

Truckee Railroad Days and Going Home

By Doug Morgan

Truckee, as a railroad town, at the turn of the 21st century is far cry from the Truckee of the turn of the 20th century. Gone are the vast 360-degree roundhouse, car shops and other facilities. Gone is the Hobart Southern Railroad that hauled lumber from Hobart Mills to Truckee for interchange with the Southern Pacific.

But Truckee is still a helper station and locomotives are constantly on the wait occupying the ready tracks for the next train needing help up the hill.

On this certain weekend the helper tracks were bare of helpers and instead the equipment from the Portola Railroad Museum occupied those tracks.

September 09, 2000 dawned with a cobalt blue sky over Truckee, CA. Driving down the hill from our motel, laid out before me was a sight to behold, fourteen pieces of PRM locomotives and cars arranged in a certain way. From my vantage point, it was incredible.

I picked my way through the traffic for a rendezvous with the docent crew assembled to take visitors through the equipment. We all met at the Wagon Wheel Cafe owned by Railroad Days Equipment Procurement Manager, Siophan Smart. There we went over the rules of docent assignment, had a terrific breakfast and then went on our way to the Railroad Days area.

There was still much to do. The display sign stands hadn't arrived as yet but soon did courtesy of a local Construction Company, who donated the labor to weld the stands together. Steps to the Silver Hostel were being erected while the signs for the sign stands were being installed by Vic Neves, Dwight Wolfinger, Ed Wagner, and Jim Gidley. After assembly, the signs were placed in front each piece. The signs were designed by Eugene Vicknair and will serve as a prototype for all future signs to be used at the museum.

Eugene Vicknair and Eric Stephens assigned themselves to the Silver Hostel. They put up posters, photographs and started giving tours of the car. Visitors would climb stairs on each end and walk through the car. They would stop in front of Eugene and Eric and receive a talk on the history of the Hostel and what the museum plans to do with the car. In some ways it reminded me of a walking tour of the "Titanic", but everyone loved it. No glass, no hardware, no seats, no nothing, but Eugene and Eric painted a picture in words of what had been and what will be again. The highlight of that day was the passing of Amtrak's version of the California Zephyr, for in that consist was a former CZ dome car the "Silver Lounge", now named "Sierra Hotel". Visitors in the dome of the Hostel were treated to this thrill as they waved through the glassless dome windows of the Hostel to the passengers in the dome of the Silver Lounge. One can't do that very often.

Meanwhile Janis Peterson and Julie Anderson took on the docent responsibility for the sleeping car, "Edenwold", the lounge car, and the UP business car 105, which were all coupled together. The entrance was the Edenwold and the exit the observation platform of the 105. The system worked great as long as

both ends of the cut had at least one docent to shepherd the crowds.

Up at the front area of the Railroad Days display, a UP engineer was giving tours of the SD-70M locomotive, UP 4167. One could hear the engineer throttling up and down as a demonstration of how the locomotive functioned.

Further back in the cut, Vic Neves, Hank Stiles, Dave Anderson, and Jim Gidley took turns being docents on the 2001 and the 707. Jim Ley became the roving troubleshooter for spot problems with machinery.

Closer to the mainline, the flanger and Jordan Spreader had been set up (wings out) with the SP 4404 in the lead to demonstrate how a flanger/spreader train operates over the hill during the winter. Right next to that display, volunteers from the C.S.R.M handcar racing team had handcar trials underway along one leg of the Truckee balloon track.

On the other side of the grounds a tent had been erected by the Railroad Days Committee for the FRRS. Within, Norm and Barbara Holmes peddled the wares of the museum to a waiting crowd with money to spend.

As the day wore on, the visitors did not. They came and went. We had no way to count the throngs since there was no gate to the event. We could only guess, but could have been in the thousands and thousands for that first day. We noted that we never had so many people in Portola as was in Truckee at a single event.

By the time we closed in the early evening, we were all bushed. Pizza was ordered in for the crew followed by the disbursement of the crew to their respective quarters. Only members of the lunatic fringe stayed for a "night shoot". This involves flash bulbs that have been extinct since the dinosaurs. Someone with good night vision (in this case Steve Habeck) walks around in the dark and sets off the flash bulbs while Mr. Neves opens his camera lens wide. This exercise is repeated over and over usually until they run out of flash bulbs or film, whichever comes first.

Day 2 was much the way as day 1 only we didn't, with one exception, have to set anything up. Eugene Vicknair and Eric Stephens got this idea about opening up the lounge bar in Silver Hostel. A quick run to the local supermarket provided bottled water and soft drinks. It worked very well, maybe because people get thirsty but Eugene and Eric would like to believe that it was the allure of visiting the bar in the Hostel for the first time in 30 years that was the magnet.

The crowds kept coming. They wouldn't let up. At closing time, the crowds had thinned but because there was no fence around the area, people still walked around. We put away the signs and locked cabs and cars and the next day would bring us the re-assembly of our train and more, much more.

In the AM Monday, September 11, some of our crew was still on hand. They included Steve Habeck, Vic Neves, Jim Gidley, and John. UP conductor Willie Burrows with Doug were assigned the task of running the UP 4146 along with the 2001 and the SP flanger to Roseville. But first there was some switching to perform to turn the displays back into a train.

Since the train had been set over to various tracks, it was in disarray for the return trip to Sparks. The 707 was fired up with

Truckee Railroad Days and Going Home

the UP 4167 and the tracks were switched using the 707. When everything was in order, the 707 and the 4404 ran down one of the tracks in the main part of Truckee. The rest of the consist was then folded over onto the 707 and 4404 until it was in the same order as when it first arrived.

Everyone expected the train to be pulled back to Sparks by local helpers returning to Sparks but such was not the case. After Steve checked with the Yardmaster in Sparks, he discovered there weren't any available helpers and that there wasn't any room in Sparks yet for our train. So the train was tied down, whistles removed and everyone went home to await the railroad's decision as to when they expected to move the train. Some rumors placed our wait at anywhere from a few days to a couple of weeks.

The phone rang on September 27. It was Steve Haback. "Better get to Sparks, the train is on the move". Steve had been in Sparks and decided to check in with the Yardmaster to see if there were any updates on moving the train. The Yardmaster told Steve that the train was on the move towards Sparks. I piled into my car and charged towards Sparks from Portola and then turned west up the hill towards Truckee. I met the descending train at Verdi.

After arriving in the Sparks yard, the train was spotted in the Rip Track area. I inspected the train, found it undisturbed and then visited with the Yardmaster to see if he had any ideas on when the next move would occur. He offered the information that the Reno Branch rebuilding job was not yet complete, but as soon as the branch was reopened we would be going home.

The phone rang again on September 29. The voice on the other end was member and UP locomotive engineer Rod McClure, calling for Steve Haback. UP locomotive engineer Haback knew immediately that he had been bumped from the seat of the 707 by a senior engineer. Rod and Steve had been selected to be the crew by Sparks MTO, Dick Green for the return move to Portola.

Steve called me. "Be ready to leave in the morning". Meanwhile, a FRRS member from Southern California and UP engineer Jerry Williams had been in contact with me about joining the crew for the return trip. Also on hand to assist was member and journeyman electrician from Bishop, Ca, Mike Barlow, who was in Portola to assist in some facility wiring challenges. Steve, Mike and I drove to Sparks on Friday morning, September 30. We arrived at 7 AM and found Jerry Williams at the Sparks depot. We also found Richard Green in conversation with Rod McClure. We were told by Richard to head 'em up and move 'em out. Steve indicated that the train was backwards and needed to be wyed. Rod suggested that we move the train to zone 4 to wye and rearrange everything. Richard asked how long this would take. One hour or so was our response. Richard said that he was trying get us out ahead of the Reno local but said under the circumstances, he would let the local go first and when our train was ready, he would let us follow to Parr yard for a meet.

Armed with our plan, we all jumped into our vehicles and headed to the rip track to fire up the locomotives, install horns, and do air tests. By 9 AM or so we had completed our air test and with two short blasts on the 707's horn we started to

move east to the wye. After wying the train, the 244, which had already been fired up at the rip track in anticipation of the switch moves, was put to work folding the train back onto the 707 and the 4404. Car and locomotive by car and locomotive, the 244 pushed and pulled until all the cars were in proper order, then the 707 moved ahead and backed down the west leg of the wye and coupled up the remaining cars behind the 244.

Next the train was moved off the wye and back into the main yard next to the yard office. We then waited for some mainline trains to clear so our train could make the crossover to the Reno Branch. Finally the go ahead was received and with the traditional toots on the horn we were off on the final leg of the journey home. Assigned to the caboose, as usual, Mike Barlow and I watched for any problems from the rear. Meanwhile Steve walked every crossing as we headed up the branch because none of the automatic warning devices (grade crossing gates and lights) had their wiring completed since the concrete tie reconstruction. Up the hill the train ground toward Parr yard. Soon the word came down to put the 244 on line and start pushing. This was done and the train roared up the hill into Parr yard where we came to a halt in front of the yard office. There we waited until we met the local. By instructions from MTO Richard Green, the local was told that if we requested a shove up Peavine Hill, they were to do so. The 4404 wasn't pulling the way it should have so we elected to take Richard up on his offer. At about 2 PM the local was ready. We moved up from the yard to a point where the power from the local was coupled to the WP caboose 484 and with the okay from Rod, the 707 started to pull while the two SP GP 40's started pushing. On and up we moved at a much faster pace. We topped the hill and drifted down to Border Town. There the helpers we cut off and we were on our own again.

Mile after mile we churned along until the hill before Reno Jct. Again the 244 went on line and pushed its heart out to the top of the jct. No stopping here! The 244 kept shoving and the 707 kept pulling hard onto the mainline. Pegging the amp meter in the 707, the train blazed through Chilcoot tunnel. Ahead a red signal directed the train into the Chilcoot siding and to a stop at the far west end. There we waited and watched the sun set. Soon a westbound double stack blew by us at track speed. We watched the double stack's F.R.E.D blink into invisibility and then observed the siding signal turn green. Off we went. It was level from here to home and the train progressed the last 15 miles at the required restricted speed. In total darkness, we at last arrived in Portola only to discover the west pass plugged with the locomotive for the B & L local. Steve decided that we had to clear the main and the depot so he elected to push the B & L locomotive down the track to allow our train to clear. This was done and we tied down the train for the night. It was 9 PM.

Satisfied with a job well done, we had the onerous job ahead of putting everything back in the morning with a deadline of 5 PM so we could set up a special train for local politicos for Saturday evening.

Saturday came all too soon. Steve planned everything to go in a reverse order from the set up to ease the complications of switching. Each cut was the length of the west pass and was to be

Truckee Railroad Days and Going Home

folded over into the museum. The only hitch was that the west pass was plugged with work cars for the UP so it had to be unplugged by putting everything into the museum, then our train to Truckee was set in on other tracks. The UP cars were then pulled and folded back into their respective spots. The rest of the day was spent putting everything back where it belonged. By 5 PM the special train consisting of the VIA lounge car, the UP 105 and WP 707 was complete. Our political guests that evening had no idea how much we had all been through to fulfill our obligation to them.

Truckee Railroad Days took a tremendous effort on the part of lots of members of this museum. To all of them we owe deep debt of gratitude for the generous donation of their time and skills. This organization also owes a dept of gratitude to the Truckee Downtown Merchants Association who thought up and perfected the idea of Railroad Days in Truckee and allowed the FRRS to participate. We also owe the greatest thanks to the Union Pacific Railroad for their willingness to allow our train of oddity to roll over their rails. The officers in charge were of good spirits, possessing a can do attitude. To them and to all that made this event occur, this organization is deeply grateful. WP LIVES! is our motto and when we go beyond the gates we take that motto with us.

Operations Training

A very special weekend for all museum members will be held on Saturday May 5th, starting at 10am and ending in the afternoon of Sunday May 6th 2001. This promises to be a very busy weekend with multiple activities planned. The operating department will hold it's annual rule exam and crew training. We will be showing training videos, there will be passenger train operations, so you can refresh your operating skills, i.e. knock the rust off, yard switching, night operations, (how many of you have done this?) and fire extinguisher training.

This is a chance to meet some of the museum members, renew old friendships and swap stories. We will also be giving the mechanical and facilities departments a big hand with projects they have underway.

Saturday evening prior to the night operations beginning a hot dinner will be served for those participating in this years training.

Scheduling for the 2001 operating season will also take place so start thinking of the dates you would like to mark up for. Please bring a pencil, proper footwear, gloves, flashlight, sleeping as well as personal gear, and an interested friend.

If you would like to help in any area please call Kerry Cochran at 650-952-7127 or email me at KC6NT@compuserve.com

Restoration of Western Pacific Hospital

By Frank Brehm and Eugene Vicknair

As reported in the last issue of The Train Sheet, FRRS now owns the old WP hospital property located in Portola. Because restoration of this historic structure is such a large undertaking a plan of action has been developed to use as a guide during the renovation. As we progress on the project there will be public comment periods which will be used to help create the master plan for this particular site which will also become part of the museums overall master plan. We invite your participation in this exciting new project. Below is a brief description of the project as well as the current action plan. The action plan is subject to revision as needed.

Brief description of the project

In 1914, the Western Pacific Railroad established a hospital in Portola for its own employees and the local communities. This was a common practice of railroad companies at the time, who were among the leaders in providing such benefits to employees and their families. This hospital was located on 2nd Avenue in Portola, on a bluff overlooking the WP locomotive facilities (and today the location of the Portola Railroad Museum). It was a full service facility, providing emergency care, long-term convalescent care, check-ups and physicals, and surgery. It served until 1972, at which point it was sold to a private owner. In early 2001, the daughter of the former owner donated the entire facility to the Feather River Rail Society, operators of the Portola Railroad Museum and the leading Western Pacific Railroad historical group, for preservation. Very few railroad hospitals remain and this is one of the few in the United States to be preserved for historical purposes.

The goal of the FRRS is to return the exterior of the hospital to a historically accurate appearance and create landscaped grounds around it. Inside, the facility would provide several functions to the FRRS and the community:

- Several rooms are envisioned to be restored to historic accuracy to tell the story of the role the hospital played in the railroad company and community.
- One wing is planned to house the archives of the FRRS and allow the creation of a research library for accessing and analyzing these archives.
- Several large rooms in the opposite wing would function as meeting rooms where the society and local community groups could hold meetings and gatherings.

Inspections have deemed it restorable, but desperately in need of care, attention and stabilization as soon as possible. Immediate needs include remediation of asbestos, removal of debris, securing of the buildings and inspection and repair of utilities.

The FRRS has in place a long-range plan for the complete restoration of this historic facility. Long-term fundraising is beginning, but the immediate needs of the structure are great. We must quickly engage specialists to assist in the planning, stabi-