

## Re-Dedication of the "Charles O. Sweetwood"

—Eugene Vicknair

On September 9, 2017, the museum hosted an amazing group of guests who came to honor and rededicate the Pullman built Business Observation car Western Pacific 106, also known as the "Charles O. Sweetwood".

Originally built as the "Pioneer" and used as part of Pullman's executive lease fleet, the car first entered service on September 11, 1917. Purchased by the Western Pacific and renumbered 106 in 1942, the car would be used as the Eastern Division Superintendent's car, based in Elko, Nevada.

In late 1950, with the beginning of the Korean War, the Western Pacific developed a daring idea to use a railroad car as a long distance blood bank, partnering with the American Red Cross to collect blood to care for wounded soldiers in the conflict. The 106 was chosen and renamed "Charles O. Sweetwood" in honor of the first Western Pacific employee killed in the war, a young man who was a former WP carman and

front line Army medic. Charles was killed on September 8, 1950, having just celebrated his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

To honor this historic car and its amazing legacy, our volunteers and members were joined by a number of special guests:

Julia Rigutto Pagan and family – Julia was one of the four original Red Cross nurses who served on the Charles O. Sweetwood. We thank Julia and her family for joining us today and honor her service.

Bill Sweetwood and family – Bill is Charles' nephew and has been regularly in contact with the Society concerning the status of the car. From the very beginning of the Red Cross service, the Sweetwood family has been closely involved with the blood procurement project and the operations of this railcar. We are honored that they have continued that tradition.

Diane Remick – Daughter of Marty Lummus, who purchased the Western Pacific 106 from the railroad in 1961 and saved it from being scrapped and lost to history.



Steve Habeck and Bill Cardoza with the framed California Senate Resolution, with the "Charles O. Sweetwood" in the background, complete with replica drumhead.

—Tessa/Michael Clawson Photo.

Stephen Walsh – Regional Director of Communications and Marketing for the American Red Cross Gold Country Chapter, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year

Maureen Koski – National Disaster Response Team Member, American Red Cross of Northern Nevada

Barb Kramer – Disaster Cycle Services Volunteer Partner, American Red Cross of Northern Nevada, which is also celebrating its 100th anniversary this year

Shane Starr – District Representative from the office of Representative Doug LaMalfa – California District 1

Pat Morton – Mayor of the city of Portola  
Robert Meacher – City Manager of the city of Portola

Bill Cardoza – District Coordinator for California State Senator Ted Gaines  
City of Elko Nevada



*Charles Sweetwood's Purple Heart (above), and Charles' mother's Blood Donor Pin (not pictured) were among the items donated to the FRRS.*

*–Tessa/Michael Clawson Photo.*

The Master of Ceremonies was Todd Bruso, noted radio personality on ESPN Reno and member of the Nevada Broadcasters Association Hall of Fame, leading those assembled in a ceremony based upon the original dedication scripts used by the Western Pacific in January 1951. Local Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3758 was joined by some other local veterans to serve as an honor guard for Charles, who was a member of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division in the war. During the ceremony, FRRS Vice-President Greg Elems joined many of the guests in sharing the history and significance of the “Sweetwood”, and the WP being a truly family railroad.

Bill Sweetwood spoke about his uncle and celebrated Charles' life. Bill and the Sweetwood family were presented with an American flag by the honor guard.

Julia Rigutto Pagan, one of the original four Red Cross nurses to serve on the car, performed the formal re-dedication of the car.

Many accolades were presented to the FRRS and received by President Steve Habeck, including recognition from the American Red Cross for those who worked on making the blood procurement program possible, a Certificate of

Special United States Congressional Recognition, a California Senate Resolution, a Proclamation by the City of Elko, Nevada (Charles' hometown), and a Special Proclamation by the City of Portola recognizing the car and declaring September 9<sup>th</sup> to be “Charles Owen Sweetwood Day” in the city.

Following remarks by FRRS Secretary Eugene Vicknair (read by Todd Bruso as Eugene was prevented from attending due to illness), the members of VFW Post 3758 played taps and performed a 21-gun salute. The VFW presented the spent shells from the salute to the members of the Sweetwood family in attendance.

Todd Bruso closed the ceremony with a moment of silence to remember the sacrifice of Sgt. Sweetwood and all those who gave their lives in the Korean War and the words ‘Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.’

Following the ceremony, the FRRS received a surprise and very moving donation from the Sweetwood family when we were presented with Charles' Purple Heart and the blood donor

pin which had been given to Charles' mother Bonnie when she became the first person to donate blood on board the car.

Thank yous to Patty Clawson, who worked tirelessly alongside Eugene Vicknair to pull the ceremony and celebration together and stepped in when Eugene took ill to smooth out last minute items, to Charlie Spikes, Greg Elems, David Elems, Steve Habeck, KC Dunn, Ali Doty, Ethan Doty and all the other FRRS volunteers who made this event possible.

Also thanks to Bill Sweetwood, Cynthia Pagan, Robert Meacher, Steve Walsh of the Red Cross and Shane Starr of Congressman Doug LaMalfa's office for their support and assistance. Several newspapers carried accounts of the event, including the Portola Reporter, whose article can be seen at this web page: <http://www.plumasnews.com/rededication-charles-o-sweetwood-railroad-museum/>

## Museum Web Page Update – Dec 2017

–Paul Finnegan, Webmaster

I created a new collection page for the WPMW 71, aka "The Weed Burner". While at the museum on October 13<sup>th</sup>, I met with Dennis Servia who worked for the WP and had memories and photos of the weed burner that he has shared with us. On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, I added his memories and photos to the MOW collection page under the Museum > Museum Rolling Stock pull-down menu.

The website promoted the 2017 Santa Train event with a very attractive graphic created by Eugene Vicknair. Greg Elems sent me some photographs that you can view on either the 2017 Santa Train news item on the News > News Archive or on the About Us > WPRM Photo & Video Gallery web pages. As a special feature, on the 2017 Santa Trains news item page, we have two audio clips posted from local radio ads promoting the event.

From October 1<sup>st</sup> until December 25<sup>th</sup> there were 938 pageviews of the 2017 Santa Train web page. Of these pageviews, 63% were from

## Departures

Long time FRRS member Ken Roller passed away 31 December 2017, aged 69.

Ken had been a fixture at the museum for many years, starting in 1983. He is well known around town with many of his locomotive paintings hung on walls throughout the area and beyond.

A service for Ken Roller was held on Saturday, January 13<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 PM at the "Sierra Valley Church" (Hwy 70 & Genesee Rd – the former Beckwith Tavern) in Beckwourth, CA. Internment followed the service.

Former CMO and FRRS Member John V. Buberniak passed away 5 February 2018, aged 52, near his hometown of Carbondale, Pennsylvania. His passing came after an eleven-day ordeal in the ICU at the Geisinger Community Medical Center in Scranton, PA. John and his wife, Pamela, had traveled to PA for John's mother's funeral on January 26<sup>th</sup>. Many of you will remember him for being the WPRM CMO for several years and getting us many needed batteries for our RAL locomotives.

John was a good friend to many and was a mechanic for the UPRR in Roseville, California. He is seen at below with Mat Schuman in Dec 2016. Mat Schuman Photo.

