

FRRS ACQUIRES "SILVER PLATE"

- Eugene Vicknair, Zephyr Project Manager

As reported in the last issue, the Feather River Rail Society is now the proud owner of the *California Zephyr* dining car "Silver Plate". The "Plate" is the last diner that survives intact from the "Silver Lady". The acquisition caps a seven year effort by members of the FRRS to add this key car to our growing Zephyr collection.

The car was built by the Budd Company in 1948, one of six diners for the CZ fleet. Two were owned by the WP, the "Silver Plate", WP 841, and sister "Silver Platter", WP 842. All six cars lasted to the end of CZ service. The three CBQ diners were sold to Amtrak after the CZ ended, while the DRGW's sole diner was used in *Rio Grande Zephyr* service until that train was discontinued. It was sold to Amtrak in 1983, but was found to have a cracked frame and was scrapped. Amtrak heavily rebuilt the three ex-CBQ diners. Reportedly, one or two are still in service. The WP sold the "Silver Platter" to Mexico's Ferrocarril del Pacifico in 1971. It would last until the late 1980's when it was scrapped.

The "Plate" was involved in at least one incident during its WP career. In August, 1955, the CZ derailed in Hayward, damaging several cars. The "Silver Plate" and our CZ locomotive WP 805-A were on the train that day. After the end of the CZ, the "Plate" ended up leading a more pampered life than her sisters. Sold in 1972 to the Sierra Railroad, she was used as a cafe for the Sierra's passengers. Reports state that the car saw a few trips on the Sierra's Wine and Cheese trains, but for the most part she sat parked just west of the depot with a deck built to one end. After a few years, the grill was closed and the car sat idle. For most of the last 25 years, it has been seen by few outside the Railtown 1897 docents and volunteers, who used the "Plate" as a lounge and gathering place.

Budd designed the diners and the dome-lounge-buffet cars to work as a joined team, with much of the dining storage being found in the dome-lounge cars. These two cars were almost always coupled together expect for the earliest months of CZ service.

Despite over 35 years having passed since the end of the CZ, the "Plate" is in remarkably original condition. While the original cooking grill was dismantled by the Sierra and some



electrical and mechanical subsystems are damaged, the car has not been substantially altered since leaving service. Only age and wear have left any noticeable marks.

Many of the removed parts still exist and will be returned to the car. Some systems, such as the air conditioning, will likely need to be replaced while others must be rebuilt. The table tops, for instance, inlaid with a linoleum type material, are deteriorating badly, as is the carpet. The glass dividers in the dining area and the etched mirror behind the steward's station vanished years ago, but replicas are possible.

Work continues to get the "Plate" moved to Portola. The car has not been off the Sierra since 1972 and needs brake work and a complete inspection. The goal is to have it in Portola before the close of operating season 2008 and to have it open to the public in early 2009.

Thank you to everyone at the FRRS and CSRM who made this historic deal a reality. Special thanks go to FRRS President Rod McClure and Kyle W. Wyatt of CSRM.

