

Reflections of the WP and its Willing People

—Jack Palmer

I have been requested by one of our Directors to share with other members of the Feather River Rail Society a few of my personal experiences with both the employees of the Western Pacific Railroad and my interests in their activities during the 1960-1980 era.

It all began when I bought an HO scale model railroad set as a present for my son in 1960. My co-workers in the Post Office advised me to forget the “Toy Train Stuff” and to choose a local railroad to model.

So one Sunday my son and I went to the Southern Pacific yard in Brisbane, California, with my Brownie camera in hand, to take pictures of the roundhouse and engines (bad idea!). Needless to say it wasn't long til we were told to get off their property.

One day I went to the Western Pacific office in San Francisco and was directed to Mr. Lee Sherwood, their Public Relations Officer. At that and several following meetings, he provided me with Time Tables, color paint chips of the paint used on their locomotives, information on their local 25th Street and Oakland yards and placed my name on their monthly mailing list of their employee publication “Mileposts”. I was hooked.

When time permitted, my son and I would go to the 25th Street yard for pictures of everything on the property including the ferry “Las Plumas”. However, the best was yet to come as we had no idea of what to expect when we would visit their Oakland Yard.

In April of 1964 we finally went to the Oakland Yard. WHAT A SURPRISE. I said to myself “WOW” This is Pig Heaven! Now I need to save money for a good camera. Having a family with three children and only one source of income would be a problem, but I eventually managed to buy a Minolta 35mm with a 1.2 lens, and prepared for some serious photography after that.

On that visit of we found the WP 334 “Mike” and several narrow gauge cars and combine near the

Museum Sponsors

The Western Pacific played a major role in developing the economy of Plumas County and the surrounding region. The Western Pacific Railroad Museum is proud to be a part of that heritage and to hold a position in supporting the ongoing economic health of our community. We welcome the support of that community in return. Helping to preserve the Western Pacific is good for tourism, good for our regional culture and good for business.

We ask our members and visitors to support our business sponsors, companies who have generously contributed to the museum and its mission to preserve the Western Pacific family.

If you are a business owner, see how you can support the WP Museum, your community and improve your advertising and networking outreach through our sponsorship program.



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turntable, many small buildings (shacks) throughout the facility plus miscellaneous remnants of the days of steam. We then discovered the WP 94 and General Bowker steam engines in the roundhouse together with several diesel switchers. That was a great visit.

On another visit to the Oakland Yard that year we had to wait for a freight drag to clear the entrance. I walked up to talk to the driver of the pick-up ahead of us. He asked where I was going and I replied to take pictures. He informed me that he was the Roundhouse Foreman and if we would be at the roundhouse at 8:30 he would take us for a ride around the yard in the Zephyr units when he would make up the train. Yes, we were at the roundhouse before 8:30 and enjoyed another pleasant surprise, courtesy of another WP's WILLING PEOPLE.

During a visit to the Oakland Yard in September 1975, I was fortunate to also photograph WP caboose 683 which was recently stenciled "RETIRED". (The 683 was one of 38 WP box car series 15001-16000 that had been converted into cabooses in 1942).

I promptly went to the Yard Office and asked for one of its Heralds. I was told they would have it for me the next day. Since then, it has been prominently displayed on the door to the entrance to my model railroad.

I next began one-day trips to other nearby location along the WP. right-of-way between Niles (Now Fremont) and Altamont. Although they were easy to get to, it required a lot of patience waiting for hours for only a photo of two of anything coming from either direction.

I was aware I had two strikes against me from the beginning. First, WP did not operate on schedules, and second, I could not afford to buy a Bear-Cat Scanner which would enable me to listen for train movements in my area.

On a good day at Altamont it was always difficult waiting for the SJT, CZ No. 18, GGM, or a work train because there was no shade or even a hard rock to sit on – but the photos taken that day were worth the effort.

I found Altamont to be a favorite location among rail fans because if I was already waiting, it soon became obvious that something was about to happen whenever a group would suddenly arrive with all their cameras and recording equipment. (I knew I was in good company when Ted Benson showed up).

Vacations or holiday week-ends would usually find me anywhere from Oroville to Portola chasing the "Orange and Silver". But that's another story.

General Superintendents Report

–Kerry Cochran
General Superintendent

By the time you read this, Annual Crew Training will be completed and the crews will be ready to start the 2017 operating season.

Several members braved the winter weather to attend the first crew training session with 3 to 8" of snow and ice in some locations. The snow hampered the crew training, as we had an 8 ½ hour power outage at the time of the training and forced us to perform all the training without a computer and projector. Paul Finnegan and Rick Gruninger handled most of the training this year as I needed to attend the monthly Board of Directors meeting.

There are so many volunteers that help around the museum all the time and I would be remiss if I did not say thank you to all of you. Your help is needed to keep the place running and helping our visitors.

Keep Alert, Be Safe.

Mechanical Department

Look for Bil Jackson's, CMO report. The mechanical department has been working very hard to get our equipment read for RAL and Operations this year.