoo started in August, 1941, according to accounts in *The Oakland Tribune* at that time. However, I have not yet found out how long that operation lasted. Later reports by Harre Demoro in *The Oakland Tribune* and by Frederic Shaw in his book say that the Zoo operation lasted only a "few months" or a "short time" because of the increasing idiosyncrasies in MacDermot's personality. So Warren Miller's letters and photos are positive evidence of the Zoo railroad's operations in 1942 and probably into early 1943.

Another clue as to the length of Zoo operation is found in Norman Holmes' book *Prune County Railroad*, p. 196, where he describes Billy Jones' Wildcat Railroad. Holmes says "The Overfair Railroad equipment was then operating in an Alameda County park" on October 13, 1943 when MacDermot drove the gold-plated spike into a tie to celebrate the start of the Wildcat Railroad. Holmes then states "that date was the twenty-ninth anniversary of a similar ceremony on the Overfair Railroad at the 1915 San Francisco World Fair". Thus, these two sources indicate MacDermot's operation at the Oakland Zoo very likely continued for about two years into 1943.

Information as to what happened afterwards as MacDermot and his equipment moved, or were moved, to the Los Gatos/Campbell area is somewhat fragmentary. A future article will attempt to present an initial account for your comments and contributions.

SORRY !!

PICTURE WAS LOST
ON WAY TO THE
PRINTER.

Engine 1913 & Train, Durant Park, Oakland
Engine being operated by L. MacDermott
May 17, 1942

Photo by Warren K. Miller

MEMENTOS OF AL SMITH'S YEARS AT CAL POLY

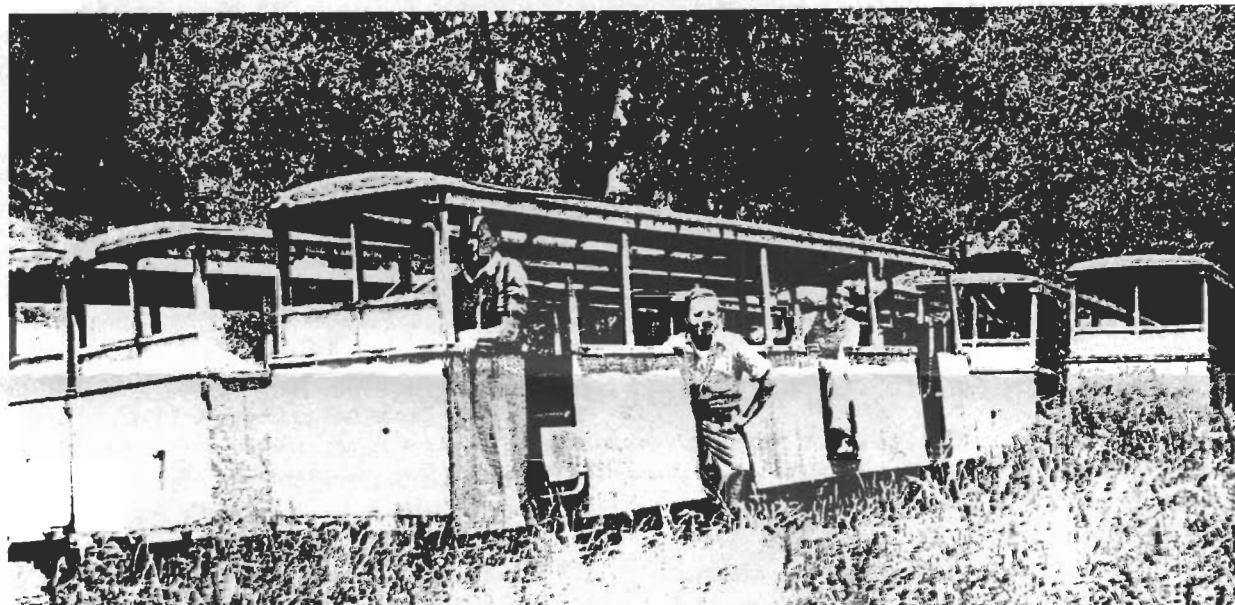
Our thanks to Frances LaMar, Al Smith's sister, for sending us some mementos of Al's years at Cal Poly in the early 1940's. The items include his student I.D. card, membership cards in the Crops Club and the California Young Farmers Association, the Freshman Handbook for 1940-1941, the Student Handbook for 1944-45, and the program book for the Ninth Annual Poly Royal. There are invitations to a "Backwards" dance given by the Girls League of the S.L.O. Senior High School, 25 cents a person and 40 cents a couple, and to a "Sadie Hawkins Day" dance. Also included is a receipt from the City of San Luis Obispo Police Court for payment of a \$1.00 fine. The reason for the fine is not specified.

These items, together with other memorabilia of Al, will be displayed in his Orchard Supply Caboose on April 13. You are invited to take a look inside Al's "office".



Engine 1913 & Train, Durant Park, Oakland
Engine being operated by L. MacDermott
May 17, 1942

Photo by Warren K. Miller



Overfair Steam RR - Cars Stored at Durant Park, Oakland, CA
May 17, 1942

Photo by Warren K. Miller
(middle person in photo)

Rail Tails

The following article, written by Steve Huffstetter, was originally printed in the April 1996 newsletter. We thought it would be appropriate to print it again on the eve of Al Smith Day.

When the Swanton Pacific name crosses one's lips, there is a name and a man irrevocably linked to the ranch and the railroad. We as a club would never have what we have without the vision, love, and generosity of Al Smith. This month we celebrate his birthday with the first official event of the year - "Al Smith Day."

Cindy and I first met Al when the SPRS was formed in 1992. One would never suspect from his appearance and approachability that he was a wealthy man. But that was typical of him. Flaunting what he had was never his style. He just did good things with what he had earned. And of course one of the best things, from our point of view, was our little railroad. Much has been written by better writers about how Al assembled the Swanton Pacific equipment. Probably other stories can still be told that we haven't had the time to learn about yet. But we've heard a few tidbits here and there, that I think will tickle the fancy of many.

We never knew that Al had an artificial leg until after his passing, and hearing the story of how his Boy Scout training saved his life. Vince Cippola tells us that Al had lots of fun with his wooden leg. Once, so Vince says, Al went horseback riding, and a young man riding with him was astounded when Al caught his leg on a tree. Not that the leg was caught, but that the leg kept getting longer as Al backed his horse away from the tree! Another story from Vince tells that Al was waiting for a bus in Los Gatos, when his artificial leg came loose. Without shame, Al did what had to be done to get mobile again. I guess I would have done the same thing.

Al, I'm told, was never on time for any business meeting in his life. Or many other things as well. Francis Stone tells me that when she wanted Al to be at her house for dinner at six, she would tell him to arrive at five. Otherwise, he'd show up at seven! Rumor has it that this was a business strategy during his days running Orchard Supply Hardware. While waiting for Al to show up, the other participants in a meeting would close the deal out of sheer boredom, making things easier (and probably more lucrative)

for Orchard Supply. Entrepreneurs, take notes! But Al never was late for anything to do with railroading. He used to take cab rides down to San Luis Obispo with Neil Vodden (who Al always referred to as "Coach," for reasons we have yet to discover). While there, he made friends with many of our mentors at the railroad today. And, we're sure, had some experiences that we've been told NOT to write about... One legend is told of the road trip to acquire locomotives 1914, 1915, and the last remaining Overfair equipment at auction in Southern California. Because of the number of people going with him, Al had to abandon his trademark pickup, and rent a Lincoln Town Car. Apparently, this made quite an impression on the other bidders at the auction, who asked, "Who's the rich guy in the Lincoln?" They never suspected that the successful bidder had rented his ride for the weekend, and was more comfortable in a pair of bib overalls than a business suit.

Once, during the last year of his life, I remember Cindy and I chatting briefly with Al. We were thanking him for letting us have the opportunity to work on his railroad. Al turned it around, and thanked US for being willing to help. It made us feel good to know that he appreciated us, and our meager contribution to his treasures.

And that I think sums up Al in a nutshell. An unassuming man, kind of heart and generous in deed, who enjoyed being who he was and giving what he could.

As the plaque by the roundhouse reads:
In Memory of Al Smith
A friend that shared his dreams
and his toys with many.
Hail to the Chief

As you ride behind the trains this weekend, remember the man who made it all happen - our friend, Al Smith.

Observation Car

Smith, Swanton and Bygone Days
by Hart Fairclough

During the past few years much has already been said and written about Al Smith and the Swanton area he bequeathed to Cal Poly. This has been important for us, but it is also important for those that follow.

In conversation at some of the SPRS workdays, I happened to relate various personal experiences involving Al and bygone days at Swanton. It was suggested that these should be written down in order to enhance the knowing and appreciation of this unique man. And also, to add to the knowledge of this wonderful area he left for us and the future to enjoy. With apologies for my writing style, I'll start now with some background information. Then, in some later issues, follow-up with related items involving Al and Swanton.

Al Smith and I go back to January of 1937 when I was a very small 12 1/2 year old 7th grader. In my eyes at the time, Al was one huge teenager about to be 16 in April. He was one of the "elder statesmen" in the Los Gatos Troop #39 I had just joined. Al and several other local high schoolers were the leaders in troop activity. Only Al went to nearby Campbell High. Ken Robison, our scoutmaster, was a great leader who believed in camping experience and the great out-of-doors world. A few miles out of Los Gatos, just past Southern Pacific railroad's "Vasona Junction", was Sewall Brown's large apricot kernel factory. The troop held its meetings in a number of rustic cabins out back. I soon learned that the railroad junction ran across the Smith's ranch a quarter of a mile down the road. Just a few years earlier, Al's dad Mr. Smith had started up a business to provide necessary supplies and equipment for the ranchers of Santa Clara Valley. His store, the Orchard Supply Hardware, was in San Jose - - also beside SP railroad tracks, the mainline from SF to LA via SLO!

It was at this time that I heard of a place called Swanton, where most of the troop went camping every other weekend, come rain or shine. If it rained and you didn't show up, as a tenderfoot, you could easily be classed as a "Momma's Boy".

Our scout transportation was by a large uncovered truck belonging to the Sewall Brown apricot kernel

factory. Kenny drove us on the old twisting two lane road through the mountains from Los Gatos to Santa Cruz. In those days that trip took at least an hour. From there it was another half hour run on the old narrow, coastal road north through the white-dusted cement company town of Davenport. Then the road led by "Rosie's" small all-purpose store along the ocean front. Suddenly the road turned inland to a small narrow valley between the hills. It was the beginning of the so-called Swanton area. As the valley closed in, we turned off on a one-way narrow road that led along a canyon wall into heavy redwood and fir country exactly one mile to the Santa Clara Valley Scout Council campsite.

From 1937 until the great flood of 1940, it was here at Swanton, and other scout activities, that provided a series of associations and experiences which led to Al Smith and Swanton becoming a lifelong attachment.

-- to be continued

The following was sent in by a member regarding last months activities.

The Carnegie cabin on wheels was moved from winter quarters in front of the machine shop to their summer location at big meadow also known as the BBQ area. By noontime Mary Ann had carpet out in front, awning open, flowers and rock dividers all set. She even swept the dirt road turnaround area at the cabooses and it is now named the culdesac and has been gravel covered.

A full weekend of weed pulling by several hands and the station meadow area is taking shape. Flowering plants are in place for Al Smith's Day, including hanging baskets of flowers on the light poles. Still a lot of touch up work to go so see you work day Sat April 12, and for sure Al Smith's day, Sunday the 13th.

A riding Sabre lawn mower built by John Deere has arrived! Of course Carnegie being the Ag Engineer, jumped on first to check out the "mechanical quality", then Art Laidlaw gave it his "perusal" and the meadow mowing was completed - in less than 3 hours.

Bob Nichols had a full day on the back hoe-loader, first trying to get across the creek at Windy Point and getting stuck in goop clear up to the undercarriage before getting near the creek. Fought his way out of that one and had to go up to the roundhouse and come down the track to get at the two slides south of Windy Point. Lots more encounters with goop, but the work got done.

Bob Morehouse tackled track blocking Bay and Alder trees that decided to leave home and sprawled across the track. The chain saw had a full workout and so did Morehouse.

Many other jobs were going on up and down the track, all of equal importance and all with diligent and hard work, to get the track back into runnable condition.

The hard fought accomplishments over the past 3 months are truly amazing. People have put in many extra workdays to deal with the rain induced havoc of water and mud slides.

Maybe soon we can all have a "job well done" workday and savor the moment with a hot dog and soda.

Al Smith Day

The fourth annual Al Smith Day will be held on Sunday, April 13. This will be a fun time for all when we celebrate the dreams of our friend and will be one of the times of the year when we will have the opportunity to fire up the locomotives for a steam run. A time you do not want to miss. So tell all of your friends. Anyone who is interested in trains is invited. For reservations or questions call Ed Carnegie at (805) 995-3659

Calendar

- Apr. 9 Cal Poly work evening
- Apr. 12** **SPRS workday**
- Apr. 13 Al Smith Day (run)
- Apr. 26 SPRS workday
- May 7 Cal Poly work evening
- May. 10 SPRS workday
- May. 24 SPRS workday
- June. 7 Cal Poly Day (run)
- July 26 Golden Spikes (run)
- Sept. 28 Land Trust (run)
- Oct. 12 2472 (run)

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

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