

Saving Western Pacific PFE Reefer 55069 Part II, A Lesson in Trucking!

- Eugene Vicknair

As discussed in the previous issue of the *Train Sheet*, the undertaking of moving WP PFE 55069 was a major one and had to move fairly quickly. Lisa DaFonte and her family had plans in place to begin an extensive home remodeling and the old reefer was in the way. While rain also delayed the work, the reefer had to move or else push the project even farther back in schedule and budget.

While the lifting and securing situation was moving along and funds were coming in to cover costs, trouble began to creep in on the transport side. A trucker had been contacted early on (some two months before the move would happen) in order to determine how they would need the car lifted and secured. A quote was given and the cost programmed in. All seemed well until Friday, February 15, when a quick message was received that the company would be unable to do the move. During a call, the reason given was a realization that their equipment would not fit down the residential street, but they recommended a different company to call and gave a listing on proper equipment. No problem, right?

What happened over the next 6 days was a repeating scenario of a trucking company either refusing the job outright, or saying they could handle the move, giving a cost, checking out the situation, then backing out. The situation came to a head on Wednesday, February 20, when a trucker went to inspect the car and called me repeatedly during a business meeting, literally yelling at me that we were crazy to move the car, that it would fly apart as soon as it hit the road and that no one would move such a thing for less than \$12,000. He outlined a need to add bracing and cribbing that would take days, if not weeks, and thousands of dollars. I later learned he had made a similar set of statements to the house movers, who had pointed out they had been jacking up the body and walking on the roof for days and found no issues with the



Lifting the 55069 off the trailer.

-photo by Eugene Vicknair

structure. Their advice to him: "If you don't want the job, don't take it!"

While I had confidence in our assessment of the structure and the house moving team's experience, this encounter just three days before the car HAD to move was rattling. I discussed the predicament with some other members and was given a very helpful piece of advice: call Taylor Heavy Haul.

If you move railcars in California, there are two names that come up frequently and Taylor Heavy Haul in Roseville is one of them. They have moved equipment, including 85 ft passenger cars and big steam and diesel engines for museums, railroads and private individuals. They have moved many things for the FRRS over



With the crowd watching, 55069 continues its reverse move.

-photo by Eugene Vicknair

the years. Why I did not call them first is explained by the budget and nature of the car: a 40 ft long wood railcar that needed to move only 8 miles. It was thought that a local firm could do this easily and save the cost of bringing a truck all the way from Roseville.

Well, shoot.

Taylor not only had the equipment and the experienced crew, they sent a driver down the Friday before to assess everything and assure me that they would handle the move no problem. Saturday morning dawned with a threat of rain, but the Taylor crew was on hand and immediately worked with the house moving crew to figure out a quicker, easier way to load the car: in contrast to the expected sequence of events, which would have had the house movers rolling the car on big casters into the street for truck loading, Ricardo, the driver from Taylor, asked them to lift the car just a couple more feet and he would back the trailer into the confined space alongside the house and right under the 55069.

Turned out Ricardo had quite a few rail jobs under his belt, including moving equipment into and out of Portola for us. And he knew his guys and his gear. As everyone watched with some nervousness, especially Lisa and her family, and several folks took pictures (including excellent photographer Alex Ramos who came to watch the adventure), the Taylor team threaded the long trailer right under the reefer with just one readjustment.

The securing went swiftly and the crews inspected the carbody. The numerous power and cable wires crossing the street were a concern, but with one of the Taylor crew on the roof with a push stick, Ricardo BACKED the whole rig down the block about ¼ mile, then headed for the main roads. Contrary to the doom and gloom from the one trucker, the Taylor team felt good enough about the structural condition of the 55069 that they took the freeway most of the journey, leading to some folks having emailed me to ask if they had really seen a wooden Western Pacific railroad car doing 60

MPH down interstate 280.

With the car finally clear of its long time resting place, Lisa expressed feeling a bit emotional that her long time companion was gone. But a new chapter was beginning for both her home and WP 55069.

The car arrived at the fairgrounds restoration site with no problems and everyone, including volunteers from California Trolley and Rail Corporation, set about getting it off the truck and settled into blocks. Within an hour the car was in the air and the Taylor truck and crew departed back to Roseville. Many thank yous were given for their last minute save of the entire project.

The house moving crew finished their work on Monday, February 25 and WP PFE 55069 was in its temporary home, ready for some needed TLC. The car is level and secure and keeping company with Southern Pacific 4-6-2 2879 and some other SP equipment. One wonders if they have all passed each other before and what stories they are sharing after so much time.

The move events finally ended on a rainy Sunday a week later when my friend Christopher Kapreilian helped me finish replacing the fence that had been taken down to allow access to the car.

The Western Pacific Historic Convention consumed my schedule and attention (along with several other FRRS members) over the next few months, but some inspection and assessment work was done on the car during that time. Also, it was decided to agree to a request from the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds and paint one side of the car in a temporary scheme to dress it up and generate interest for the county fair in August. Luckily, the car was placed with its best face toward the fairgrounds, so this will be getting a coat of yellow and graphics depicting the original Western Refrigerator Lines scheme in tribute to the WP's audacious plan.

As assessment and measurements wind down and a work plan is finalized, work sessions will

be announced. It is hoped to have the first one in late June or early July. Also, based on a suggestion from a member, we will likely add an informational and fellowship meeting to these work sessions to inform local FRRS members of things going on with the Society and Museum, similar to the old First Sub Club from years ago. Please keep an eye on the Facebook page and website for information, or email info@wplives.org if you want to be part of the 55069 work team.

This restoration will be an interesting experiment for the FRRS. In years past we have tried similar ventures, including having WP GP20 2001 get worked on in Woodland prior to an appearance at one of the Sacramento Railfairs, but doing a restoration of this scope away from Portola is a new step. Our hope is to generate interest and opportunities to participate for members in the Bay Area.

Please join us in helping restore this historic reefer to operation. Even if you cannot help with the work, your donations are vital to making this happen. Please donate to the WP PFE 55069 Fund through the Go Fund Me page (accessed through WPLives.org), through our online donation page (<http://donate.wplives.org>) or by mail to FRRS-WP 55069 Fund, P O Box 608, Portola, CA 96122.

And again we must offer our thanks to Lisa DaFonte and her family, whose generosity and patience allowed all this to happen. A plaque will be placed with the car acknowledging their role in its history and preservation.

Thank you also to Ken Middlebrook, the California Trolley and Rail Corporation, the Santa Clara County Fairgrounds, the team from Kelley Brothers Housemoving, Jerry Estruth for his donation to the move, Sal Pizarro and the San Jose Mercury News, Kerry Cochran, Paul and Kenneth Finnegan, Christopher Kapreilian, Alex Ramos and everyone who donated to help promote this project. And of course a huge thank you to Ricardo and the team at Taylor Heavy Haul.



The visitors had LOTS of questions, the crew made sure they were all answered!

- photo by Regine Rogers

Tahoe Expedition Academy Visit

- Paul Finnegan

WPRM has a long-standing tradition of supporting our local schools in the spring by hosting railroad field trips. As an example, on Friday April 26th, we were visited by seventeen students and adults from Tahoe Expedition Academy in Truckee. WPRM volunteers Kerry Cochran, Greg Elems, Paul Finnegan, Bil Jackson, Loren Ross and Charlie Spikes ran a charter caboose train for them. The children were delightful and clearly had a wonderful time.



Loren Ross gives a safety briefing.

- photo by Kerry Cochran