



## SWANTON PACIFIC RAILROAD SOCIETY

Number 51

June 1997

### All Aboard !!

Our workdays for June are Wednesday evening, **June 11th.** at Cal Poly, starting @ 6:00 P. M. and at the Swanton Ranch, Saturday morning, **June 14th.** and Saturday morning, **June 28th.** starting @ 9:00 A. M.

### On Track

with your Director,  
Ed Carnegie

The grass planted in the meadow last month is doing great. You will have to see it to believe. The meadow is a lush green and looks a lot better than last year at this time. So far people have expressed a desire to set up a miniature golf course, croquet, bocci ball, etc., but it will remain as "just a meadow"!

A few weeks ago, Lud McCrary and crew came down to the meadow to move their picnic tables back to their picnic area for a trail ride. As we were hauling the heavy tables, I mentioned to Lud that we would like to build some permanent type picnic tables so that we would not have to move them. His response was, "What do you need?" Well, I immediately made up a list of materials and Big Creek Lumber came through again. The following week when we were back up at Swanton the lumber was ready to be picked up. With lots of help from the construction crew of Tom Vertel, Bill, Linda and Molly Engelman, and Bill McNab we now have 5 new 18 foot picnic tables. The picnic tables were barely completed when Mary Ann had her paint brush out to put three coats of sealer on all the tables and benches.

The track crew has been busy, and since last month we now have another 400 feet of new track. Well, the track isn't new, just the ties. The best thing is that these ties have an under-layment beneath them and have also been raised about 6 inches. This now takes us through to the North switch at Cosgrove. Fred and Tom Vertel recently donated a pair of forks that fit onto the bucket

of the loader. These forks certainly make it a much easier job to load ties on to a flat car.

Fitz and Randy have been working on brakes for the passenger cars and have two more cars with brakes. It won't be very long before all the cars will be equipped with brakes, or at least will have a brake line through them. Our goal is to eventually have a brake line the full length of the train and not just the first few cars.

The round house crew consisting of Marty, John, Geof and Randy have been working on the 1912 and the 1914. You go into the round house one day and the pilot truck is out, and lo and behold the next day it is back where it belongs. Valves and packing were worked on so that the engines are ready for the runs on June 7 and 8 (Cal Poly Day and Red Cross Benefit).

In case some of you are noticing some other improvements around the grounds you should thank several of our members who come down, over, or up on other days than our scheduled workdays. Some of the extra sprucing up can be credited to Bill McNab and Lou Haughney who fertilize, water and tend to the grounds around the roundhouse (i.e. the roses, the other plants, & the newly planted sweetpeas that will provide bountiful color when they decide to bloom). Other areas have also been attended to by both of these gentlemen. Martha has also contributed much to the gardens around the station and cabooses. It always looks so nice to drive into the driveway and see all the color and maintained grounds. The area around the car barn, where trees went down this last winter, and leaves, brush and weeds grew in quite thick, was cleared away and really looks great thanks to Tom and Fred Vertel. I am sure there have been other members that have done work that you may think goes unnoticed since I may not have mentioned you by name, but believe me we do notice things that show improvements. So I apologize for not mentioning you by name, but thank you immensely for all your contributions that all of us do enjoy. Remember that everyone's contributions of time, work, sore muscles, conversation and developing bonds friendships are what makes our trips to Swanton so much fun.

We look forward to seeing all of you at the next workday, Saturday, June 14. There will be plenty of tasks to do.

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## **In the Caboose**

with your Historian,  
Lou Haughney

### THE OVERFAIR RAILROAD LOCOMOTIVES AT DISNEYLAND?

After MacDermot's death in 1948, Billy Jones acquired the Overfair Railroad equipment from the estate for a few thousand dollars. He moved the equipment to his ranch in Los Gatos, where he had built the 18-inch gauge Wildcat Railroad. After changing his rails to the 19-inch gauge, he tried to run the Overfair #1500 locomotive; but, the curves of the Wildcat layout were too tight for the Overfair engine to negotiate smoothly. So, the Overfair locomotives were put in storage at Billy's ranch. However, he was able to use the Overfair passenger cars by modifying their axles and trucks.

In the early 1950's, Walt Disney's dream of building a different type of family amusement park was changing into a definite plan to construct such a park in Anaheim. That park would include a steam railroad because Disney had been a railroad buff since his teenage jobs on trains. His interest in railroads had remained strong through the years. In 1950, he built, with the assistance of the Disney Studio shops, the 1/8-scale, 1/2-mile long Carrolwood Pacific Railroad on his estate in Holmby Hills. The coal-burning locomotive, made in the Disney shops, was a replica of the old Central Pacific locomotive no. 173, built in 1890. It was named "Lily Belle" in honor of his wife.

Somehow, Walt Disney heard of Billy Jones' Wildcat Railroad and particularly of Billy's possession of the Overfair Railroad rolling stock. Apparently, Disney contacted Jones; and, during their contacts, some conversation may have led to remarks about the suitability of using the Overfair locomotives for Disney's railroading projects. (The preceding sentence is conjecture on my part; what follows is based on the correspondence between Frederic Shaw and Walt Disney as preserved in the archives of the CSRM Library.)

After learning of Disney's interest in the MacDermot locomotives, the Sausalito railroad historian, Frederic

Shaw, introduced himself to Walt Disney in a letter dated Jan., 22, 1954. Shaw identified himself as the author of the book Oil Lamps and Iron Ponies. (This was four years before the publication of his Little Railways of the World). Shaw wrote:

"...A local friend has advised me you have given some thought to the acquisition of the 19" gauge steam locomotives presently owned by Mr. Wm. Jones of Los Gatos, and establishing a line somewhere near your home. I have practically lived with those engines for the past twenty-five years, Mr. MacDermot, their designer and builder and I having been close friends until the time of his passing. Mr. Jones and I are very good friends also.

"I would like to inquire as to whether or not you would be interested in talking over the with me a possibility of my taking over for you the engineering and architectural aspects of the line you may have in mind..."

[It is not clear as to which "line" Shaw is referring, whether to an addition to the small scale line Disney already had on his estate or to the railroad on the Disneyland park, for which initial planning and design were well underway in early 1954.]

Disney replied on Feb. 10, 1954.

"...I have talked with Billy Jones several times about acquiring his locomotives for use in a project we are contemplating here. Sometime after the first of March, I plan to see Jones again about these locomotives and what sort of arrangements can be made for them. So I am glad to know of your interest in the engines and if we do acquire them, I would then like to discuss the matter with you..."

Shaw responded quickly on Feb. 24, 1954.

"...With respect to the Jones' locomotives, would it be convenient and agreeable for me to meet you at Mr. Jones' home upon the occasion of your visit there next month?"

Shaw included in this letter a copy of "my OL&IP Supplement and a color print of a 9" gauge coal-burning live steamer I built", plus a mention of "my almost-finished CASEY JONES' LOCKER".

Disney wrote back on March 17, 1954.

"...I have been under such heavy pressure since my return from the West Indies where we were shooting exterior locations on Jules Verne's "20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA" that, frankly, I haven't even had time to think about getting up to see my good friend, Will Jones.

"It would be nice to meet you at Will's place, but I cannot tell you now just when I will be able to get away...I want to see Will very much and I'll make it at my first opportunity...."

Shaw replied quickly on March 25, 1954 that "a week-end meeting with you at Will Jones' place is quite agreeable". Shaw goes on to mention that Disney had met "two friends of mine upon the occasion of your visit to Britain". The "friends" were Dr. Jeffrey and George A. Barlow, the latter senior engineer on the Romney, Hythe, & Dymchurch Light Railway.

No further correspondence between Shaw and Disney appears in the CSRM files until Shaw's letter to Disney dated Sept. 21, 1954, a stiffer and much more formal letter than his earlier ones, which had included many references to Shaw's books, health, and mutual acquaintances.

"In the belief you still have an active interest in the old MacDermot Panama-Pacific International Exposition 19" gauge locomotives presently owned by "Billy" Jones of Los Gatos, I am presuming to send you under separate cover a print each of the two drawings I recently completed of the No. 1913 Pacific type 4-6-2 and the No. 1500 switcher 0-6-0T. These are the result of many trips on my part to Mr. Jones' home to make measurements and photos and un-numbered hours on the drawing board. I hope you will enjoy their perusal.

"It was understandably a disappointment that I failed to have any connection with the railroad project of your in-being Disneyland. But I want to record in all sincerity my belief you couldn't have picked a better man than Dick Bagley. He will do a capital job..."

So, in this letter, Shaw suggests that Walt Disney was interested in using or copying the Overfair Railroad for

the Disneyland project rather than for his private estate. Note that this letter describes how Shaw made those excellent "engineering drawing" profiles of #1913 and #1500 that appear in his book LROTW, the Railroadians' calendar, and in various later reproductions.

Does anyone have any recollections or "hearsay" about this Jones-Shaw-Disney connection? Did Disney ever come to Billy Jones' Wildcat Railroad to look at the MacDermot/Overfair equipment?

Many intriguing speculations come to mind in considering the possible use of the Overfair locomotives at Disneyland, particularly when one looks at the magnitude of the Disneyland operation over the past 40+ years. Would the MacDermot Pacific locomotives have been able to survive the daily, heavy duty service since the Park opened on July 17, 1955? Would the 19-inch gauge Overfair equipment, particularly the passenger cars, have been adequate to accommodate the thousands of daily passengers on the mainline Disneyland Railroad? Note that Disney adopted a 36-inch gauge track for that service. Maybe, Disney was considering the Overfair trains for service on the Mine Train through Nature's Wonderland, which ran in the early years, or on the Casey Jr. trains in Storyland. Perhaps, Disney's interest in the MacDermot equipment may have been only as a source of information, experience, and inspiration for both his private estate line and for the Disneyland lines.

Disney and MacDermot's railroad operations have several similarities. Both modeled their locomotives in fine detail after actual, full-scale engines in daily service. Both built their locomotives in their own shops with their own employees; MacDermot in shops erected on his family estate in Oakland, Disney in his Disney Studios' shops in Burbank. Both used skilled craftsmen in executing authentic designs and construction.

Similarities also exist in the backgrounds of Walt Disney, Billy Jones, and Al Smith. All had an intense, lifelong affection for railroading, based upon their direct association with railroads as teenagers and young men. Disney's "interest dated back to his teenage years when he 'rode the rails' selling candy and newspapers on trains rolling between Kansas City and Chicago". (pp. 26-27, Disneyland, The First Thirty Years, Walt Disney Productions, 1985). Billy Jones spent his life career as an engineer on Southern Pacific Railroad, his final years on the SP "Daylight" train. Al Smith worked as an SP brakeman in his early college years. All three realized their dreams of building and operating their own

narrow-gauge railroads; Disney's estate Carolwood-Pacific Railroad and the Disneyland Railroad; Billy Jones' Wildcat Railroad on his ranch in Los Gatos; and, Al's Swanton Pacific Railroad on his Swanton ranch. All were dedicated to preserving and exhibiting authentic examples of steam locomotion, the backbone of the world's land transportation systems over for a century.

NOTE: The cited correspondence between Shaw and Disney is found in the MacDermot/Al Smith files of the Library at the California State Railroad Museum. Thanks to Ms. Ellen Halteman, the Librarian, for pointing out these interesting letters. Much more information in that particular file concerns the Jervis/Shaw/Franklin purchase of three MacDermot engines from the Jones estate in 1959 and their subsequent removal to the Los Angeles region. That story will be told in a future article.

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## Observation Car

Smith, Swanton and Bygone Days  
by Hart Fairclough

Last month's article ended with Al Smith's birth in 1921, the closing of the San Vicente Lumber and Mill Company in the Swanton area in 1923, and the picnic outings of the Smith family from their Los Gatos ranch to the Scott Creek region of Swanton in the twenties.

In 1920, UC Berkeley somehow got interested in the Swanton area as a site for their Civil Engineering students to practice their classroom knowledge. Around 1921 they arranged to lease the land where the main Swanton Pacific RR buildings exist. By 1922 they had built the metal building, later to be Al's first train building and now known as the machine shop. That summer, Cal Civil Engineering students arrived in Swanton to the summer surveying camp. It's not certain why Cal did not return the next summer. (Could it have been because of poison oak, nettles, or rattlesnakes?) Whatever the reason, Ken Robison said UC agreed to lease the site and buildings to the 4-County Boy Scout Council for use as their first Swanton summer camp. The site was used continuously for the next five years, 1923-1928, during which Ken was a Scout camper. Opposite our "Red House" are two old buildings. The larger served as the mess hall. The kitchen is now part of George de la Torre's residence.

Two indicators of this period are easily seen. Look up at the roof at the back of the far right inside of the old metal building (our machine shop). There you'll see, "BRUCE P. GRISWOLD - 1928." A second item is among the historical items in Lou's collection at the OSH caboose. It is a good photo showing one group that was here during those years, "Los Gatos, 1926 Boy Scouts Summer Camp."

By 1929, the Santa Clara County Scout Council separated from the San Benito, Monterey and Santa Cruz County Councils and purchased almost 500 acres of the area previously a part of the old San Vicente Company. The area contained most of the old San Vicente roadbed along Little Creek and the area at the fork with Chandler Gulch one mile up. This spot at the fork became the next, and last, Santa Clara County summer Scout camp at Swanton. It was called "Arroyo Sequoia" and lasted 12 years until the damage of the big winter flood of 1940-41 made it unusable.

The camping at the new camp site was fairly primitive in its first years. Starting in 1931-32, a kitchen was built followed by a large mess hall in '33-'34. In 1935 Scout Executive McKinley had a cabin built for himself just above the 1935 site of the camp's first swimming pool. Cement for the pool was provided by the Santa Cruz Cement Company of Davenport. It was filled with water from Little Creek, and many of us almost froze trying to pass swimming and life saving merit badges. It was one of the horror experiences of my life. Both cabin and pool are still there. Al used the cabin as his Swanton quarters until he built his new home on the hill in the early eighties.

In those years of 1929-1940, Ken Robison was Camp Director. Al Smith became a Scout in 1932 and was active in the Swanton summer camps until the camp was closed in 1941. During the rest of the year he was part of Los Gatos Troop 39's many weekend camps at the troop's own campsite about 1/4 mile up above Chandler Gulch Canyon. Under Scoutmaster Robison's direction we built a sizable log cabin out of nearby redwoods during the latter years of the thirties.

Because Al was one of the first older fellows with a truck driver's license (orchard life experience), he ended up driving the 1931 Model A Ford truck for mail and supplies between camp and Santa Cruz every summer. During Easter vacation week of 1940, the Santa Clara Council ran a special camping trip to Death Valley and Al also drove the Ford supply truck on that occasion. It was a special event for me when "Big Al" asked me to

ride with him all the way from Darwin Falls, over Walker Pass to the next night's camp spot in the Kern River Canyon. That was the year that Al achieved the rank of Eagle Scout.

-- to be continued

Wanted !!

A visitor at the Al Smith Run in April was noticing the The Railroadian's "Overfair Calendar" on the history display board that Lou Haughney had set up. This person was surprised to see it and stated "he was in the club when they issued that calendar! I have a copy of it at home". Unfortunately, Lou was unable to get his name or address. We are wanting to talk more with this gentleman. Perhaps he had met Frederic Shaw and possibly some of MacDermots "friends". Please contact Lou at the Cal Poly Railroad Day if you know who this person might be or call Lou at home @ (415) 592-2517.

The second person or persons we are try to locate is anyone who might know of any relatives of Louis MacDermot's family. We would love to hear more about Mr. MacDermot's life. Is anyone interested in helping to locate any relatives? If so please contact Lou at the above number.

Calendar

- June 7 ..... Cal Poly Day (run)
June 8 ..... Red Cross (run)
June 11 ..... Cal Poly work evening
June 14 ..... SPRS workday
June 28 ..... SPRS workday
July 9 ..... Cal Poly work evening
July 12 ..... 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 and fourth Saturdays of the month and the Wednesday evening, prior to the second 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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