

A FRIEND IN NEED...

- Eugene John Vicknair

During February, 2006, a team from the FRRS spent nearly a month in San Francisco, working side by side with volunteers from the Golden Gate Railroad Railroad Museum and Pacific Locomotive Association on an unprecedented task: move the GGRM's collection of vintage locomotives and passenger cars to Niles Canyon and PLA. Many of these railcars had not seen a mainline in decades. And there could be no mistakes. The route required the train to move on the busy, double track mainline used by the CalTrain commuter line. Time was running short and a lot still needed to be done...



Rod McClure and Steve Habeck keep WP 707 company in Stockton Yard on the trip to GGRM.

- photo by Alex Ramos

The arrival in San Francisco had already been an adventure, with a fast run over the old WP main via Altamont and up the former SP Peninsula Line, allowing the museum's locomotives a rare chance to blow out the stack carbon and perform as EMD designed them to. Then came the long, slow, torturous tiptoe down the Hunter's Point spur, with trash, cars, errant wood and steel beams and misparked semi-trucks providing some final drama. Finally, the train was tied down in the GGRM yard and the main FRRS team set off to secure the hotel rooms they would occupy for the next 3 weeks. The hard part was about to begin.

While GGRM teams had been working on their equipment for weeks, a great deal remained to be done. As part of their preparation for leaving Hunter's Point, a general thinning of the collection had been in progress. Some deaccessioned equipment was sold off to private owners or other museums. For the most

part, the new owners took responsibility for these items, either trucking them out or getting them prepped for separate rail movement. In the weeks prior to the big move, cars trickled out of Hunter's Point in ones and twos, bound for new homes. One of the biggest lots, however, was the responsibility of the FRRS team. The Virginia and Truckee Restoration group had purchased 5 ex-Southern Pacific "Harriman" subs, former commuter cars that dated back to the 1920's. These would be moved to Portola under our supervision for eventual transport to Carson City, and all required brake and truck work, as well as securing damaged and broken windows.

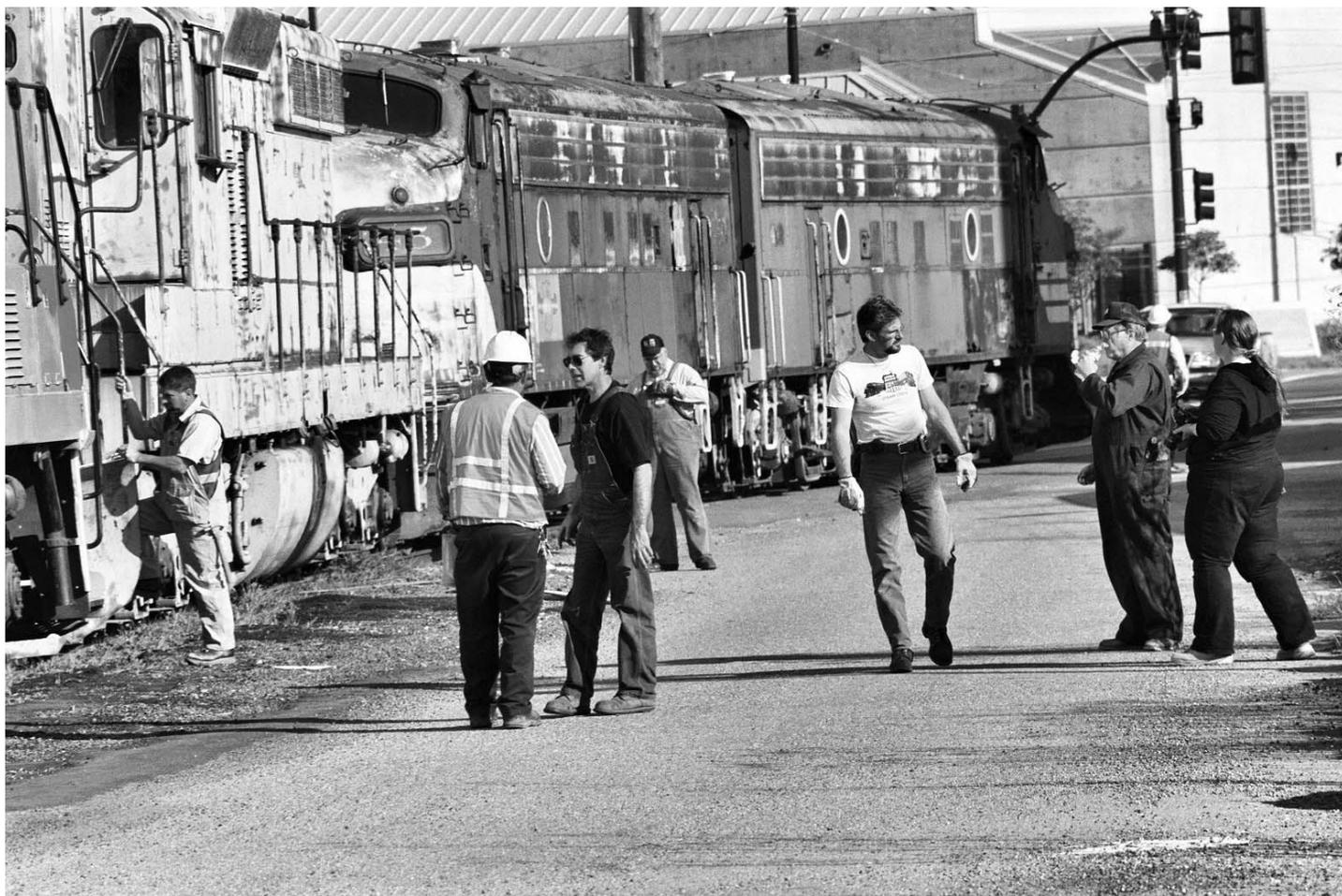
Then there were the cars deeded to the FRRS and PLA in thanks for their assistance. PLA crews were working on their equipment, including a rare and classic triple unit, articulated dining car from the Southern Pacific, envisioned to one day be the heart of a dinner train in Niles Canyon. The PLA cars would also move in our train and their volunteers closely coordinated with FRRS personnel. The FRRS itself would become the owner of 3 pieces for SN and WP equipment, as well as an SP SD9, and we would provide long-term storage for a California Zephyr dome car. While WP/Pullman sleeper "Clover Plot" and SN bay window caboose 1642 could move on their own wheels, WP bay window caboose 646, lacking trucks, would need a ride home atop our FRRX flat car. SP 4450, a former commute SD9, was also donated to the Society.

Finally, there were the pieces GGRM was retaining, numbering in the dozens. Volunteers



WP 707 switches the GGRM yard while a pair of ex-SP F7As waits on the next track.

- photo by Paul "Yarddogh" Lanyi



Various crew members coordinate during a switching move at the CalTrain mainline. - photo by Paul "Yarddogh" Lanyi

from all 3 organizations would need to pull together to get them all ready in time for the fast approaching deadline.

Work on the cars was very straightforward, but time consuming. Many of them rode on plain bearing (friction bearing) trucks and required repair and repacking to ensure zero problems on the road. The expertise of UP employee and FRRS member Ed Dickens proved invaluable, as he trained others in polishing the bearing "brasses" and properly seating the lubrication packing on dozens of cars. With cars frequently in motion among the 4 tracks in GGRM's main yard and along the "mainline" to GGRM's main workshop, located about ¼ mile away, the FRRS crews put their operations skills to good use, with Rod McClure and Steve Habeck, joined by Cliff Cox, Ed Dickens and Don Chakerian, working hard to keep everything in motion on the compact set of tracks. Gail McClure, Doug Morgan and Hank Stiles completed the core team, with Gail working on car repair with Rod, Steve, Cliff and Ed as well as managing the logistics of keeping the crew fed and lodged. Hank and Doug concentrated on the motive

power that was to be moved, working most often out of the main shop in Building 403.

Many other volunteers answered the call, putting in time when they could. Paul "Yarddogh" Lanyi was a regular visitor, handling everything from clearing brush and trash off the connector spur to packing journals, repairing cars and acting as gate closer during the moves out to the CalTrain main. Andrew McCarron and Larry Brown also joined the car crew and secured the disabled WP 646 onto the flat car. Eugene Vicknair aided the journal packing fun and also got some welding time in, securing the steps on SN 1642, while also sealing broken windows on the V&T bound subs and the CZ "Silver Rifle". Eric Stephens probably made the most inspirational contribution, when twice during the month, straddling a chemotherapy session for a malignant brain tumor, he came to Hunter's Point to pitch in. Required to use a walker on the rough terrain due to a paralyzed left leg, he loaded up the walker's basket with custom made stencils (supplied by Eugene Vicknair and non-member Robert McNeal) and spray paint and took on the task of stenciling

the air and packing dates on several cars, as well as painting the fresh repairs to the steps of SN 1642.

By the third week in February, the end was in sight. Most of the equipment had been inspected and cleared for travel. Moving out of Hunter's Point would be as large a task as getting everything ready in the first place. The line connecting the museum to the outside world is a twisting industrial spur that wanders between buildings astride soggy and well worn ties. There was no way the entire train, which would eventually number 37 cars and locomotives, could be moved in one shot. On February 23, the first cut rolled out the main gate, as WP 707 took SP 4450, two SP F7As, the triple unit diner and an ex-SP articulated double unit coach out to the CalTrain mainline.



WP 484 leads the way during a shove down the weed-covered and twisting Hunter's Point spur.

- photo by Paul "Yarddogh" Lanyi

Several other trips were run in the next few days, including shuttle trips down the mainline to Bayshore Yard several miles away (see back cover photo) where a large cut was assembled. Things did not always go smoothly, however. SP 4450 was found to have problems that could not be fixed in time, so the decision was made to move it back to Hunter's Point, flanges shrieking in protest on every inch of the tightly curved track, to await future movement. The local businesses also added their own delays. On February 25, a stack of steel beams were found to be fouling the line. With 707 providing a little assistance, Cliff Cox and Ed Dickens manhandled the heavy beams out of the way (see cover photo).

Finally, on the evening of the 25th, the greenlight was given to make the final moves.

The last cut departed GGRM at 10:45 PM, with WP caboose 484 leading the way through the back alleys and on to Carroll Street. Stopping just short of Third Street and the CalTrain connection, the crew settled in to wait for the last commute plug and clearance to occupy the main. Locals and passersby were amazed at the sight of the long train standing in the middle of the street, taking up nearly the entire length of the street trackage. Members of San Francisco's finest stopped by, enjoying the unusual break in their regular beat, while a small army of local railfans snapped shots and found choice locations to record the event.



Vic Neves gives a rundown of the night's events to a pair of SF police officers as the special train waits for clearance to enter the CalTrain mainline.

- photo by Paul "Yarddogh" Lanyi

At 10 minutes after midnight, Sunday, February 26th, clearance was given to shove across Third Street and enter the main. A large cut was picked up off the Coke Spur, including several of the classic "Harriman" suburban coaches, making a brief return to their longtime commute rails for the first time in over 20 years, and the cars jockeyed into position for departure from The City. The train was finally assembled just before 1:30 AM. With an all clear from Conductor Habeck, Engineer Rod McClure notched out the 2001's throttle and rolled the once in a lifetime train down the polished ex-SP main. A stop at the south end of Bayshore Yard added the final cut to the train, which now stretched to 37 cars and locomotives with a combined length of almost 4000 feet, likely the longest train ever handled by the FRRS.

Movement over the normally fast main was done below 25 miles per hour in deference to the numerous fragile and plain bearing

equipped cars in the consist. Gail McClure and Eugene Vicknair acted as the ground support crew, rolling the train by at various stops, including the recently opened Millbrae CalTrain/BART depot. The combination of orange and silver power, early 20th century passenger cars and 21st century transit architecture created a truly surreal moment.



*Rolling through the Millbrae CalTrain/BART depot.
- photo by Alex Ramos*

A whiff of burning heralded the only problem: a dragging brake shoe on one car that was remedied during a quick stop at Redwood Junction. The train finally rolled to a halt in Newhall Yard, Santa Clara, around 7:00 AM Sunday, having taken 6-1/2 hours to travel just over 50 miles. At Newhall, the power was swapped to the north end of the train and the crews swapped duties to keep with the Hours of Service Law, then settled in for breakfast and naps, waiting for their clearance to enter the UP's mainline for the last leg to Niles Canyon.

A window opened about 10:00 AM and the special continued north with Ed Dickens at the throttle. Rod and Gail McClure followed on the ground, eyeballing the train up close for any hint of problems. The railfan following had grown larger and dozens of fans were waiting when the train finally reached the old WP siding at Hearst and the interchange with the Niles Canyon Railway. PLA's SP NW2 switcher 1423 and WP GP7 713 were waiting on home rails the help with movement onto the NCRy. With the tail track of the interchange only able to handle two or three cars at a time, the FRRS and PLA crews began handing over the cars that would stay in Niles Canyon. A total of 25 cars and engines were finally transferred and taken into the canyon to their storage locations. WP 165

and her tender, secured on FRRS flatcars, was then switched out and tacked on to the FRRS train for her journey home. The long day finished, the crew tied down on Niles Canyon rails for a long break before the final push.

The next afternoon, the FRRS crew departed the siding at Hearst with its time warp train. After a 3 hour delay at Altamont waiting for all the ACE commuter trains to clear, the special arrived at Stockton about 10:00 PM. After a crew change and inspection, the train made a nighttime run to Oroville, arriving at 5:30 AM with the entire crew dog tired. At this point, Gail McClure, Ed Dickens and Cliff Cox departed via "Gail's Transport Services", homeward bound to Reno, leaving Rod and Steve to man the train the last leg to home. With a light rain falling, the 707 and train marched out of Oroville at about 10:00 AM and, with the exception of one meet at Keddie, never stopped until pulling up the main in Portola. There, the special was met with blasting whistles from the SP 2873 and SP 1100. Loren Ross, Matt Parker, Charlie Spikes, Norm Holmes and John Walker were on hand to assist in putting the train away in the Museum. With everything tied down and secure, Rod and Steve headed home, looking forward to sleeping in their own beds for the first time in over a month.

This was a once in a lifetime move that went flawlessly and safely. Three organizations worked together in a tremendous show of cooperation to make this happen, helping out a friend in need. Huge thanks to all the FRRS personnel that helped make this possible, and to all the GGRM and PLA personnel who worked to make this event successful and safe.



WP 165 is shoved onto the NCRy/UP interchange by PLA's SP 1423. She will be coupled into the train and soon complete her journey home.

- photo by Alex Ramos