

Repainting of WP Caboose 645

- Norman Holmes

Western Pacific's wooden cabooses dated from 1910 were built to the original Gould Standards as used on the D&RG. By the mid 1930's WP's fleet of 49 cabooses of this design were reduced because of fires and wrecks and the company felt a need for additional cabooses.

WP's first box cars were one thousand 40' outside braced single sheathed cars that were built in 1916. They were now becoming obsolete with the arrival of WP's first steel box cars in 1937.

It was decided to convert some of the 1916 cars to cabooses. Earlier 200 had been converted into stock cars followed by 232 cars in 1936-37. Others were rebuilt for use as outfit cars and other MW service.

In 1937 12 box cars were rebuilt into cabooses (605-616) mainly for use in the Feather River Canyon. These cars had a unique "vestibule" end, a set back of 24 inches from the sides to provide protection from the weather when a conductor or brakeman was standing on the back platform. The only known example of this series in existence is No. 614, preserved by the FRRS in Portola.

Several design changes were made in the next 12 (617-628) built in 1938 and the final 4 (639-642) built in 1942.

As box cars were getting higher, it was becoming difficult to see over the tops of the cars. The purpose of the cupola was to allow the brakeman and conductor to keep an eye out for any problems that might occur with their train.



A number of eastern roads had experimented with cabooses that had a bay window on each side instead of a cupola. WP decided to experiment with the construction of a bay window caboose in 1942. Caboose NO. 642 was put into service for evaluation. It was a success and subsequently 60 bay window cabooses were built between 1943 and 1945. Because of the increase in war time traffic the early wooden cabooses remained in service but were mainly used in local service.

Bay window caboose No. 645, the subject of this article, was the 3rd one built. I first became acquainted with No. 645 while working in San Jose yard. Sometime in the late 1960s WP was installing electric generators on their cabooses. No. 645 left San Jose for conversion and when it returned it had electric lights and markers. The old kerosene markers were left in their holder inside the caboose. I thought someone would steal them so I took them home for safe keeping.

In 1970 we purchased 15 acres in Portola and in 1971 we moved from San Jose. Inspired by a search for a "lost locomotive in the woods" with James Boynton, I thought there would be room on our property to fulfill a life long dream and have my own railroad. The "lost locomotive" was still lost, but in Winnemucca I discovered a 1917 box car that was in excellent condition that the WP was going to retire. I purchased the car for \$200 and along with a flat car arranged to have them moved to Portola. A little later the railroad contacted me and asked if I wanted a caboose. It seems that No. 645 had followed me to Portola and was in use on the Reno Local. One day while returning through the Sierra Valley strong winds blew the roofing paper off. Since WP was not spending any money on repairs for this series of cabs, it was declared surplus. I purchased it for \$500.

Meanwhile the City of Portola had acquired No. 679 and another party bought No. 676. Thus there were 3 cabooses, a box car and a flat car that needed to be moved. I contacted a railroad car mover and the 3 cars were moved to my property, the city's caboose moved to a park and the other private owner's cab was taken to his property.

I had acquired some 45 pound rail from Loyalton and from "found" rail in the woods.

Now I needed a locomotive. A 35 ton Plymouth was located in Medford, Oregon and trucked to Portola. With the help of friends I now had a railroad with 1200 feet of track. The railroad was operated occasionally until 1983 when the Portola Railroad Museum was formed. In 1987 I retired as engineer for UP. I donated the caboose, box car, flat car and locomotive to the FRRS.

Since then the cars and locomotive have remained on my property except for the flat car which was sold for a bridge. It seems the summers go by so quickly and there is so much

to do at the museum that we never get around to moving the equipment.

This summer (2005) I decided No. 645 need a new coat of paint. It was last painted by WP in 1972. The results can be seen in the accompanying photo. A new application of roofing paper was also applied. To attest to their sturdy construction there are at least 12 cupola style and at least 22 bay window cabooses still in existence.

P.S. The kerosene marker lamps have been returned to their holder in the caboose.

WP Equipment Sightings

- compiled by David Epling

Well here we are, 2006 and a new year and a new issue of the Trainsheet. By now most of you know the BIG change at the Museum. No longer are we the Portola Railroad Museum. We are now the Western Pacific Railroad Museum at Portola. But more on that will be written by others. This column is made possible by you the FRRS members and non-FRRS Members via the world of the internet be it yahoogroups, the various Discussion Boards are just plain individual sightings. To send your sightings to me, simply drop an E-mail to me at frrsweb@sbcglobal.net. And now, on to the reports:

- First up is Roger Burdick reporting UP 1983 by his home at MP 156 on the Roseville Sub on 11/1/05. (Editors note - UP seems to be keeping the heritage units in general in their primary namesake areas as 1983 has become a regular to out area).

- Mike Hinkle reported WP 12050 (Cov Hopper) near Richmond TX. November 2005.

- Dave Anderson reported WP 12090 in a UP unit grain train parked in the BNSF yard adjacent to the Louis Dreyfus Export Elevator on the Seattle waterfront on 11/02/05.

- Chris Bekaris reported UP 4504 stopped at north/east end of Sunset Whitney at 2 PM 11/5/05 due to MP 116.9 detector calling out

hot box on WP 12407 (Cov Hooper). This location is in Lincoln CA. Crew could not find a problem.

- Frank Caron reported WP 38128 (Boxcar) at San Jose CA's Newhall Yard 11/7/05.

- Jim Bryant reported WP 12072 (Cov Hopper) rolled west by his home trackside in Lawton NV 11/8/05.

- Ken Reiter reported WP 1903 (89' flat) at San Jose CA's Newhall Yard 11/9/05.

- Frank Caron reported the same flat as still at Newhall on 11/11/05.

- Kevin Caldwell reported in his travels an open top WP Hopper at Paxton on 11/30/2005. Later that same day, he observed a WP covered hopper heading west into Sparks Yard. He says both numbers were obscured.



- Dan Crews reported a very clean WP 86122 through Citrus Heights CA on 12/8/05.

photo by Dan Crews