

Western Pacific Historical Archives, a Directors Perspective

—Tom Carter – Director FRRS

Recently, I and several Directors and Officers of the FRRS enjoyed the annual Western Pacific Historical Convention in Fairfield. It's always nice to visit with and see fans of the WP that we don't otherwise get the opportunity to connect with the rest of the year. In talking with several folks though, one disturbing sentiment kept coming up repeatedly, that "the Directors don't care about the archives". Folks, this couldn't be further from the truth.

I can tell you unequivocally that, yes, we *do* care *very much* about the Historical Archives owned by the Feather River Rail Society every bit as much as we do the physical rail equipment and artifacts at the museum. This is a constant source of discussion and effort on behalf of the Directors and Officers both at the regular monthly board meetings. The problems with access to the archives by the general public though are many and complex, so I thought I'd take a few moments of your time to clear the air and give you our point of view on them.

In the "olden days" of the FRRS, the archives were a mismatched, hodge-podge assortment of photos, drawings, books and other small sundry items. The solution to getting these pieces "archived" and cared for was often "Here, take these home, scan them and bring them back when you're done". As you can well imagine, this created numerous problems, including inventory tracking, accountability, safety and care of the archives and consistency in the quality and procedures of the scans themselves. For obvious reasons, we have had to tighten these well meaning, yet problematic attempts down into practical procedures. This has become even more important as our archives have grown tremendously over the years. We owe it to the donors and especially the legacy of the Western Pacific to protect these pieces and give them the protection, respect and due diligence they deserve.

We do, however, want *very much* to make these archives available to you, the members, as well as the modelers, authors, historians, fans, and those who are just plain curious in the form of digital scans of documents and photos, reproduced for a small fee to cover the cost associated with cataloging, archiving and re-producing these historical pieces.

We have heard grumblings from some folks who feel

that, as members, that they should have free, unfettered, unlimited access to scan, re-produce or borrow any of these pieces at will. I am sorry, but this cannot and will not happen. Some of these archives date back over 100 years and are *extremely* fragile. I don't even like handling them myself with clean hands and wearing cotton librarians gloves, due to the fact that I fully understand their historical value and, frankly, I am not an expert in handling archives. I have no formal training, or experience handling things like this, as much as I enjoy looking at them. I'm sure I'm not the only one who feels this way on our board. For this very reason though, we are not willing to let everyone who wishes to, to handle them either, as it would destroy a lot of these pieces. This has to be handled by folks who know what they're doing, scanned at a certain resolution and file format and *then* they are ready for anyone who wishes to, to do whatever they choose with them. This must be understood by folks for the safety of these priceless treasures entrusted to us. We also must charge a nominal fee for these duplications as there are very real, hard costs associated with this type of work, especially where professionals get involved. As a Non-profit, we simply cannot absorb this cost ourselves. We do, however, feel that these nominal fees are reasonable and in fact, are not unusual for situations like this with other historical organizations.

Speaking of our "Non Profit" Status, we are in fact, all volunteers. None of us are paid to do what we do for the society; however, we're *very* short handed lately. Add to that, the fact that not many of us have the experience or the knowledge to get these archives sorted, cataloged, scanned, and stored. FRRS Director Wayne Monger has been handling the Kenneth J. Meeker Western Pacific Corporate Archives and has done a tremendous job in that capacity. It's very top quality work, however, this only represents one *portion* of the total archives collection of the FRRS and he's only one man. This is also in the middle of all of the other "hats" Wayne wears at the museum. This is where we ask for *your* help. If you have the knowledge and experience to assist us in this capacity, we'd love to have the help. This would ensure that the archives do in fact get out to the general public eventually, hopefully, sooner rather than later. We need folks that can spend hours at a time in Reno and Portola scanning, cataloging, and archiving these pieces, however, again, per the policies and procedures of the FRRS Archives Department, and yes, there *is* a set of written procedures for this. We also need folks that are able

to scan each back issue of "The Headlight" magazine and convert them into individual .PDF files for eventual online distribution. That *can* be done in the comfort of your home. If you or a group of you would like to take on this task, please contact us.

With the issues with the archives themselves addressed, this doesn't even take into account the logistical issues. Where are we eventually going to long term store and care for them? (Think Library facility). We had *planned* to convert the basement of the WP Hospital in Portola into a climate controlled archives library, but that was a multi-million dollar project that was torched in an arson fire a few years ago. Aside from the diesel shop and a few small out-buildings at the museum, we don't have an adequate structure to convert to suitable archives facilities on campus. A replacement for the Hospital is being explored in the "Master Plan", but is many years and millions of dollars down the road. In the mean time, there have been a few plans and ideas floated about to turn a former baggage car into a climate controlled archives library, however, this is just in the early discussion stages, and even that presents a few

issues that must first be overcome.

The point is, there aren't any simple solutions just yet, but we *are* working on it. We welcome *your* ideas, comments, concerns, assistance, donations of funds and equipment and any other input you can offer. If you want to see this for yourself, I urge you to come to a Board Meeting. This way, you can see it first hand for yourself. I realize that the steel wheeled exhibits receive the majority of the attention and publicity, but, we do in fact, realize the equal importance of our archives and care as much about them as we do anything else we are entrusted with the care of at the museum.

We can be reached at archives@wplives.org for more information or to let us know how you can help.



WP 1503 is seen here in Oakland, CA in January 1974, along with the WP Business Car "Feather River". The 1503 is currently part of the WPRM collection, and is slated to be painted back into this scheme in the near future.

—Photo by Greg Elems