



Blue Flag; Freight Car Restoration Department Reports: Winter 1994-1995

All written by John S. Walker

The last time I reported on the progress of the Freight Car Restoration Dept., we had one caboose sitting on blocks in Oroville and another one in Portola with holes in the roof! I'm glad to report that there has been significant progress made on both projects.

Working on these old cabooses has been a lot of fun(?). The learning experience has been phenomenal(!). But, one of the toughest things I've discovered about restoring old things is deciding how far to go, and exactly where to stop. Sometimes it's tempting (and it might even be quicker) to throw everything away and start all over by building a new car from scratch! We no sooner fix one thing than we find something else that we would like to change or repair. And once we're finished, the work doesn't end there. We will have to continue to make quick repairs and little "touch ups" to the cars periodically to keep them looking good after we have finished our restoration work.

SN Caboose is Finished!

For all intents and purposes, the SN 1632 caboose is FINISHED!! The roof has been completely repaired, including a new roof walk. The interior and exterior have been painted and lettered. After a couple of small "touch ups" we will install displays inside and open her up again next spring as a "living" display for the education and enjoyment of our visitors!

It took us a year and a half to complete this project (1600+ hours) and I know that there were many times when there was more doubt and frustration than there was hope and optimism (mostly mine...JSW). But, even though we had to figure most of it out as we went along....we did it just in time for the caboose to operate again on a "Fast Freight" on Railfan Day.

A Special "Thank You" is extended to the following people who contributed their time and talent to the restoration of SN 1632: Clyde Lippincott, Norman Holmes, Josh Astalosh, Joshua Walker, Spencer Pattison, Don Nelson, David Dewey, Wayne Monger, Mardi Langdon, and Nick Tynan. I also need to thank all of the people in the Mechanical Dept. Without the air system, electricity, power tools and carpentry shop, this project could not have been accomplished. Hank Stiles and his people deserve our appreciation for providing the museum with the tools and equipment to do all of our restoration work. Special thanks also go to Hap Manitt for always finding the tool or materials that we needed to keep on working. Hap is probably our biggest fan. No matter how rotten things were going, or how little progress was seemingly being made...Hap was always there with a pat on the back, a smile and words of encouragement. Thanks Hap.

To complete the SN 1632 project, David Dewey is trying to repair the canvas shades that cover the interior of the windows and make new ones for the WP 614 caboose. The seats and cushions need to be reinstalled and the end platforms and steps will need to be painted. Ideally, our interior display will include two or three mannequins placed inside the caboose in period clothing (when I inquired about the cost of these mannequins, I was told that they run about \$250 a piece or more! Do any of our members know where we can acquire some of these at a more reasonable price?) with some of that fake plastic food cooking on the stove. We already have oil cans, hotbox lubrication, train orders, etc. to display inside the caboose. The display will focus on the general atmosphere/living and working conditions of a typical caboose.

I feel that it is important that we utilize our equipment to educate and entertain our visitors. I'm sure I speak for everyone involved in both restoration projects when I say that we didn't do all this hard work just so we could take a picture of it and get our names in the newsletter. Something more important is happening here. The restoration of railroad equipment (or anything else) carries with it the obligation to display the equipment in such a way, that interested visitors can interpret what the equipment was used for, and how the people who used it did their job. Tens of thousands

of people not only worked in these cars-they lived and died in them! It is my long term goal, that the restoration of SN 1632, WP 614 and our other cabooses (even the off line cabooses in our collection) will give our visitors an excellent opportunity to explore the development and use of cabooses on American railroads. I believe that our collection of cabooses at Portola could easily be developed into a **NATIONALLY RE-NOWN** exhibit. Anybody want to help?

WP 614 Caboose

The Western Pacific 614 Caboose is still sitting on blocks, albeit in Portola with fresh coats of paint on the outside and interior!

I need to take a moment here to offer a very special THANK YOU! to Mr. Oliver Elam and his wife Carol of Oroville. The Elam's graciously allowed me to use a corner of their maintenance yard in Oroville last winter to work on the caboose instead of driving all the way to Portola every weekend (saving the restoration crew a lot of time and gas money!). Matt Goings, along with FRRS members David Dewey, Robert Forren, Bill Randolph, Don Clark and myself were then able to come over on Sunday afternoons and put in over 500 hours of work on the caboose. With the milder winter climate in Oroville, we were able to complete the initial restoration which could not have even been attempted under the snow and ice at the museum. There simply aren't that many people out there today who will go out of their way to allow something like this to be done on their property without wanting an arm and a leg and a battery of lawyers to double check the contracts! On behalf of the museum, I'd like to again thank Mr. & Mrs. Elam for their generosity, patience and friendship.

Even though we had the luxury of having the caboose close by to work on last winter, the location did not have power, air, water or lights. All of the restoration work was accomplished using a Honda 650EM generator(!) supplied by Matt Goings.

Most of the work on this caboose involved the removing of all the old dead paint, fungus and mold from the sides. The car was parked under a tree for many years and one side seldom received any direct light. Consequently, a lot of fuzzy green stuff was eating away at the wood. This work was done with an electric grinder and a wire wheel cup. This technique easily removes the dead wood (if you hit a really bad spot-it explodes into a dust ball, right in front of your face). The resulting cavities were painted with straight bleach to kill the dry rot and/or anything else that was growing in there. These bad spots were then filled with Mr. Mac's wood patching compound. Although expensive, (\$12.95 a box) this compound uses a co-polymer which strongly bonds dry loose wood with the Portland Cement filler compound. The resulting patch is...excuse the pun...hard as a rock.

An old electrical junction box and conduit was removed and all of the smaller holes were filled with Fix-All. By the time we were ready to paint, the caboose looked like it had

been used for target practice, there were so many spots on it! Four gallons of white primer made the caboose look like a little country church with a weird steeple. The orange stripe and ends were added next. Here is something that I bet you didn't know. The orange stripe is not the same width across the length of the car. The stripe is actually wider at the windows to include the top and bottom of the window frames, then it tapers back down toward the ends of the car. The difference is about 4-5 inches, so it isn't apparent when you view the entire side of the car. The outline of where the stripe is supposed to be is clearly etched into the outside bracing of the car. But, initially, I painted the stripe evenly across the side of the car just to see how it looked. It looked terrible! I dug out an old picture and stood back and compared the two, sure enough, the stripe didn't look right. So I finished painting the stripe the way it was done before and now it looks great. Silver paint was applied next. Metallic paints take longer to dry, especially this one, 60-90 days for a full cure!

The interior had previously been painted with white latex paint (ugh). We used a power sander to remove this old paint and rough up the wood to give the new paint something to bite into. "Foam (Foamer?) Green" was found to be an exact match to one of the four shades of green we found on the inside of the caboose. The interior was painted by hand because we didn't have enough power to run the paint sprayer and a safety light at the same time. With all the windows masked off, we couldn't spray paint in the dark! Here is where I have to stop and thank Mr. Gary Austin. Although Gary is not a member, he volunteered over 100 hours helping paint the exterior and interior of the caboose!

WP 614 arrived at the museum after a roundabout trip from Oroville to Yuba City, Marysville, Interstate 80 to Truckee and then north through Loyalton into Portola. I made the 18 hour round-trip to pilot the movement north from Truckee to help save some money on the expenses. Armed with a fistful of oversize permits, Amos Heavy Hauling of Gridley, California and Steve Biggs again did the honors with their special freight car moving equipment (the load is suspended between two hydraulic dollies). If you know someone who needs a freight car moved, give the guys at Amos a call. They've really done a great job for us and I highly recommend them (very reasonable rates too, for which we thank them).

WP 614 has been wrapped up in tarps for the winter. The caboose will enter the second phase of its restoration when it is picked up by our newly re-cabled derrick, set on trucks and moved inside the building. Extensive welding is needed on the end sills of the car and we need another new roof plus the addition of draft gear and brakes (Volunteers

The Freight Car Restoration Dept. had a successful 1994! We've learned a lot over the last two years. Our "TEAM" concept of everyone working together on one project at a time has proved successful. Our productivity should increase with the development of a fixed repair and restoration spot inside the museum on track two next spring.

I would also like to take this opportunity to personally thank Norman Holmes for his suggestion that I take over this department. Norm also keeps watch over our projects when I'm not at the museum. I also want to thank the Board of Directors for their continued support of our projects.

Plans for 1995

The completion of SN 1632 and continued work on WP 614 will be our immediate concerns next year. WP 614 will require a lot of time and effort. Again, we will be doing some things that we have never done before. We would also like to repaint at least two steel freight cars next year (we've grown rather tired of working on wood cars!). Again, much of what we accomplish will depend on how much help we get. Much like the U.S. Marines... "We're (still) looking for a few good men." (and women are welcome too!)

In addition to the mannequins mentioned above, we are looking for the following items to assist us in the restoration and presentation of our freight, passenger and maintenance of way equipment:

- A good degreasing agent to remove the accumulated road grime that our cars have collected over the years. We have tried several water based-household type cleaners but these dry out before we can scrub the grime off. There must be a product that we can spray on the car, let it sit for a week and then wash off with our steam cleaner. Anyone have any suggestions?

- We are also looking for any information concerning how the WP Car Dept. built our outside braced cabooses and remanufactured the 15001-16000 series of outside braced boxcars into other types of cars. A set of specifications and plans must have been drawn up by the railroad. Did any of these plans survive?

If you can answer these questions, or would like to volunteer to help with restoration work, call me at (916) 671-9584.

needed!).

In comparison to SN 1632, which was extensively modified by the SN and WP MofW department (for use in the Oroville derrick train), WP 614 is rather spartan inside. Two bunks and overhead bunk beds, a stove and a sink comprise the interior furnishings. This car also has a green tile floor. Was this done by the WP or by one of the private owners?? I've read of many instances where conductors fixed up the interiors of their regularly assigned cabooses (curtains, rugs, etc.) for their own comfort. Can anyone shed any light on this mystery? Since we have so much empty wall space inside, we would like to use this space to display photographs of WP/SN/TS cabooses. We've received some great Tidewater Southern caboose prints and we found Sacramento Northern caboose photos in the CSRM library, but we're still looking for more WP caboose photos; 8x10's or 5x7's are perfect. Please take a look through your collection and help us out.

Other Activities

In addition to working on cabooses, this department also contributed to other projects for the museum and the society. During August, we primed and painted the awnings over the doors on the north side of the building. The paint and primer was left over from the WP 614 project so it didn't cost much. Other projects consisted of helping with the rebuilding of the shower car and participation (helping clean up) in the "Circling the Wagons" event. My brand new pickup truck was pressed into service hauling trash off the Pacific Limited excursion train at Oroville when the prepaid dumpster that was ordered failed to appear!

Another project was sorting through some Western Pacific Car Dept. material that was donated to the museum last summer. Information from this material will appear in upcoming issues of The Headlight. We have also been working on a "Master Plan" for the long term restoration and display of our freight, passenger and maintenance of way equipment at the museum.

One of the more interesting exploits was a safari through the backwoods of the Oroville area by David Dewey and me to find old railroad cars. We found a WP tank car body, a forty foot WP boxcar, three WP-PFE reefer bodies and two passenger cars formerly used by the Bechtel Corporation for their construction trains in the 1930's through early 1950's. One car has been rebuilt into a house. After considerable investigation, we found out that the other car was built for the Ocean Shore Railway by the Holman Car Company of San Francisco. This all wood car really should be preserved. It really doesn't fit into our collection so David and I made some inquiries to responsible individuals in the preservation field. Hopefully, it will soon find a good home.