

## SWANTON PACIFIC RAILROAD SOCIETY

Number 50

May 1997

### All Aboard !!

Our workdays for May are Wednesday evening, May 7th. at Cal Poly, starting @ 6:00 P. M. and at the Swanton Ranch, Saturday morning, May 10th. and Saturday morning, May 24th. starting @ 9:00 A. M.

### On Track

with your Director,  
Ed Carnegie

I am happy to report that Al's Day was well attended and came off without a hitch. It was very nice to see and visit with a lot of Al's friends and family; some of whom we haven't seen for some time. It was especially nice to have Steve Spafford, Al's nephew introduce several of the family members present. The weather was O.K. Not too hot, no rain, but lots of wind that we could have done without. I want to thank all of the volunteers who came to Swanton and spent a day or more cleaning to make the railroad and grounds look great. It took a lot of effort to get everything ready from the disastrous winter we experienced this last year. Without the support of our many volunteers we would not have been able to have such a successful event.

For those of you that were unable to make the event we had well over 180 in attendance. A double header steam engine run was conducted to the delight of the many for a "Kodak moment" at Windy Point. The locomotives never looked better. The Locomotive crew had the 1912, 1914 and the 502 sparkling and running like a clock. My hat also goes off to the BBQ team, under the leadership of Jim Matheny, as well as to all of you that brought "sweets" for some great desserts to top the fantastic meal. The food, as always, was great.

The entire day ran smoothly--no derailments, or other mishaps--it was a great success. In case I may have left out some names to give special thanks and recognition to, please don't be offended. We know that without each of your contributions, events such as these

would not be successful. A great big thanks goes out to all of you that helped -- but most of all a continual thanks goes to Al Smith for sharing his dreams and toys with all of us.

Some of the items that were completed before the Al Smith Day:

- Track crew, under Elmer's leadership, leveled, aligned, and tamped the washout and mudslide areas. The new track, according to many of the railroaders ran very smoothly.
- The picnic meadow was mowed and cleaned up. A special thanks goes to all of you who worked so hard in making the meadow look terrific. All the color provided by the flowers, i.e. flowers on the light posts and tables, around the station and circular drive certainly added a nice festive flair to the event. The tablecloths on all the tables were also very nice.
- Monday after the event, the meadow was again ripped, disked, compost added, leveled and planted. This time buffalo grass was not planted, but rather a playground mix was chosen. Hopefully this variety of grass will be more adaptable to our climatic conditions. A special thanks again goes to La Donna and farm crew for helping pick up rocks, digging and placing fence post holes.
- The car barn and round house grounds were all spruced up. A new coat of paint was put on the car barn doors.
- Bob Nichols scraped and leveled off the parking lot above the red house so that additional parking spots would be available for all our guests on Sunday.
- The PA system was installed down in the meadow area and worked very well. Everyone could hear what was being said, as very powerful speakers were installed on top of two new light poles. It will sure be nice having a sound system that can be heard by all from almost everywhere in the meadow area.

- One more car was installed with air brakes by one of our newest members, Tom Vertel, under the direction of Randy Jones.
- A special thanks is also in order for Lou Haughney and the great historical display he always puts together for all to see and enjoy.

Work accomplished on the second workday in April (4/26):

- Elmer and Bob worked on the switch at the wye at Folger.
- The engine house crew worked on the steam cylinder leaks on the 1914 and uncovered some difficulties that will definitely need to be worked on before the engine can operate again.

Our next event is Cal Poly Day which will be held Saturday, June 7th--followed on Sunday by a fund raiser for the Red Cross, so please mark your calendar. We will need to **organize and be ready for the events** prior to that Saturday, so you may just be getting a phone call to see **what your assignment(s) might be**. If in doubt about **what you might be doing**, please call me so that **I may assign** a job to you. We will need all kinds of **assistance in order** to make the events successful. Be ready to sign up for a task on the May Work Days (May 10 & 24).

We hope to see you on Sat., June 7, and Sun. June 8. The weather should be **good, not to mention** having longer daylight hours, so **come on out to work**, talk railroad, and **just have fun**. After all, where else can you have so much fun with such good people?

**Want a Free Lunch? Then come to the May 10th work day and partake in Tri-tip sandwich, beans and Cola.**

#### New Memberships:

Liz Allison	Half Moon Bay
Robert Parkinson	Berkeley
John Turrill	San Luis Obispo
Fred Vertel	Los Altos
Tom Vertel	Los Altos

On behalf of the entire organization we welcome each of you into our "train family" and we certainly look forward to seeing you at some of our next events. Many of our members may not recognize you right away so please introduce yourselves so that we can get to better know you and vice versa.

## In the Caboose

with your Historian,  
Lou Haughney

### MacDERMOT's LAST YEARS, 1940-1948

The MacDermot estate in West Oakland occupied the entire block bounded by Seventh, Eighth, Center, and Cypress Streets. The West Oakland BART Station is now across Seventh Street from the MacDermot site. The run-down mansion and grounds were taken over in 1939 by an Oakland Redevelopment Agency according to Frederic Shaw's brief report on the 1954 Railroaders' calendar. However, MacDermot was still at that site on Nov. 15, 1940 when a news story in the *Oakland Tribune* told about the moving of the Overfair Railroad equipment to the Alameda County Zoological Gardens. "He [MacDermot] and Snow [director of the Zoo] decided only a month ago to recommission the trains....Two of the locomotives and 12 of the tourist cars have been moved to the zoological gardens. The third engine was started there yesterday." Next, an *Oakland Tribune* news item of July 15, 1941 reported that the layout at the Zoo Gardens was almost ready and that service would start about August 1, 1941. So, these reports indicate that MacDermot moved out of his family home during or after November 1940.

As stated in last month's article, the Zoo railroad was running in May 1942 when Warren K. Miller and friends rode on it. Other indirect clues suggest that it may have been operating into 1943, when poor attendance at the Zoo and MacDermot's increasingly unsociable interactions with the Zoo management brought the operation to an end. One of Miller's photos from his 1942 visit shows several passenger cars stored in a field at the Zoo.

So, if MacDermot lost his family home in 1940 or 1941, then where did he live during the next few years? And, when did he move, or was taken by friends, to the Cupertino-Los Gatos-Campbell area?

A brief memoir written by Charlie Hoyle says that the Hoyle family took MacDermot into their care at their house in Los Gatos. (This memoir was reprinted in the Nov. 1996 SPRS newsletter.) Another report says that MacDermot was taken care of, for at least part of his final years, by Billy Jones. As described in last month's article, MacDermot did participate in Billy Jones' Golden Spike ceremony for the Wildcat Railroad in October 1943.

Another item I have been given about MacDermot's very last years shows that he was still dreaming and planning to operate the Overfair equipment again, despite his rapidly deteriorating health. An article in the *San Jose Mercury News* of Jan. 5, 1947 is entitled "\$250,000 Miniature Railroad Seeks Chance to Do Stuff in San Jose" Excerpts from Ralph Condon's story reveal MacDermot's continuing dedication to his trains.

"In a vacant lot near Campbell stands \$250,000 worth of miniature steam locomotives, cars and equipment which their owner hopes may some day soon see use in San Jose's Alum Rock Park. ... The owner, L. M. MacDermot, who designed and built them in his own Oakland shop removed the machined parts and packed them in grease 30 years ago [after the Fair]. The boilers and the rest of the equipment, still as good as new, stand painted and ready for assembly if the call ever comes to use them again. ... MacDermot himself drove one (engine) at 43 miles per hour along the Marina during the busy days at the fair. ... Whether or not these little trains go into service again in the near future is a matter which now rests in the hands of the San Jose City Council. MacDermot has filed a request here to install this equipment with three-quarters of a mile of track in the lower end of Alum Rock Park." (We may assume that the reporter received this information directly from MacDermot.)

This plan never came to pass. It may well have been his last attempt to run the trains again. On February 22, 1948, Louis M. MacDermot died.

Note: Much of the preceding information has already appeared in earlier articles, but I am trying here to collect and summarize what I have learned about MacDermot's last years. Any corrections, verifications, and further information to fill in the gaps will be appreciated. This and the earlier articles complete what I have found or been told about MacDermot's life. Thanks for all your help, articles, leads, reminiscences, etc. LCH.

## Observation Car

Smith, Swanton and Bygone Days  
by Hart Fairclough

In last month's article an attempt was made to set the background of my association since 1937 with respect to Al Smith, Swanton and trains. It's difficult to put anyone's life into unique time periods. However, in regard to Swanton, Al's life could be thought of as follows: Swanton before Al (circa 1890-1921), Scouting at Swanton (1922-1941), acquiring Swanton lands (1944-1979), creating the Swanton Pacific RR (1979-1987), and finally Cal Poly comes to Swanton (1988-1993).

The first quarter of a century in the Swanton area should hold importance to us, because much of that period ties in closely to our life here now. In writing about this first time period, please bear in mind that my memory will be accurate on some points, but weak and maybe inaccurate on others. (e.g. in the April article I said that Orchard Supply in San Jose was on the SF to LA main track. Error: OSH was on a trunk line serving various warehouse, etc.) Besides information found in Lou Haughney's OSH caboose collection of historical materials, I've added some items or clarification's based on interview conversations with Ken Robison. Ken has a familiarity with the area from the early 1920's on. He was among the first Scout campers at Swanton, and moved up to be in key leadership roles in camp operations and as camp director until the camp was destroyed in the great winter flood of 1940-41.

The early settlement was named after Fred Swanton, a prominent promoter before the turn of the century. He was well-known for planning and promoting the Santa Cruz boardwalk and casino. The town was small, but gradually had a hotel, post office, fish hatchery and even a spur of the Ocean Shore Railroad.

Logging operations began in the Swanton area of the Santa Cruz Mountains, by the San Vicente Lumber and Mill Company around 1906-07. They logged the areas surrounding Scott Creek, Little Creek and Big Creek. The railroad for hauling out the logs was built along Little Creek starting from the trunk line from the Ocean Shore RR that ran north from Santa Cruz to Scott Junction near Davenport. Just across the bridge near the present entrance to the Swanton Pacific area is a mile long road built on top of the old San Vicente roadbed. Even today some of the old ties still show through on the road. At the end of this first mile, Little Creek is joined

road. At the end of this first mile, Little Creek is joined by the water from a creek flowing down Chandler Gulch to the right. At the junction of the two creeks was the main camp of the logging company. Many years later it was to become the last Swanton campsite of the Santa Clara County Boy Scouts. From this main camp area, the railroad continued further on up and around the area to some 5 or 6 other temporary camp sites as the logging operation moved from one area to a new one as areas were logged out over the years. In Al's OSH office caboose is a map of the area, showing various camps, and the route of the two old Shay engines that hauled the logs down to the connection with the trunk line off the Ocean Shore Railroad. From there the logs went to the company mill in Santa Cruz.

By 1920 Ocean Shore Railroad folded up after business diminished because they never hooked up with the line from SF that stopped below Half Moon Bay. Ocean Shore sold their track line from Santa Cruz to the San Vicente Company. Ironically, it didn't help San Vicente very long because their Swanton area was getting logged out and in 1923 they closed their local operation and moved to the Sierras.

During the above period of time, Al's family was getting familiar with the Swanton region. Grandfather Smith first came to visit the area before the turn of the century. In the years that followed, he exposed Al's father to the enjoyments of this remote little valley tucked away between the mountains and so close to the ocean. As a result, Al's parents became fond of the area also. Thus, during the twenties, the sons Al and Loren, daughters Frances and Lois, grew up taking occasional trips through the Santa Cruz Mountains for picnic outings around the Scott Creek area. By the time Al reached Scout age, Swanton was a familiar place when he joined Los Gatos Troop 39.

-- to be continued

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## Neil Vodden

A friend of the Swanton Pacific Railroad passed away recently and following is what was printed in the San Francisco Chronicle on Monday, April 14, 1997

Neil Vodden, a retired railroad engineer who was a master of the nearly lost art of operating steam locomotives, died of cancer Tuesday at 71.

He was a man whose work was also his passion. He worked in railroading for more than 40 years, and after his retirement, his avocation was to operate a restored 1925 Southern Pacific steam locomotive for the Golden Gate Railroad Museum in San Francisco and on trips up and down the Peninsula.

"The museum became his family," said Michael Mangini, the organization's executive director. Mangini said Mr. Vodden was able to coax maximum performance out of SP engine 2472, which was a year older than he was. He had a complete understanding of the huge and complex machine, Mangini said. "He was the master. He could run a steam engine as if it were a musical instrument."

Mr. Vodden grew up in Los Gatos near the railroad tracks and, like many another boy, became fascinated with trains. Unlike most, he never got over it. He went to work for the Southern Pacific in a roundhouse on the Peninsula in 1944, servicing steam engines. Later, he became a locomotive fire man and in 1952 was promoted to engineer. Mr. Vodden was an engineer on the commuter trains between San Francisco and San Jose, a bitter sweet time for him because his beloved steam engines were being phased out. Later, he ran diesel locomotives, and when he retired in 1986, he was a senior engineer on Amtrak's Coast Starlight passenger train. "The railroad was his life, said Severn Edmonds one of his friends.

Not long after he retired to his home in Scotts Valley, the Golden Gate museum restored SP engine 2472, which had been on display for years outside the San Mateo County Fairgrounds. Mr. Vodden was at the throttle on May 1, 1991, when it ran for the first time under its own steam in 34 years.

He ran the engine many times since on its occasional trips as far afield as Sacramento and on the CalTrain to San Jose and Gilroy. Before he died, he made a video to explain the secrets of steam locomotives to aspiring engineers.

Mr Vodden, who never married, is survived by a brother, Jack Vodden, of Los Gatos.

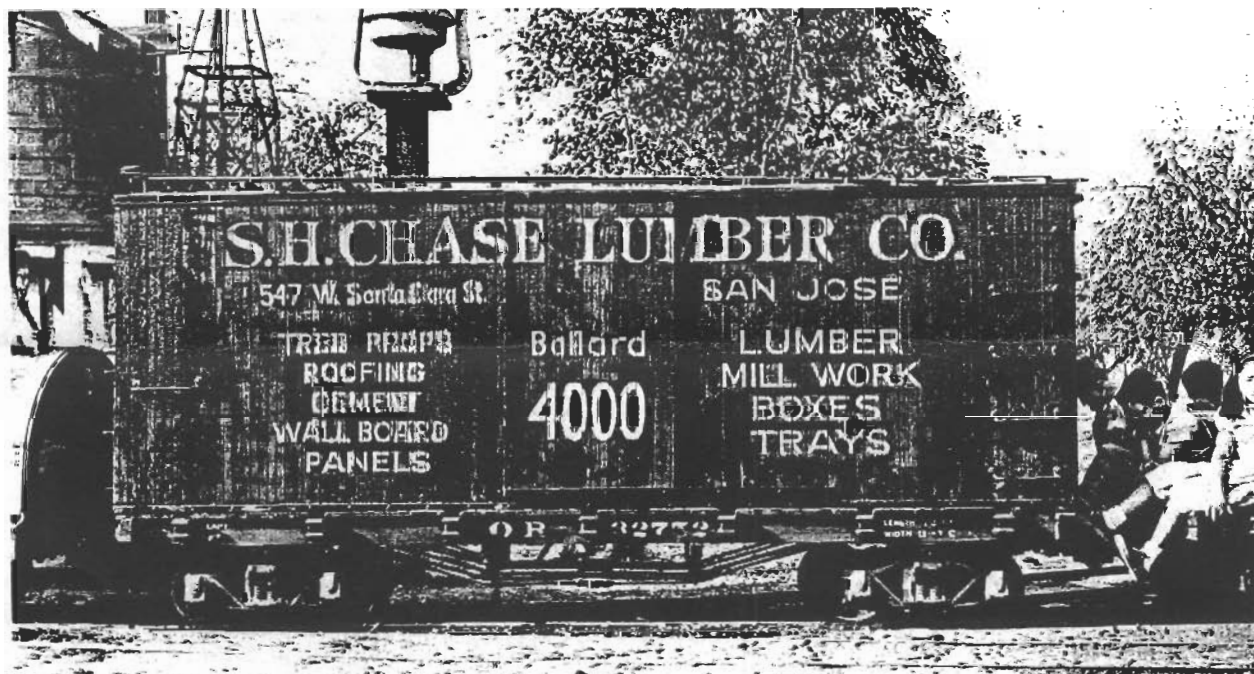
There will be a memorial service later this year during one of the engine's trips.

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

Photo by Warren K. Miller  
(This was the photo missing from  
last months newsletter)



Overfair RR boxcar #32752 at Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad  
The truck axles were changed to operate on the Wildcat's 18-inch gauge tracks  
Photo from the Library of the California State Railroad Museum

Submitted by Lou Haughney



**Calendar**

May 7 ..... Cal Poly work evening  
 May 10 ..... SPRS workday  
 May 24 ..... SPRS workday  
 June 7 ..... Cal Poly Day (run)  
 June 11 ..... Cal Poly work evening  
 June 14 ..... SPRS workday  
 June 28 ..... SPRS workday  
 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

**Swanton Pacific Railroad Society  
 Executive Board**

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 (408) 257-2683

**Swanton Pacific Ranch Railroad Day**  
**Swanton Pacific Ranch**  
**Saturday, June 7, 1997**

The College of Agriculture is pleased to invite you to our annual train ride, barbecue and view of the Swanton Pacific Ranch in Davenport on **Saturday, June 7, 1997**. Dr. Walter Mark, Director of Swanton Pacific Ranch, will present an update of the College's activities at the ranch.

Those who wish to do roundhouse railroading involved in firing up a steam locomotive (or who wish to just watch) should arrive about 9 a.m. The first train run will be at approximately 11 a.m. and runs will continue until barbecue time, which is scheduled at 12:30 p.m.

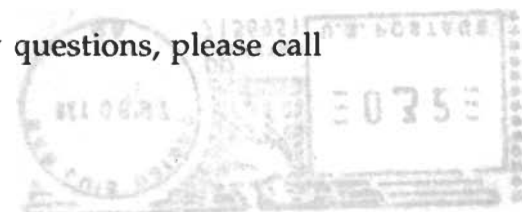
If you haven't visited the Swanton Ranch before, be assured that you will enjoy seeing the steam engines, diesel engine, crane car, roundhouse, turntable, machine shop, and beautifully laid-out 1-1/2 miles of track, **AND** experience an exciting train ride.

Van tours will be conducted so you will be able to see the spectacular view of the ranch from the high ground.

We will need an accurate head count for the barbecue by Monday, June 2th. Please return the bottom portion of this invitation, along with a check (\$12/adult and \$6/child) to cover expenses for the barbecue and refreshments, to:

Ed Carnegie  
BioResource & Agricultural Engineering Department  
Cal Poly State University  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407

Tickets will held for you at the Swanton Ranch. If you have any **questions, please call** Ed Carnegie at (805) 756-2620 or (805) 995-3659.



Hope to see you at Swanton!

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Name (s) -----  
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Address -----  
& Phone -----  
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----- Yes, I (we) will attend  
\_\_\_\_\_ Number of adults  
\_\_\_\_\_ Number of children  
\$\_\_\_\_\_ Check enclosed - Payable to Swanton Pacific Railroad