

Second Annual Night Santa Trains

December 4 and 11, 1993

By Gordon Wollesen

The Second Annual Night Santa Trains took place as advertised. Again we ran the train on two Saturday nights.

As usual, Mr. Murphy slipped in the back gate six days prior to the first night of operations. The plan was to string the lights on the cars Monday and Tuesday (11-29 & 30) utilizing students from the Jim Beckwourth and Portola High Schools. Monday it rained hard all day and in the evening it turned to heavy snow. Tuesday dawned clear and very cold; everything was frozen. We could not decorate anything because the cars were covered with ice. Wednesday through Friday was a no-go for outside decorating again because the cars were frozen. Finally, Saturday was good enough to decorate the train. The weather was in our favor -- warm and dry. By train time (5:30 PM) the inside of the engine house was decorated, the Christmas tree was done, the FR&W 1857 decorated and 85% of the cars were ready to light.

At the appointed hour, people started arriving. Santa Claus was ready, the Beanery was well-stocked with goodies and the train crew was in place.

The first night we held the Community Christmas Tree Lighting at 7:30 PM. The tree was located at the center of the engine house clear of all tracks. The tree was not as tall as last year's, and as a result, it was much easier to decorate. The Christmas lights that were strung along the barricades and on the tree looked real good; those that attended the tree lighting were very pleased. When the tree was lit there were cheers and lots of applause.

The Beanery was open both nights to provide free "goodies" to all that attended. Bruce Cooper came up with a plan to heat the Beanery. We purchased a 135,000 BTU propane heater (jet engine style). Even though it was somewhat noisy, the heater kept the Beanery warm (if the door to the engine house was kept closed).

Santa Claus was here both nights. Santa worked the same as last year as far as train operations were concerned. People boarded the train and Santa toured each car giving out candy canes. When Santa finished his tour of the train, he gave the conductor the order to highball. Santa also officiated at the tree lighting ceremony.

Compared to the 1992 Santa train operation, the number of people attending the first night was down to around 400. This is down 50% from 1992. The second night was also down about 50% from 1992 with about 100 people attending. The weather was a big factor. The first night was very cold and icy. Even though it was cold, those that attended had a good time. The second night was stormy; it snowed off and on during the late afternoon. We even managed to finish stringing the lights on the undecorated part of the train before the weather got bad. As soon as train time arrived it started to snow almost continually. By 7:30 PM it was snowing hard causing visibility to be near zero (a whiteout). We made one trip in the whiteout conditions. After the

"whiteout" trip, the superintendent of operations gave the order to shut down all operations for safety reasons. Of course twenty minutes after shut down, it stopped snowing. The second night attendees had a good time even though it was a wet and cold snow.

The gift shop did a brisk business this year with visitors buying Christmas Gift items for friends who like trains.

All in all, I feel that everyone had a good time. There were positive comments heard throughout both nights of the Santa Train Event. Almost everyone asked, "Are you going to do it again next year?" Our answer was, "You bet we are!" I think we have set ourselves in concrete as far as the night Santa Train is concerned. We will definitely do it again and again.

Now is the time for the thank-yous.

The Christmas Tree -- Harvey West (Graeagle Land and Water Co.)

The Beanery Crew -- Sue and Bruce Cooper, Diane and Karena Wollesen, Wendi Hook, Edna Ede, Ellen Housen

The Engine House and Tree Decorating crew -- Skip Englert, Merrill (Turp) Turpin, Hap Manit

The Train Decorating crew -- Dan and Hennie Ogle, Steve Habeck, Mardi and Peter Langdon, Gordon Wollesen

The Providers of the Goodies -- Linda and Clyde Lippincott, The Portola Rotary, American Legion, Soroptimists, The Sorority, Graeagle Lions

The Gift Shop -- first night Barbara Holmes, second night Hap Manit

The First Night Train Crew -- Steve Habeck, Mardi Langdon, Peter Langdon, Ed Warren, Merrill Turpin, Jack Palmer and Gordon Wollesen

The Second Night Train Crew - Steve Habeck, Kerry Cochran, Justin Brewer and Gordon Wollesen. (Ed Warren, Mardi Langdon and Peter Langdon were planning to work, but the snow storm overruled them participating.)

Last but not least, thanks go to Santa Claus (Skip Englert) for taking time out of his busy schedule to help plan the event and to help operate it. And a special thank you goes to Norm Holmes for his support.

Train Show Volunteers, Appreciation

Bill and Melony Evans worked the tables at the LA County Fairgrounds, November 6 and 7, 1993; Norm and Barbara Holmes were in charge of sales at the Model Railroad show in Roseville, November 13-14, 1993; and were helped by Dave and Linda Dewey and Kent Stephens. Norm and Barbara also worked the tables at the GATS show in San Jose, December 11 and 12, 1993. Our participation at the above events helps put our museum in front of the public and the resulting sales help our financial position. We appreciate the efforts of the volunteers who help at the shows. We also appreciate our members buying from us which helps our museum.