



Preserving "THE FEATHER RIVER ROUTE"



The Train Sheet

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News from the Feather River Rail Society and the Portola Railroad Museum

History of the Pullman Business-Observation Car WP 106

By Eugene John Vicknair and Doug Morgan

Several years ago, a large, heavyweight passenger car arrived at the Portola Railroad Museum. Privately owned, the car, lettered "MCLX 101" and painted a fading green, is on lease to the FRRS, often resting near the diesel shop where visitors and members pass it every-day. It appears unremarkable from the outside, but this car is anything but. Hiding in plain view at the PRM, this old Pullman is probably the most famous single passenger car from the Western Pacific Railroad and, for a time during the 1950's, was one of the most famous railroad cars in the western United States when it helped gather the blood that saved the lives of countless soldiers wounded in the Korean War.

This is the story of Western Pacific 106, aka Pullman business car "Pioneer", more famously known as the "Charles O.



With a long history of distinguished service WP 106 can be viewed today at our museum. - Frank Brehm

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Sweetwood".

Pullman's "Pioneer"

In 1917, the Pullman Company constructed a new business-observation car for its lease service fleet. Built under speci-

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Why Don't Our Museums Measure Up?

By John A. Craft

I've been corresponding recently with a friend about the definition of preservation. John's contention is that saving the skills once common in railroading is as important as saving the equipment, buildings and infrastructure that we cherish. No argument there; the fear of losing the skills required to overhaul steam locomotives was a real concern of many in the 1960s, which fortunately has turned out to be at least partially misplaced.

But John raised the bar with his statement that train-handling skills were passing away. In a sense he's right - most main-

line trains today are controlled with dynamic brakes, not air brakes, and there's no one left on any railroad with substantial steam experience (remember, steam has been gone for more than 40 years in most locations). Steve Lee has made the point that if full-time diesel engineers are at a loss to handle a long steam-powered train, the postal worker who managed to get enough friends and money together to restore O' Number 999 should not be trusted at the throttle, no matter how much he feels entitled.

But my thought process went on beyond that a bit. Even if we manage to preserve hundreds of working steam locomotives, trainloads of passenger and freight cars, miles of track and

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fication 4490, this car was named the "Pioneer".

The 1917 car was the second in Pullman service to wear that name. "Pioneer" was the name of the original "Market Product" put out by George Pullman's company and was included in the consist of Lincoln's funeral train in 1864. A lot of effort went into making the car, with its rather large clearances, pass through station platforms, bridges, and etc between Washington D.C. and Springfield, Illinois. Sadly, this historic car burned at the Pullman car works in the 1890's. The name must have held some reverence with the company because, unlike other cars that routinely received renames or names from predecessors cars, the "Pioneer" name was not applied again until the 1917 car.

This car was constructed for Pullman's fleet of business cars, a term applied to cars used specially for the service of railroad executives, managers and dignitaries. Its floor plan was the same as other Pullman owned and operated lease/rental business cars of the day, featuring an open observation platform at the rear, sleeping rooms and a galley and dining room. These were always a rare type of car, being used in such specific service, and were often very decorative and comfortable. A railroad could rent them with or without crew and supplies.

In Pullman Lease Service

The new "Pioneer" featured peanut-graining on the walls, a process of simulating wood grain on metal via the use of stains, paintbrushes and other stippling tools, and all the standard business car appointments of the day, including a decorated dining room and five staterooms. The car performed in the lease/rental pool service from 1917 until 1927 when a new car was built for the lease pool and the "Pioneer" name was transferred. The name "Davy Crockett" was then attached to the former "Pioneer" and it retained that name until May of 1942, when the car was sold to the Western Pacific Railroad for \$14,845.48. During this time, the car remained in the same lease service for which it was built. The car never had a number with Pullman since the only cars that the company did number were "Tourist"-type sleeping cars.

Purchase by the Western Pacific

E.E. Gleason, later superintendent of Motive Power for the WP, traveled to the Calumet, IL, shops of Pullman and selected the cars "Philadelphia" and "Davy Crockett" to replace the aging and wood-constructed division superintendent cars 103 and 104. The idea of buying second-hand business cars was not new to the WP as the 103 and 104 had both been purchased from the same Pullman rental pool many years earlier. For reasons unknown (probably a toss of a coin or the whim of a superintendent), the "Pioneer"/"Davy Crockett" received the number of 106 and replaced the 104 as the Eastern Division Superintendent's (Jack Duggan's) car while the 105 (the ex-"Philadelphia") replaced the 103 as the Western Division Superintendent's car.

The "Charles O. Sweetwood"

In the early 1950's, the United States became involved in the war in Korea. At some point early in the conflict, an idea to create a rail-based blood donation center was brought forward. It is uncertain who came up with the idea initially, but it is generally believed to be Gilbert Kneiss of the Western Pacific. It was a stroke of public relations genius and showed the WP in an original and sensitive light. WP 106, formerly the "Pioneer", was chosen for this new service. The Western Pacific decided to rename the car after the first WP employee who had died in the Korean conflict. With the name of "Charles O. Sweetwood" emblazoned on the side of the car and with Mr. Sweetwood's family in attendance at the dedication ceremonies, the 106 was cemented into history in a different way than any other business car. It became the first blood procurement car in the U.S. for the Korean War (it is uncertain if such a car was used in previous wars). While in blood procurement service, the car did maintain its number 106.

By a strange coincidence, when Charles Sweetwood hired out with the WP in 1946, one of his duties as a carman in Elko was to maintain the car that, in 1951, would carry his name.

The dedication on Wednesday, January 10, 1951, was considered one of the most impressive ceremonies to take place on the WP to that date. The ceremonies started after the departure of the eastbound California Zephyr from the Oakland, CA, Western Pacific Station at Third and Washington Streets near Jack London Square. The crowd waited expectantly while the 106 was moved into position attended by 4 nurses, crisply attired in white uniforms with colorful red capes representing the American Red Cross, on the observation platform. The U.S. Sixth Army Band played "America" followed by speeches all around and the introduction of the Sweetwood family. Later the family entered the 106 to make the first blood donations.

Over 25,000 pints of blood were collected on the 106's travels between January of 1951 and November of 1953. The car traveled over 225,000 miles and visited places on the WP where many times no blood donation facilities existed. It even ventured as far east as Pueblo, CO. on the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railway. The 106 also traveled to Ely, Nevada on the Nevada Northern where more blood was collected (345 pints) during the period of March 9th through April 19th that at any other area in that tour. Mr. Sweetwood's mother often rode with the car, occasionally joined by other family members, and regularly was the first to donate blood. An interesting side note is how the blood was transported to blood banks after the donations on board the 106. The railroad used its flagship train, the California Zephyr. Each day the Zephyr would stop wherever the 106 was spotted and collect the blood. How they transported the blood when off the main line is a question yet to be solved.

An article in the Western Pacific company magazine "Mileposts" about the blood donation project refers to the perfect setup that the five bedrooms in the car offered. Four were used for collection while the fifth was reserved for a secretary's use, office space and a testing laboratory. The dining room was used as a canteen where donors were served refreshments while the obser-

Pullman Car WP 106

vation room was used as a reception area. Blood was stored in the refrigerators located in the pantry and kitchen area.

The car also was used as a hotel for the crew and nurses when appropriate hotel accommodations could not be procured in some communities along the railroad.

The Post-War Years

When decommissioned by the American Red Cross, the ceremonies held at the Presidio were as equally impressive as the ones commissioning the 106. Keys were turned back to WP President Whitman from the Red Cross and the "Charles O. Sweetwood" name was removed. Thereafter, the 106 just faded away. It is likely that the car did not return to Elko but remained in Oakland along with the 105.

In June of 1957, the Western Pacific's new self-propelled railcar ferry "Las Plumas" was christened in Portland, OR by the wife of WP President, Fred Whitman. The ship had been prepared for travel from Portland to San Francisco Bay under its own power. Naturally, several officials of the Railroad and a team of mechanical employees were to go along for the adventure and to witness the performance of the new vessel.

However, there were scant accommodations on the ship since it was to be an inland ferry, as service where non-resident crews would mostly man the ship. So to accommodate the passengers, the WP sent an observation lounge car (Western Pacific 653), the 105 and the 106/ex-"Charles O. Sweetwood" to Portland where they were loaded onto the deck of the Las Plumas. It is uncertain how they got to Portland. It may have been on the rear of the Southern Pacific passenger train "Cascade" or they may have been run up the Western Pacific's High Line to connect with the Great Northern for delivery to Portland. It isn't clear how they loaded the cars on to the deck of Las Plumas but it probably was by a rail transfer facility very common in Pacific Northwest. Most transfer grids are 3 or 4 tracks so, with the Las Plumas being designed for S.F. Bay grids, its 2 tracks would have presented a zero challenge. The business cars were used to sleep and feed the riders while the lounge car would be for dining and lounge usage.

Retirement and Resurrection

Both the 105 and the 106 were sold in February 1961. Marty Loomis, noted scrap dealer, purchased the 106. Mr. Loomis modified the car by removing the two staterooms adjacent to the observation room in order to create a larger lounge. Otherwise the car remains nearly unchanged from its 1917 appearance. After the death of Mr. Loomis, its current owner, Mr. Doug Morgan, acquired the car.

The "Pioneer"/"Davy Crockett"/106/"Charles O. Sweetwood" is currently on display at the Portola Railroad Museum in Portola, California. The car is open by appointment and during special events at the museum. The owner is planning a full restoration of the car to its Western Pacific 106 appearance with a tribute inside to its time in service of the Red Cross and the men and women who fought in Korea.

Our Museums

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dozens of stations, and every skill ever learned, what is the result? WHY do we do it? What's the RATIONALE for preservation, whatever the definition turns out to be? The answer, by looking at the results, seems to be "for our own pleasure." Steam locomotives that aren't welcome on their home railroad because of bad relations; railfans who would rather see 4449 cold in Daylight paint than under steam lettered for BNSF; tourist lines that offer a hot ride behind a diesel in a dirty coach; all-day death-march "excursions." They all point to a group of selfish individuals wanting to play trains at the expense of railroads and the public.

Small wonder that while old-car enthusiasts and Confederate Air Force pilots are portrayed as interesting individuals, the media uniformly spin rail enthusiasts as "train nuts" just one whistle-blast away from an all-expense-paid, padded room at the county hospital.

Ever been to a "railroad museum?" Sure, there are a few good ones - the North Carolina Transportation Museum and the Mid-Continent Railway Museum come to mind - but the majority of "museums" are little more than a rusting collection of equipment with no focus and no context. Most organizations either never understood the term in the first place, or didn't change with the times.

And make no mistake - the meaning of the word "museum" has changed drastically since UP and N&W dropped their fires. In 1960 a museum existed to collect artifacts, little more. Standards for exhibits were very low - in the example of an Egyptian exhibit, maybe a few artifacts from a tomb, a mummy, an index card typed with some geologic information, and a prominent "donated by" credit. Contrast that with the Field Museum's Egyptian exhibit of today - a three-level recreation of a tomb, exhibits placed in historical context, artifacts shown in use, interactive exhibits for kids.

There's no sin in simply offering a train ride - if there's a market for it, sell it. But don't dress it up as preservation. A "museum" must be more than a mismatched collection of hardware to be successful. If you want to impress the community, see philanthropic dollars flow your way, and earn the respect of your peers, take the interpretation and education mandate of a museum more seriously.

So how does this apply to the rail museum world? Should all museums look like the California State Railroad Museum? Of course not. But neither should they look like a scrapyard. What's missing is context, the ability to see why that dome car was important. (Pulling it at 5mph on a grown-up branchline behind a switcher isn't the proper context.)

Pick a focus. The best museums focus on their region, although another theme (the streamlined passenger train, the steam locomotive) will work too. If you're museum's in South Dakota and all your equipment comes from Massachusetts, Florida, Arizona and Finland, just WHAT is your "museum" about? If your train ride features fluted-side passenger cars behind a rock-quarry 0-4-0T, what educational point are you trying to make? If your collection is in St. Louis, do you really need a Lackawanna 4-4-0? Why not swap it for something more appropriate to your area?

Our Museums

Clean up your displays. In 1982 I was in Bellevue, Ohio, photographing ex-NKP 2-8-4 765, and spent a few moments around the Mad River & NKP RRHS grounds. No operations, strictly a static exhibit. But every string of cars had an engine at one end, and strings of freight cars had a caboose. In a small space the Mad River group manages to convey quite a lot. Compare this to some of the more notorious collections in the Deep South, where there's no rhyme or reason to the arrangement of equipment.

Show the entire environment. Interpretation is the not-so-new standard in the field. Don't just display a switcher; switch some cars from the proper era, with roofwalks. (And not with radios - make the crew learn proper hand signals.) Don't just offer a train ride - show life at the station as it was, with baggage handling, mail exchange, orders being delivered, a couple of retirees loafing at the depot. Atmospheric, not antiseptic, should be the goal.

Our counterparts in England excel at this. Visit the Ramsbottom station on the East Lancashire Railway, or Damems on the Worth Valley, or Horsted Keynes on the Bluebell. The station area reeks of a period, be it Victorian, Edwardian, or post-war. When trains meet, batons are exchanged, baggage carts are rolled to the guard's van, crewmen share a quick conversation. You feel like you're a part of the period - and you learn a little about the context in which the railroad was a large part of daily life, a context now changed by Motorways, television, and urban sprawl.

And on selected weekends, these lines (and most other "preserved railways" in the UK) pull out all the stops for a "Gala." Extra passenger services are laid on, freight trains are run, sometimes locomotives are hired from other lines or private owners. (Imagine what kind of gala the C&TS could put on with a K28 borrowed from Durango.)

Interpretation and education should be the reason that any museum exists today. And education does not have to be stuffy or classroom-based. It's not giving the construction details of Ol' Number 999, or dry statistics about corporate entities and dates. Explain WHY the East Tennessee & Virginia was built, not just when. Relate WHERE Ol' Number 999 worked, WHAT she hauled, and WHY she was replaced. Note that our agricultural society rapidly became an industrial one after 1918, and that this change fundamentally affected the railroads. Look to Old Stourbridge, Plimouth, and Williamsburg for inspiration.

Let me close with a concrete example. The Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum in Chattanooga, Tennessee, operates a steam-hauled passenger train daily during the tourist season. Both ends of the short run feature stations; crewmen are properly attired in white shirts and black hats and trousers. It's one of the better train rides. But a few of the above ideas - offering a demonstration of the RPO and baggage cars as well as the turntable demonstration, comparing orders at the operator's window - would raise the TVRM experience a notch or two on the Interpret-O-Meter. Maybe many people wouldn't notice - but many would.

And isn't it important that we educate as well as enjoy?

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WPRRHS

By Thom Anderson

Here is an update on the status of the Headlight magazine. Mike Mucklin has completed the work on issue #17. It will go to press in March and be in your hands by early April, if not sooner. I apologize for the extreme tardiness of this issue, and extend my thanks to all of you for your patience.

There are also some changes taking place on the staff. Frank Brehm is assuming the Production Manager duties effective with issue #18. Dave Pires is moving into the Editor position. I am confident these gentlemen will keep the magazine on schedule in the future.

As you read in the previous Train Sheet, the FRRS has acquired the WP hospital site near the Museum. This presents an opportunity to the Historical Society to find a permanent, non-rolling location for the archives that are less subject to weather conditions of the seasons. Anyone with input or assistance on this should contact Director Frank Brehm or Archive Curator John Walker. Your participation is most welcome.

Steve Hayes has the 2001 Convention set to go. Presentations include such subjects as the Nevada Northern Ry., WP 50' PS-1 double door boxcars, a history of the Highline, the Tesla District, the Tidewater Southern, slides, movies, research techniques, and more - don't miss it! The date is April 27-28 at the Modesto Holiday Inn. Additional information and a registration form can be found at the WPRRHS website (www.wprrhs.org), or by contacting Steve at P.O. Box 1083, Soulsbyville CA 95372 (209)536-1847.

Donations, New Members

We would like to thank the following individuals and families who made donations to our Society and Railroad Museum. Your support is appreciated very much.

Frank Aguilar, James D. Anderson, Norman E. Anderson, Dean Billing, Kent & Gail Brezee, Robert L. Brown, M.D., Bob & Beverly Campisi, Michael Capolupo, Edward J. DeLozier, Esq., Jerry Esmay, Ken Falconer, Steven & Judy Fauth, Jason Ferreira, Barry Garrett, John J. Grasso, Wilson Harkins III, Philip Heckmann, Josiah F. Jenkins, Darel Johnson, Robert J. Kirker, Fred & Margaret Klyver, Jerry Mittelholtz, Lynda Monger, Margaret A. Mustard, Tomas Parra, Andrew & Julia Petersen, Robert Pires, Jay & Julie Sarno, James Schindler, Ralph E. Shafer, Terry & Susan Taylor, David, C & E Thompson, Steve Van Denburgh, and Mark B. Williams.

Tim Sweeney of Sweeney-Rose Architects made a special donation as a memorial to Katharine Myra Coleman McNeill.

We would like to welcome our newest life and family life members to the Society.

Patrick Bartlett, Noel D. Thomas, Thomas Mabie, and Wayne Monger.

Joel Louis Salmons - Family Life.