

SWANTON PACIFIC RAILROAD SOCIETY

Number 57

Dec. 1997

All Aboard !!

Our workdays for December are Wednesday evening, **December 10**, at Cal Poly, starting @ 6:00 P. M. and at the Swanton Ranch, Saturday morning, **December 13** and Saturday morning, **December 27**, starting @ 9:00 A. M.

On Track

with your Director,
Ed Carnegie

Well, now that we are all stuffed and watching our diets (??) we have another workday scheduled on Dec. 13 to work off some of those extra calories from Thanksgiving! Hope all of you had a very nice Thanksgiving and were able to spend it with family and friends.

Last workday we had approximately twenty-eight hardy souls show up for the workday--unfortunately we did **not have** a quorum to finalize our election of officers as **there were only 19 voting members present**. As a result, ballots had to be mailed out to the entire membership and they have been trickling back. We've had a good response on the ballots and they will be counted by a selected group at the next workday when the newly elected officers will be announced.

Work done at the last workday was highly productive in that the following things were accomplished:

- all of our existing ties were used up, thanks to some hard work from Tom Vertel
- Elmer's track crew ballasted, leveled, and aligned track from where we left off last month, to just short of the San Vincent Junction
- Tom, Art, and myself, were faced with the task to remove the rock baskets from Scott Creek that were placed last winter to protect the bank from erosion. It appears that galvanized wire is foreign to the creek and is not allowed under the direction

of fish and game

- the roundhouse crew, under the leadership of John Tomlin, washed out the boiler of the 1914, while Marty Campbell and Bill McNab used up all the paint we had on hand to "lighten-up" the roundhouse ceiling. More painting is needed, but we need to obtain more paint.
- Randy put in a good day's work on the turn-table
- the carbarn crew, under Fitz, fine tuned some of the brakes on a few of the cars
- Tom and myself, on the following rainy days worked in the carbarn and started re-gauging one of the covered Vertel cars
- Lou, our historian, quietly worked away in the caboose, and added a new picture of the 1912 which was given to the railroad society by Elmer Stone. If you haven't been in to see the caboose be sure to check with Lou or myself. The historical display is really quite interesting and Lou has done a great job.
- the grounds crew worked on the hillsides between the rail and the horseshoe pits cleaning and planting, and in addition planted a lazy "SP" in boxwood.

At the end of the workday we all adjourned to Al's house and had a delicious dinner brought to us by Fred Vertel. A special thanks is extended to Martha for allowing us to use the house--it was a lot warmer than the meadow, now that the days are shorter and the evenings more brisk.

"LIONS, TIGERS & BEARS, OH MY!, LIONS, TIGERS & BEARS, OH MY!"

Earlier in the month, Tom and I built a bonfire to keep warm and to get rid of some of the wood that we didn't need or want. As the fire was getting low, Mary Ann and I decided to go clean up, so we left for the redhouse, leaving Tom to watch and tend to the fire. On our journey up to the house, we heard some strange noises from around Little Creek Bridge, but we kept going, even though it did sound somewhat like a pig or a bird. Upon our return to the fire, Tom was wild-eyed with a red hot poker in hand. "Whoa," we said, to which Tom

across the meadow it was being chased by a rather large mountain lion! Yes, a mountain lion, and one with a long tail. They both went across the tracks and disappeared in the brush, heading towards Swanton Road." So far this is the second sighting of mountain lions by the railroad group, so beware. We've been told that if you face a mountain lion, don't run, don't cowl, don't be aggressive, stand erect and they should go on by!

Reminders:

If you are planning to stay in the red house either Friday or Saturday, let me know and I will try my best to have your reservation taken care of. Please let me know a few days in advance. We are responsible for cleaning up after ourselves and to take home anything we bring in.

For New Year's Eve we will be having a potluck before the train rides begin. This really is going to be a "pot-luck", in that you bring the pot with whatever you feel like bringing, and the luck is that hopefully we will not all have beans to eat! We will all be getting the engines and cars ready during the day and will plan to eat shortly after it gets dark. We hope you are able to come as the evening is always a lot of fun for the families.

Being the last newsletter of 1997 I want to express my sincere thanks to all the members that worked so hard and accomplished so much during this past year, Our organization and its accomplishments would not be possible without your support. Mary Ann and I would like to wish everyone of you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. As always we look forward to working with all of you in the coming year and to continue to have our friendships grow.

In the Caboose

with your Historian,
Lou Haughney

NEW MATERIAL IN THE SPRS HISTORY FILES

While reviewing the historical material already on hand, I continue to find new and interesting "odds and ends" type of items about the history and the personalities associated with the Overfair/Swanton Pacific Railroad. These will be presented as short articles during the next few months.

Meanwhile, new material keeps being discovered and sent to us. In particular, the past few months have brought many more items from Al's relatives as they go through their collections and, especially, through Al's

houses. For example, Al's collection of snapshots, some with negatives, have been found, about 200 or more. These had been sorted by time or event, probably by Al, and put into 5x7 envelopes; such as, Charles Hoyle's photos of locomotives, the flood of 1982, transfer of the Calistoga equipment to Swanton, delivery of the 502 diesel, etc. All of these are waiting to be identified and put into albums. Most valuable of the collection are about a dozen snapshot photos, with negatives, of "MacDermot's personal pics, home, boat, etc". Copies made from the negatives will be displayed after consultation with the original processing firm, a family run photography studio still operating in San Francisco. Several wooden patterns for locomotive and car parts have been found in the SPRS shop and car barn. They are marked with "L.M.M." and a pattern number. It would be interesting to match these patterns with the MacDermot drawings.

Help in going through all this material and arranging it for display in Al's caboose will be most welcome.

EIGHT MacDERMOT LOCOMOTIVES???

A MacDermot drawing of 1914 indicates that he was hopeful, or dreaming, of building eight locomotives, one switcher and seven Pacifics. The drawing, no. C-122, is entitled "Boiler, Number, & Name Plates/All Engines"; it is dated 6-17-14. The instructions to the machinist read:

Front End Number Plate

Brass Patt. #L.B. 354 1 required per engine
Plates to be numbered 1500, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1911,
1912, 1913, 1914, 1915

Note that the drawing was made in mid-1914 when the building of nos. 1500 and 1912 to 1915 was well underway. We have often speculated that the selection of the numbers 1912-1915 was related to the years in which he was building them. However, design and fabrication of these engines did not start until mid-1913, according to the drawings remaining in the CSRM and the SPRS files. So, what is the significance of his assigning numbers 1912 to an engine that was built in 1913-1915 and then numbers 1908 through 1911 to engines that were not made? And, how firm were his plans, or hopes, of building the additional engines? This drawing is the only reference I have found so far in regards to these additional MacDermot locomotives.

A FULL-SCALE LOCOMOTIVE IN MacDermot's BACKYARD???

An old newspaper clipping found in Al Smith's memorabilia contains new and intriguing information about how Louis MacDermot built the Overfair locomotives. The clipping tells mostly about settling the estate of the mother, Mrs. Flora Main MacDermot, who died in October 1914. The clipping does not have a date nor does it identify the newspaper in which it appeared. However, the context of the report indicates that it was written in December 1914 because of its reference to the approaching holiday season.

The brief and puzzling description of how Louis built the locomotives is as follows: "...Louis MacDermot is of mechanical turn and has a concession at the Exposition requiring locomotives and other railroad rolling stock. So he bought a locomotive and established a machine shop in his back yard and thereupon proceeded to tear the locomotive to pieces and put it together again...."

As reported in previous articles in this newsletter, other sources say that MacDermot used the SP 2450 series of Pacific locomotives as his prototype. Unfortunately, the newspaper article does not identify the type or size of the locomotive that Louis is supposed to have bought. Well, if it were a full-scale Pacific 4-6-2 locomotive, that would have been quite a feat to haul it to his backyard, disassemble it, and then reassemble it. Also, if that did occur, then one can understand the reactions of Louis' older sister and younger brother as reported in the article: "... Mrs. [Flora Macdermot] Proctor had moved from the family home, 1408 Eighth Street, Oakland, to the Claremont district shortly after her mother's death. Alfred, a younger brother, went with her. Apparently Brother Louis was too noisy for them. " [A second sister in the family was Mrs. Mary Crawford.] The more I think about it, the more I wonder how the MacDermot neighbors liked having a locomotive factory in their neighborhood. But then, "The MacDermots are one of the wealthiest pioneer Oakland families". Mrs. MacDermot's estate was estimated at \$2,000,000. So, they could probably do as they pleased on their property. This account of Louis' buying, disassembling, and reassembling a locomotive will have to be verified. It sounds fantastic, but it may be true! Has anyone heard about this from other sources?

(Thanks to Martha Neilsen for rescuing this clipping.)

Observation Car

Smith, Swanton and Bygone Days - #9
by Hart Fairclough

Last month's article #8, left off with 3 paragraphs of notes taken while Al Smith was driving an 80 year old former worker at the old San Vicente Lumber Company, Verne Clifford, on a jeep ride around Swanton.

Back at Al's cabin after the ride, Clif had fun looking at some of the old logging photos that Al had collected of the San Vicente Company. Many of these are now in our SPRS history collection in Al's old office caboose. One in particular was a great photo of San Vicente personnel at one of their sites. Clif was able to identify some of the men he recognized and what they did. One other item came up when Al was telling him about Billy Jones and the Wildcat Railroad in Los Gatos. Clif said that the Jones family came from Boulder Creek and that he remembered Billy Jones when Clif was about ten. Billy was conductor on the SP running from Santa Cruz into Boulder Creek. We finally drove Clif home after a memorable day together with Al.

The business at OSH reached the point where Al felt he could retire and have the money to pursue his fondest dreams. In 1979 when W.R. Grace Company bought the Orchard Supply Hardware Company, Al stepped out, but maintained some contact with OSH and the new management as a consultant for a few years. Al moved quickly in two areas: a real train and more land in which to establish his own railroad. This led to the purchase of over 3,000 acres adjoining his present property. The flat land provided the space for the present Swanton Pacific RR operation. The rest of the adjoining croplands and hill areas added to the possibilities of Cal Poly's future program when Al made his tremendous grant to the University.

His next move occurred in Calistoga, CA, where he purchased two of MacDermot's trains and equipment that were from the 1915 Pan-Pacific Fair held in San Francisco. Al was aware of these one-third scale trains because he knew of them when they had been stored on Billy Jones' property in Los Gatos. When I first heard what was going on, I was excited and anxious to help on some of the projects Al would face in launching his railroad. However, the distance to Swanton and my two jobs only allowed time to get in on three of the early operations. On August 29, 1979, Betty and I drove to Calistoga in time to see Al and Greg Jones finish loading the 1913 and 1912 tenders onto a long flatbed truck and take some photos. We missed out on the moving of the engines and all the rest of the Calistoga railroad equipment.

The first train shed was to be the old UC built metal building which is now the SPRS machine shop. Betty and I were able to drive down and help on the cleanup project. The inside of the building had all the mud, silt and debris from both the floods of '40 and '55. First Al had to run the tractor around the outside of the building, knocking down and clearing shoulder high weeds, debris and overgrown brush. Then we went inside. What a mess! Besides the flood material 6 to 12 inches deep, there was a rotted wood floor and rat nests. We spent the rest of the day shoveling it out and raking it level enough for Hal Bianchi to put in a cement floor after proper 19" placement of rails was done to accommodate the engines, tenders and some cars.

There are many other items that could be recorded in these articles. However, some are more personal, such as my repeated trips of 1/4 mile between two campsites for striped paint, or how the huge boulder was on top of the opening of my sleeping bag so I couldn't get out one morning in Kern Canyon. These are good campfire stories, but don't belong here because, although Al was there both times, I can't prove to what extent he was involved. Such things were well-kept secrets.

-- to be continued

Christmas Gifts

It has been "observed" that a lot of people working for the railroad have been looking pretty sharp lately. We have noticed that they are wearing some very classy looking sweatshirts, t-shirts and some fantastic looking hats.

Did you know that the Swanton Pacific Railroad has these items for sale? Check out the following inventory list. These would make excellent Christmas gifts for that special person, being it you or someone else. (the pins make great stocking stuffers) These items will be available at our December workday at Swanton.

- Hats-green \$7.00 ea.
Youth & adult
- Hats-embroidered \$15.00 ea.
Adult
- T-shirt \$10.00 ea.
S-M-L-XL-XXL
- Knit shirt \$25.00 ea.
S-M-L-XL-XXL
- Sweatshirt \$35.00 ea.
M-L-XL-XXL
- Jacket-embroidered \$90.00 ea.
M-L-XL-XXL

- Pins with SPRR.... logo \$5.00 ea.
- SPRR Belt buckles
member \$10.00
non member \$15.00
- Membership \$25.00/yr.

Calendar

- Dec. 10 Cal Poly work evening
- Dec. 13 SPRR workday
- Dec. 27 SPRR workday
- Dec. 31 New Years Eve Run

Thanks

Back in January of 1992 the first meeting of the SPRS was held at Swanton. I remember sitting down at the picnic tables that day as we planned our future. Who knew that we would succeed in accomplishing all that has been done to this day. This is the 57th issue of this newsletter. As I read back in past issues I realize that so much has been done to make it such a wonderful place. Everyday at Swanton has been special with fond memories. They have been special because of the people that I have had the pleasure of working with. I have met a lot of friends that I hope to be associated with for many years to come.

Putting this newsletter together each month and getting it mailed out has been a lot of work, but it couldn't have been done without the support of other members, especially those who submitted their articles to be printed.

Thank-you to everyone who has made these past years at Swanton so special. I look forward to working and visiting with you at the next workday. Jim Matheny

MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY NEW YEAR

Since this is the last newsletter of 1997, we would all like to wish you HAPPY HOLIDAYS, and hope 1998 will be a prosperous new year.

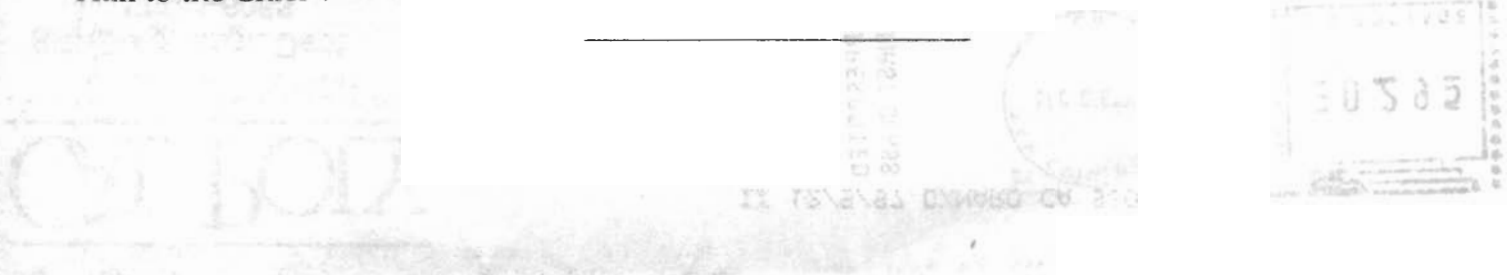
The following card was sent to the Hart Fairclough family back in 1973. We thought it appropriate to share it with everyone. I know that if Al was with us today we all would be receiving a card like this.



from
Al Smith

We also want you to remember Al Smith. It was four years ago this month that he passed away. If it were not for his visions, this whole railroad would not be what it is today. It is wonderful that this piece of history can be enjoyed by so many people from all over the world. For the generous donations, and to all of the hard work he put into this railroad, we say ...

"Hail to the Chief!"



BRUCE & CHRISTINA

BY