



Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum



Issue Number 55

San Luis Obispo, California

Spring 2016

www.slorm.com

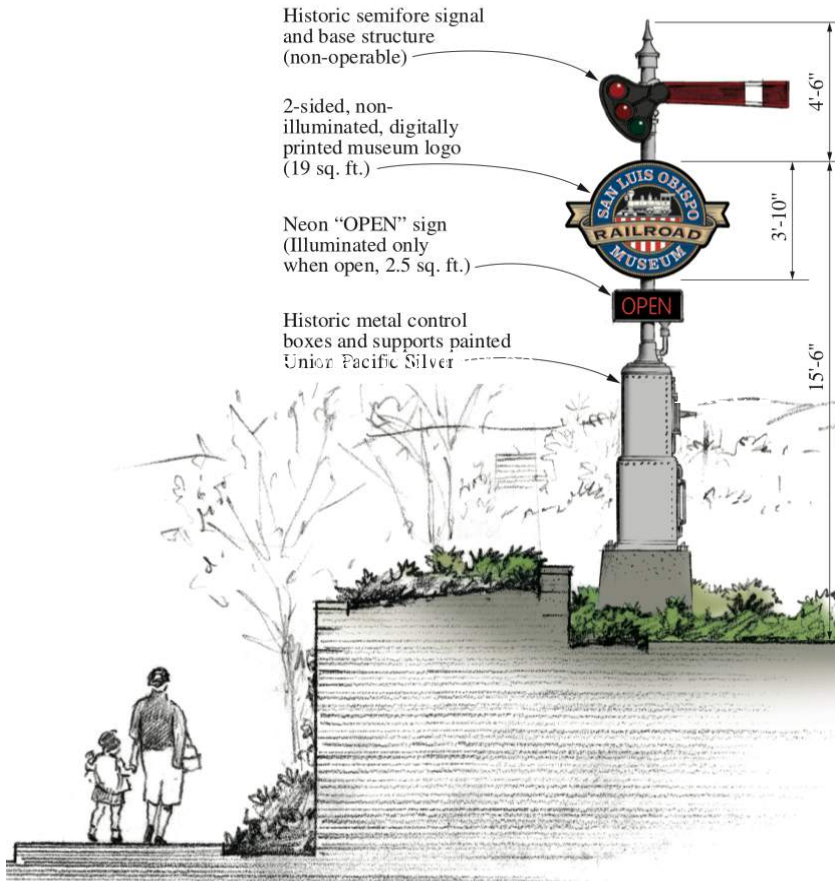


Illustration by Pierre Rademaker Design.

For the Museum's sign, the blade will not move and there will be no colored light. However, nearby streetlights and parking lot lights will make the sign visible at all times. There will be a circular panel with the Museum's logo visible from both directions. A small "Open" panel can be illuminated.

Other signs approved by the city for the Freighthouse are a round logo on the north wall, a roof sign at the south end typical of those used by the Southern Pacific Railroad to identify their depots by location name, and an "Entrance" sign over the public entry from the platform.

Pierre Rademaker Design, a local graphic arts business, provided design services. Principal Pierre Rademaker and Museum member John Marchetti helped package the proposal, and Ted VanKlaveren has been working to prepare the semaphore components. Arnold Jonas and Leon Fairbanks have offered financial support for the installation.

Also on the Museum's to-do list are better signs to direct people to the Amtrak station (we still get visitors asking if the Freighthouse is the place to buy tickets or meet arrivals), and signs to identify and give background on features such as the Museum's display track.

A further note on semaphores: They were designed so that if a train occupied a section of track ahead, a rail broke, or the power failed, the signal would automatically display the most restrictive aspect; a weight normally held up by an electromagnet would be pulled by gravity and through lever action raise the arm to "Stop."

Report by Glen Matteson.

Can you see us now?

Because the Freighthouse sits back from Santa Barbara Avenue and a tall retaining wall was required along the intervening parking area, the many people travelling past are often unaware of the Museum's presence. That will change with installation of a free-standing sign incorporating the basic elements of an actual Southern Pacific semaphore signal.

Such signals were common from the 1920s through the 1950s. They were typically mounted trackside in pairs on opposite sides, one controlling train movement in each direction. They combined a movable arm with a colored light to indicate:

Horizontal blade with red light – "Stop and stay," or in some situations "Stop, then proceed at restricted speed prepared to stop;"

Diagonal downward blade with yellow light – "Proceed at restricted speed prepared to stop before passing next signal;"

Nearly vertical downward blade with green light – "Proceed at authorized speed."

When two mechanisms were mounted on a single mast near a track switch, the upper one indicated the through route and the lower one indicated the diverging route.

A Little Editorial - Big Thanks

A few months ago during a discussion with a facilitator for Spokes, the organization that helps nonprofits reach their goals, the idea of raising \$10,000 in year-end giving was proposed. One hundred donors each giving \$100 sounded unlikely. But board members decided to give it a try, noting in the requests some of the specific projects where funds could be directed.

The results are in: 54 donors provided a total of \$12,520. Certain ones are noted elsewhere in this edition. Among the major efforts benefitting are our Pacific Coast Railway 1200-series boxcar, our Southern Pacific bay-window caboose, and *La Cuesta*, our 1926 café-lounge car.

Your dollars are essential; your generosity is inspiring.



Preserving California's Central Coast Railroad History

The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum is a non-profit educational institution. Founded to preserve and present California Central Coast railroad history by collecting, restoring, displaying, and operating relevant railroad artifacts, photographs, models, and documents, its goal is to facilitate a better understanding of railroads' impact on our area's social, cultural, and economic history.

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- Karl Hovanitz *President*
- Gary See *Vice President*
- Glen Matteson *Secretary*
- David Rohr *Treasurer*
- Brad LaRose, John Marchetti,
Andrew Merriam, Duane Powell,
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- Assistant Manager* Stephanie Hovanitz
- Curator* Brad LaRose
- Archivist, Newsletter Editor* Glen Matteson
(newsletter@slorrm.com)
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- Events Coordinator:* Tom Mitchell
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Contact

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 e-mail: info@slorrm.com
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 Mail: 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue
 San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE

Any member may access or receive a copy of the Museum's *By-laws*, *Collections Policy*, or *Strategic Plan* by going to the website noted above or by sending a #10, self-addressed, stamped envelope to the address above.

Renew your membership

The Museum exists thanks to continued member support. All annual memberships expire **December 31**. If you have not already renewed, please provide your payment and any changes to your contact information. You can renew online through the Museum's website (via Paypal) or checks may be mailed to the Museum. If renewing online you can provide updated contact information by phone message or email (contact listed below left). The Museum never shares your contact information.

Become a member

Membership provides opportunities for anyone interested in today's railroads, railroad history, train travel, or model railroading to learn and experience more, and to share with others.

Individual members pay \$36 per year; a family \$60 annually, and a sustaining member \$100. Application forms can be downloaded from the Museum's website and mailed with payment, or you can join online (mailing and web addresses below left) by clicking [Membership](#) and using PayPal.

Membership benefits include free admission to the Museum and access to Members Only features of the website, including current issues of *Coast Mail*.

Do you have photos of the photon-message train?

Last November former Southern Pacific engineers Rick Bacon and Kirk Miller generously allowed their reminiscences to be recorded as part of the Museum's "Train Tales" oral history program. A highlight was their memory of working on the trains that installed fiber-optic cables along the right-of-way through the central and south coasts and in northern California. If you have photos of this activity that the Museum can use, let us know.

TIMETABLE

These are the scheduled meetings of the Museum Board of Directors, held on the second Tuesday of each month at 6:00 p.m., at 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue, San Luis Obispo.

- March 8 - Board action meeting
- April 12 - Public meeting
- May 10 - Board action meeting

For dates, times and locations of committee meetings, contact the Museum through the number or email at left.

Train Day 2016

Mark your calendars for May 7.

Come to the Museum to view the newly installed Pacific Coast Railway exhibit and learn more about why San Luis Obispo had a railroad to the ocean; check progress on the model railroad; pick up a free magazine or two on model or full-size railroading; see everything from apricot-haulers to Zephyr books; ring the locomotive bell; watch trains go by.

Membership News is on page 12.

It's huge -25 years.

There was much to cover in this *Coast Mail*. If you're reading a four-page paper copy, remember that members can read all 14 pages of this issue on-line, and anyone can read entire past issues there.

This also marks our 25th anniversary. On February 11, 1991, articles of incorporation for the Museum were filed with the California Secretary of State.

Donations

Ryan and Howard Amborn have provided two fully stocked first-aid kits for the Freighthouse.

Life Members Robert and Deborah Hoefke made a generous contribution that will allow the Museum to obtain materials for replacing the roof of the Pacific Coast Railway boxcar that's accessible from the Freighthouse and used for storage. The existing steeper pitched roof with asphalt shingles had been in-stalled when the car was used on a ranch. The original lower pitched rafters remain in place and can be used to support a roof like that originally built with the car. To be completed as weather allows, this will be a huge step in authentic restoration and appearance for this car. See future issues for photos and progress reports.

Brad LaRose obtained and donated two brake wheels for freight cars that the Museum is working to acquire or restore.

Company Store

To raise funds, the Museum offers several items for sale. T-shirts, baseball caps, belt buckles, mugs, enameled pins, embroidered patches, engineer hats, and videos are available through the Museum website www.slorrm.com. Click on **Company Store**.

So, how did you get interested in trains?

Bill Pyper

Bill Pyper, *Coast Mail* Editor Emeritus and recipient of the Museum's Distinguished Service Award, was recently asked how he became interested in and a supporter of railroad history.

Bill says he was born and grew up in Amityville, New York, a small town on Long Island, 35 miles by rail from Manhattan. His maternal grandparents lived in a big, old house next to the tracks of the Long Island Rail Road. (Yes, that company spelled it as two words, a detail Bill would catch). He remembers sitting on their porch in the late 1940s and early 1950s, watching the electric commuter trains rattle by, and a small steam locomotive switching a nearby dairy. Long Island was still somewhat rural in those days. He adds that as a child he often rode the LIRR to Manhattan with his mother for various cultural adventures.

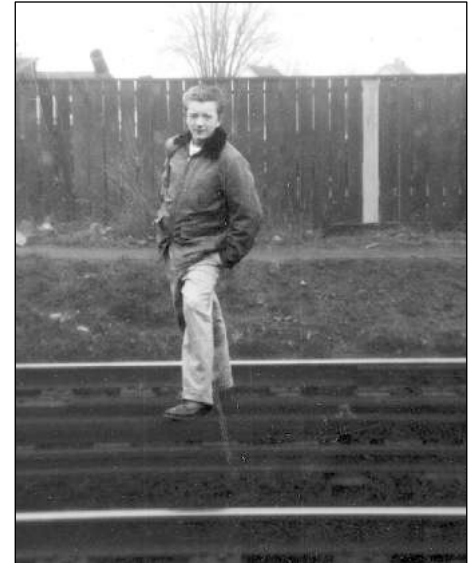
When he became a teenager, he was able to ride the LIRR into "the city" with friends to watch Brooklyn Dodgers baseball games. Imprinted on his memory is the first time he saw a huge Pennsylvania Railroad GG-1 electric locomotive in Penn Station. Lionel made models of those, and he wanted one desperately. However, all that came forth was a less costly Marx tinplate set. Also during that period his family took trips on the New York Central's famed *20th Century Limited* to Syracuse, New York, to visit relatives.

After enlisting in the Air Force in 1957, he was sent by train, using several railroads, from New York to Texas, a trip of three or four days as he recalls. While in the Air Force he rode trains in Germany, the Netherlands, and England.

How did Bill come to be in San Luis Obispo? In 1975 he was hired to teach printing at Cal Poly. That job turned out not to be permanent. Bill and his wife, wanting to stay in SLO, bought a troubled printing business that was in a small building at the end of Osos Street, across from the Park Hotel. Its proximity to what was then a fairly active rail yard reignited his interest in trains. He admits that his wife would often chastise him for gazing out the window at the trains instead of working. (Bill must be the only one ever to have done so.)

In 1996 he bought a used Lionel train set at the Sunset Drive-in swapmeet and started model railroading again. When a *Telegram-Tribune* article announced an organizational meeting for what would become the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum, he attended and joined. He volunteered to do the *Coast Mail* because he knew how to compose a newsletter and he could print it for free at his shop, a real boon to the fledgling organization that did not have a building or displays. Also, for several years Bill kept track of Museum memberships and communications with members.

Bill's work with the *Coast Mail* led to his current part-time job as editor of the *Dispatch*, a semi-monthly magazine published by the National Association of S-Gaugers. (S scale uses 3/16 inch per foot, or about midway between O scale and the currently popular H-O scale, used for the Museum's model railroad.)



Here's Bill at age 15, standing on Long Island Rail Road tracks (an activity that the Museum does not encourage).

Bill, now living in Oregon, adds that he loves anything mechanical: automobiles, airplanes, printing presses, and especially trains. He's found steam and diesel locomotives fascinating for as long as he can remember.

Several Museum participants have had older relatives who worked in some capacity for a railroad. With Bill, it's just the opposite. His oldest son, who worked as a printer for 20 years, is now an electronics technician for the Union Pacific R.R, working out of Watsonville.

Dailey Foundation Grant Received

In February the Museum received a grant from the Tom E. Dailey Foundation of Chicago. The grant of \$1,500 will be used in restoration of the Pacific Coast Railway 1200-series boxcar. The award is significant because this foundation supports several areas of public benefit, and even within the railroad heritage category does not focus on Western railroads. The uniqueness of the PCRY, the rarity of the artifact, and the Museum's reliance on volunteer work contributed to a high rank.

Election of board members, officers

Following a vote by general members, at the January meeting Karl Hovanitz (president), Gary See (vice president), Andrew Merriam, and Dave Rohr (treasurer) were approved as continuing board members. Glen Matteson, midway in his board term, was named secretary.

Mike Boyack chose not to run for re-election. Mike has contributed much to museum governance, remodeling projects, and the model railroad. The board hopes he will continue helping make the Museum successful despite not being on the board.

Distinguished Service Awards

The board has recognized Bill Pyper (article this page) for his many years of service to the Museum. Bill was a long-serving board member and continued to prepare the *Coast Mail* and help with member communications after moving out of the area.

Members Rob Himoto and Pierre Rademaker have also received the award (*Coast Mail* #54, Winter 2015).



Walking the neighborhood

Several years ago the city adopted a special standard for sidewalks in the area near the Museum, part of the Railroad Historic District, calling for a boardwalk design: concrete curbs on each side, with treated wood supports and 2x6 boards crosswise for the walking surface. They were installed along Santa Barbara Avenue at the Railroad Square commercial building, Amtrak parking, the hardware store, and the city's main fire station. Over time, the boards have deteriorated, requiring frequent maintenance.

Last year, city engineering staff began investigating potential new standards that would give a unique character for the area but be more durable. The city's Cultural Heritage Committee, which advises on historical matters, was also involved. The new standard would apply to planned replacements and new developments' frontages in the designated area. Museum board members have followed the process, noting there are no records indicating that boardwalks were used in the area; it must have gone from having no sidewalks to gray concrete ones. The newer reddish walkways at the depot and the Freighthouse reflect a Southern Pacific practice applied locally and in Santa Barbara, where concrete walkways were tinted and scored to recall Mexican paving tiles.

Above: The boardwalk design used in part of the Railroad Historic District.

Below: The colored concrete design used around the Amtrak depot and the Freighthouse.



The Museum board favors red clay brick. As this edition was prepared, City staff was working with other stakeholders and city advisory bodies to prepare a recommended new standard.

Report and photos by Glen Matteson

What does this have to do with railroads?



The link is tenuous at best, but we're always looking for new ways to engage visitors whether or not they are railfans.

It was part of the Museum's Halloween hospitality, since October 31 was a regular open Saturday. The "Treatbot 9000" dispensed treats and encouragement to small visitors whether or not they were in costume. Diane and John Marchetti did the same, with the advantage of being able to walk.

Photo by Gary See.

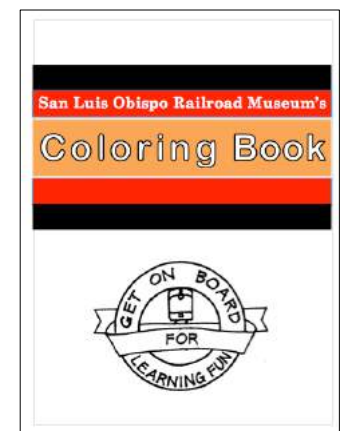


That's more like it!

On December 5 the Museum's award-winning *Pineapple Express* rolled as part of the Grover Beach holiday parade, this year with a theme of Hawaiian Holiday. Karl exercised his perk as president to be engineer.

Photo by Tom Mitchell. More holidays photos on page 8.

New Publications



They aren't thick, glossy, or filled with historical drama, but two new Museum publications should help young visitors learn about local railroads and better remember their time at the Freighthouse. One is a coloring book intended mainly for ages 4 to 6; the other contains more activities and is for children aged about 7 to 11. Both encourage family participation and safety.

*From the archives***A Life-saving Operation**

by Glen Matteson

This time we start by looking at an item from the Museum's library rather than its archives and at another item from the recent news, and not so much focused on the Central Coast. But they do show how the history of the Southern Pacific Railroad has a way of reaching across the years to us.

Thanks to various donors, the Museum has a nearly complete collection of *S-P Trainline*, the quarterly publication of the Southern Pacific Historical & Technical Society, back to Issue No. 1 in 1984. One of the hazards of working in the library and archives is the temptation to be distracted by things of personal interest or involving attractive photos and graphics, when they are not on the task list for the day. For example, your archivist admits to a fondness for maps and bridges.

The Summer 2002 *S-P Trainline* has an article by Frank Scheer titled "The Hito Underpass," describing a project that was built in Oregon's Willamette Valley during 1936-37. According to the article, in 1935 Congress appropriated \$400 million for projects that would eliminate at-grade crossings of highways and railroads. (The handy web page "U. S. Inflation Calculator" shows that, assuming the general rate of inflation, those 1935 dollars would be roughly equivalent to seven billion 2016 dollars.)

The construction contract was let for about \$48,000, and the project was completed about 10 percent under bid price. The bridge turned out to be a very sturdy example of plate-girders and concrete-abutment engineering, with art deco details. It was long enough, despite crossing the road at a 30-degree angle, to span four travel lanes. It is still in use.

That program and project are particularly relevant because effective ways to prevent grade-crossing tragedies and to provide jobs have been much in the news. The project was part of the congressionally funded Works Program Grade Separation Funds. The article also explains that the bridge took longer to complete than might have been expected because "1930s works relief funding was to provide employment, and hand tools were to be used over power tools whenever possible." Shovel-ready, indeed.



Someday this may be history. On May 11, 2015, a set of engines with no cars zips across Orcutt Road in San Luis Obispo, headed for Guadalupe.
Photo by Glen Matteson.

In February 2015, a Metrolink regional commuter train struck a truck and trailer that had been abandoned on the right-of-way at the Rice Avenue grade crossing of Union Pacific's (formerly Southern Pacific's) coast main line in Oxnard. The subsequent derailment caused substantial damage to equipment, 30 injuries among passengers and crew, and one fatality. The engineer, the most senior at Metrolink and a 42-year veteran of Amtrak, died a week later. According to a Wikipedia article on the accident, "an overpass has been planned for the Rice Avenue crossing where the accident occurred for almost two decades. Funding has not been available in Ventura County for the estimated \$35 million grade separation project." Figuring backwards, that would have been about \$2 million in 1935. It looks like it's become relatively more expensive to build things, even allowing for more efficient use of labor.

Having been involved in some cost-benefit safety studies, your archivist remembers the sting of being asked "How can you put a value on a human life?" Thanks to a wise Cal Poly economics professor (at the dawn of the computer age), and disregarding the litigation aspect, your archivist also recalls the best answer: The question is not the dollar value of a life, but given, say, one billion dollars, what is the most effective way to spend them to save lives?

Should they go to Positive Train Control, the satellite- and computer-linked system, which supposedly never gets distracted or doses off, to back up train crews and to monitor switch positions and possibly grade-crossing occupancy? To building grade separations? To earthquake and tsunami warning systems that may have no railroad connection? To scanning airline passengers and freight? To keeping impaired drivers off the road? There are no easy answers, mainly because the frequency of occurrence of many of the cost-imposing incidents is not known. Because of the way our minds work and the news is reported, the infrequent but dramatic individual events often get more attention and resources

Continues on page 6.

At right: A 1956 aerial photo of the Orcutt Road crossing shows that there wasn't much development or traffic then. The building at lower right was a vegetable packing shed with its own spur. Image is from City of SLO Engineering Division Collection.



A Life-saving Operation *continued*

than the daily events that in the aggregate result in more losses.

In looking at the costs and benefits of grade separations, other factors are considered: the potential for trains to delay emergency-response vehicles; the time lost by people waiting for trains to clear; the fuel consumption and air pollution caused by stopping, waiting, and accelerating vehicles.

Also, what lower-cost alternatives would save lives? In Europe, crossing gates are often hefty steel pipes that a driver must be very determined to crash through. Yes, people do drive through crossing arms when they're down. Spares are often kept nearby, and in some areas signal maintainers routinely keep extras of the shorter versions in their trucks. Enforcement campaigns can reduce the number of people who try to beat the train, with local officers ticketing those who drive around lowered gates. Forward-facing cameras in locomotive cabs are not a direct deterrent to crossing violators, but they do help railroads make the case when sued that "Yes, the lights were flashing, the horn was blowing, the gates were down in time, and the engineer was running within the track speed limit when the plaintiff drove in front of the train." And in a favorite example of you can't fix careless, in 2005 the Federal Railroad Administration issued Rule 224, requiring bright reflective markings on the sides of locomotives and freight cars to reduce the number of people driving into them at crossings.



Above: In 1937, before the packing shed and spur. Image is from the U.S. Army via map archives at www.ucsb.edu.



This close-in Google Satellite view shows townhouses curving away from Orcutt Road, and Bullock Lane angling to align with Laurel Lane, so that someday this grade crossing may more easily become part of history if a bridge is built.

Bringing it closer to home, in a "Train Tales" oral history retired Signal Supervisor Sid Marques recalled installing new crossing protection equipment at Orcutt Road in south San Luis Obispo, when it was a lightly travelled two lanes. The upgrade then was adding automatic gates to what had been simply a swinging light and a bell: a wig-wag. Today, there are more and longer gates because the road is four lanes. If you glance to the right when travelling east you'll see an area of open land that gets wider approaching the tracks, and after crossing the tracks a sharp jog in Bullock Lane as it comes in from the south. The open land and the jog are to accommodate an earth fill leading to a future road bridge over the tracks, if one is ever built. The jog also moved the Bullock-Orcutt intersection farther from the tracks.

Continues on page 7.

A Life-saving Operation *continued*



The most problematic grade crossing, Osos Street continuing right over the main and multiple yard tracks, was closed in the late steam era. (The book *Coast Line Pictorial*, page 142, has a Richard Steinheimer photo looking westerly along Osos Street across the yard.)

Just during the spring of 2015, the Ventura County tragedy was one of several fatal grade-crossing collisions in the United States. Everyone, be careful out there.

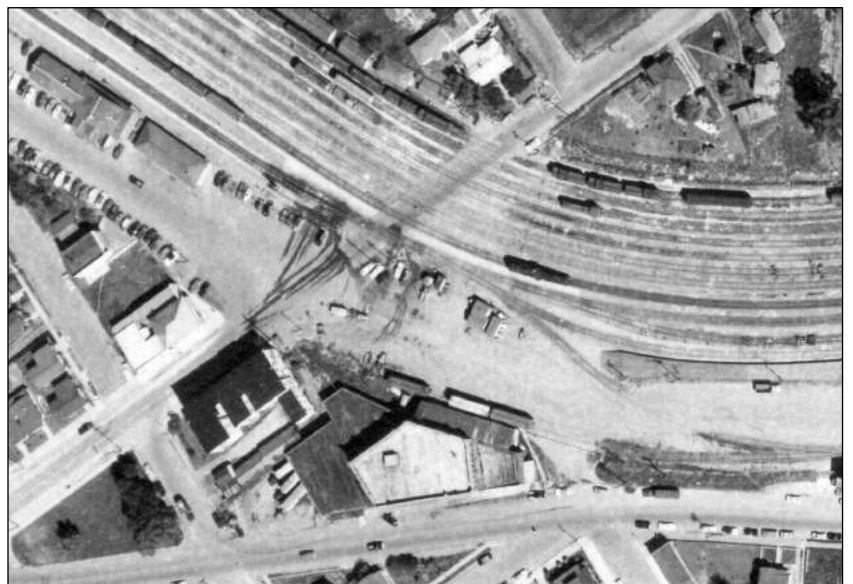
Left: An SP Daylight locomotive approaches Orcutt Rd. crossing with #72, the southbound Coast Mail train, about 1950. Note the wig-wag. Uncredited photo from the Internet.

Below: Amtrak's train #1790, the weekend midday Surfliner, heads south at the same location in September 2015, with a cab car in the lead and the locomotive at the rear. Photo by Glen Matteson.

Having a road intersection close to a railroad grade crossing is especially hazardous, because turning vehicles add to the uncertainty and the chance that a driver will allow himself or herself to become trapped on the tracks between vehicles or between a lowered gate and a vehicle. The Foothill Boulevard crossing in north San Luis Obispo, which is next to the intersection with California Boulevard, has a sophisticated connection between road traffic signals and automatic railroad-crossing protection to help avoid those situations.

In the early 1990s, a San Luis Obispo city planner tried to convince a skeptical citizens' advisory group about the value of an Orcutt Road grade separation, especially if train speeds were to increase. Hundreds of new dwellings were, and are, planned for the city's Orcutt Area, extending from Orcutt Road to Tank Farm Road east of the railroad. (Tank Farm Road was built as a railroad undercrossing when it was extended east from Broad Street; it's usually easier and less expensive to build grade separations in undeveloped areas than to fit them into existing development.) Generally, local governments and developers have to pay for grade separations, whether in open land or built-up areas, because the rails were there first. According to federal and state grant funding criteria, money should go first to the crossings with the most rail and road traffic. Back in the 1980s, Orcutt Road was on the short list. But by the 1990s, while Orcutt Road traffic was increasing, Coast Line rail traffic was declining, and the probability of Federal money dropped to zero.

Considering the length of the main line through the city, San Luis Obispo has relatively few grade crossings. That's due mainly to natural elevation differences of the long established bridges at Mill Street, Monterey Street, and Johnson Avenue, and the more recent extension of Tank Farm Road.



In this 1955 aerial view, Osos Street crosses all nine tracks in the SLO yard. According to oral accounts, a man was always stationed there to protect the crossing with a flag, and another man with a broom was usually on duty to sweep ballast and debris out of the flangeways. Santa Barbara Avenue is at the bottom of the image, which is cropped from a photo in the City of San Luis Obispo Engineering Division collection.

Holidays at the Museum

One person compared the “Treatbot” temporarily installed on Halloween to a trackside defect detector. But some visitors found that it followed simple directions such as “Clap your hands.”

Photo by Jamie Foster.



Mr. and Mrs. Claus and some regular Museum volunteers added holiday cheer on *La Cuesta's* platform, and a young visitor checks out Santa's beard inside the 1926 Pullman lounge car.

Photos by Cheryl Strahl Photography.



Updating the Organization

The Museum's Board of Directors has embarked on an effort to update its governing and financing procedures. Most measures are meant to better define qualifications and duties for board members and appointed positions, which at this time are all filled by volunteers. Another set of potential changes should give Museum members a more direct say in what the Museum offers to them and the public as a whole.

Currently, general members vote on candidates for board membership. General members also approve any changes to the by-laws through an election. Under the proposed approach, general members will be polled for suggestions on how to improve the Museum, but future board members and changes to the by-laws would be decided by the board itself. Of course, for that to happen the general members by a majority vote must approve changes to the by-laws now in effect. The board believes several other aspects of the by-laws should be clarified and updated as well. A vote on the actual language of the new provisions is likely to be scheduled for later this year.

A future edition of the *Coast Mail* will summarize the recommended changes as they are refined.

Spokes, a local organization that helps non-profits develop their services, has assisted the board in identifying improved practices and listing steps needed to implement them.



Stenner Canyon Trestle in Fall 2015.

Photo by Glen Matteson

Legacies of Railroad History

If you've included the Museum in your will, estate plan, or charitable annuity, and haven't already informed the Museum, please do so, so your support can be recognized. (We won't publicize your support if you'd prefer it not be individually identified.) If you'd like to create a legacy of support for preserving and presenting Central Coast railroad history, consult a qualified legal or financial advisor. Gifts can go to specific projects or types of activities. The Museum would work with you and your advisor to ensure your specific intent is fulfilled.



This train came through San Luis Obispo one time in 1971. Did you ride or photograph it? Photo by "Viewline" via Photobucket online; location not known.

Call for oddities

If you have memories, and especially photos, of some of the unusual railroad happenings on the Central Coast, the Museum would truly appreciate your sharing them. We're thinking of events like the one northbound demonstration trip by United Aircraft's TurboTrain in August 1971. Its San Luis Obispo visit was covered by the Telegram-Tribune. These low-slung, jet-engine powered, articulated trains were used for several years on an East Coast Amtrak corridor and by Canadian National Railway; none returned to the West.

An unlikely visitor would have been one of the German-built, Krauss-Maffei diesel-hydraulic loco-motives that Southern Pacific tested and used in limited service in the 1960s. These locomotives with two prime movers were an early experiment in high-horsepower freight haulers. They had a distinctive cab shape. They were used mainly in the San Joaquin Valley. The Southern Pacific Historical and Technical Society published a book on them in 2014. That book and other sources give no indication that they came closer to the Central Coast than the Los Angeles Basin or the eastern San Francisco Bay area, but they don't rule out the possibility. Neil Haskin, former SP freight conductor who visited the Museum during the October 2015 railroad festival, recalled working on a 100-car train going over Altamont Pass with such locomotives, stalling, and finding that the transmission fluid had leaked in a dramatic fashion.

Our interest isn't limited to distinctive trains or locomotives. Did you record unusual shipments such as large components for the Diablo Canyon power plant, or something as small as the substantially different wheel diameters in a freight car truck once seen by your editor when he had no camera handy?

Scheduled Arrivals

Watch for the following in future editions.

Summer 2016

Report on San Luis Obispo Train Day; From the Archives featuring octopi, root beer, and an awkward trip; proposed Museum by-laws changes.

Fall 2016

What we did this summer; From the Archives featuring "Kids These Days" and "Details."

Looking good...

In early February a contractor repainted the south and west sides of the Freighthouse, the most weathered areas. That work was arranged by the city under its current budget. City staff are aiming to budget repainting the whole building in coming years. City facilities maintenance supervisor Andrew Collins and technician Alejandro Hernandez worked with museum members on this highly visible improvement and on weatherizing a door.



Browder Painting's crew works on the south end of the Freighthouse under City of San Luis Obispo contract. Photo by Glen Matteson.



The Freighthouse when it was being restored. We've come a long way, but maintenance needs continue. Photo from SLORRM collection.

More from the archives by Glen Matteson

Archives within archives

When a 1937 newspaper article is titled “Ancient Deed To Land Filed” you know you’ve found something *old*. Such was the case when a clipping from the Santa Maria Daily Times of September 2, 1937, turned up, with the subtitle “Pacific Coast Records Transfer Right of Way in Oil Field 53 Years Ago.” To quote:

“An ancient deed which had reposed in the archives of the Pacific Coast Railroad [sic] Co. for 53 years has been filed for record with County Auditor Yris Covarrubias by the company, as a result of the present oil excitement in Santa Maria valley.

“The land covered by the old deed was sold to the railroad company in 1884 by Joel Smith, and covers two acres in a 1200-foot strip which the little narrow-gauge railroad acquired in building across Santa Maria valley to Sisquoc.

“The right-of-way was bought by the company for a consideration of \$50 and today it may be worth a fortune, as it is in the line of oil development...”

“The 53-year-old document found in the company’s archives disclosed no reservations were made, and the railroad company is owner of the oil as well as the surface rights.”

So, archives can have value beyond education and amusement.

Fish, and oil, and trains...

The actors change, but the same topics keep coming up. The circumstances were different, though, as shown by an October 5, 1939, letter from Pacific Coast Railway Manager H. C. Grundell to Mr. R. V. Rosborough, Superintendent of the Union Oil Company of California at San Luis Obispo.

“Dear Mr. Rosborough:

“Some time ago I had a verbal discussion with you relative to the restrictions that should be placed on the use of Union Oil Company push cars operating on our tracks at Port San Luis; and that such use should be limited [to] between Marine Warehouse and the end of the oil dock because of the hazard of such use by reason of the fact that the operations of our trains or work equipment at the same time your push cars were being operated might result in a collision between the two.”

Mr. Grundell’s writing style does not reflect an economy of words, so we won’t reproduce the whole one-and-a-half page, single-space typed letter here. Push cars, like the ones displayed on the west (parking lot) side of the Museum’s Freighthouse, were simply platforms with four flanged wheels that a person could push along the track. They could also be used on any hard surface, such as pier decking. The letter goes on to say that the wheels of the Union Oil push cars should be kept locked when not in use by Union Oil workers “to

avoid the general public from using them indiscriminately.” Mr. Grundell asks that use of oil company push cars on PCRY track “be placed under the direction of some responsible person in your organization, preferably Mr. Shekelle, in whose judgment I have absolute confidence.” In an “extreme emergency” requiring use of the push cars between the Marine Warehouse and Avila, he should call the railroad’s dispatcher in San Luis Obispo (phone number 1420) and get clearance.

To drive the point home:

“Last evening while going toward Port San Luis on our motor car we discovered Mr. Barden and two men from the sales department of the Union Oil Company pushing one of your push cars on our main line track from Marine Warehouse to Avila. We were going toward Port ... and Mr. Barden saw our motor in advance and had the push car off the track. I stopped and told Mr. Barden that what he was doing was absolutely contrary to a previous understanding I had had with his Company, and was absolutely against my knowledge, against my consent, and against my will...and should an accident occur ... as a result of the unauthorized use ...the responsibility would have to be placed solely upon the Union Oil Company, and I was giving him notice to that effect.”

Then, to dispel any “misconstruction” of motives, Mr. Grundell explained that competing wholesale fish buyers were located on the railroad’s No. 1 Wharf (for which they must have paid rent, and accessible from what today would be called Port San Luis) and on the County Wharf (accessible from what today is called Avila Beach). What he didn’t say, because it was common knowledge at the time, was that the railroad and its right-of-way—not much wider than the actual tracks—were basically the only land route from one to the other. And the crux:

Continues on page 11.



In 2015 Tom Cooper (back to camera) and Ted Van Klaveren resist the urge to joyride and instead prepare one of the Museum’s narrow-gauge push-cars to hold a load of timber pilings, as it would have on the Pacific Coast Railway wharf at Port San Luis. The nearer car was owned by Union Oil, the other car by PCRY. Photo by Glen Matteson.

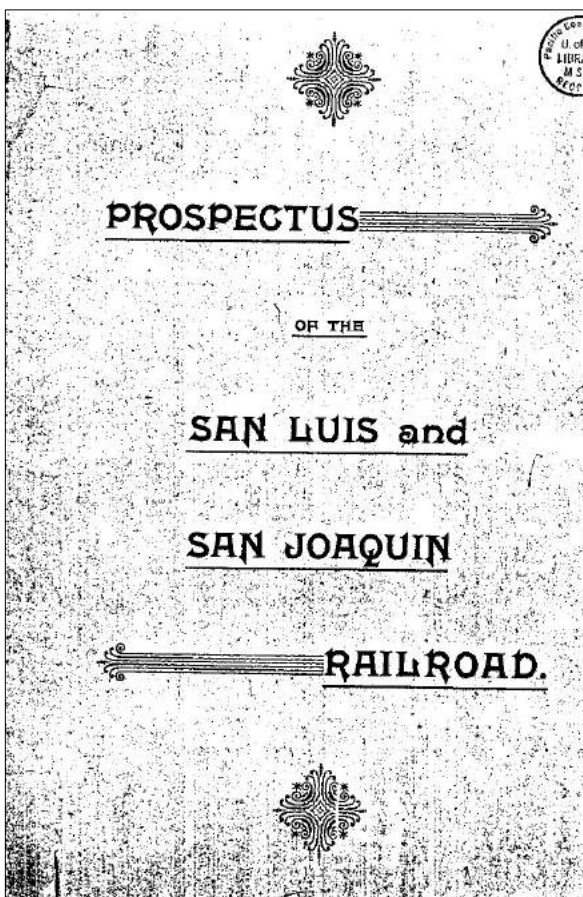
Fish, and oil, and trains... *continued*

"Any competitive dealing between the buyers on our Wharf and on the County Wharf cannot have any influence, and does not have any influence upon my feelings. As a matter of fact, if I had extra push cars to spare I would gladly lend one of them to Mr. Barden to use on the County Wharf..."

By the late 1930's, the PCRY had little of anything to spare. In a few years, nearly any property made of metal would be on its way to scrapping for the war effort.

The railroad that never was

The name Myron Angel is associated with early San Luis Obispo newspapers, efforts to found the school that became Cal Poly, and convincing the Southern Pacific to build through San Luis Obispo instead of an alternate route. He also advocated building a railroad from Port Harford (now known as Port San Luis, or Avila Beach) to the San Joaquin Valley. Recently found in the material to be archived is a photocopy of his March 1891 "Prospectus of the San Luis and San Joaquin Railroad," from an original in the University of Washington collection.



The cover of Myron Angel's 1891 prospectus containing 26 pages of glowing prose, but no dollar amounts, for an investment too good to be true. "Printed by The Tribune Printing Company." From the SLO Railroad Museum collection.

Addressed to "capitalists, railroad makers and those whom it may concern," the Prospectus describes a route following the Pacific Coast Railway from the "harbor of ideal excellence" into Los Osos Valley, then into the Moro (so spelled, now called Chorro) Valley, along Old Creek to the summit of the Santa Lucia Range, then down Paso Robles Creek into the Salinas Valley, ignoring Cuesta Pass. There the line would cross "the Southern Pacific branch railroad and the Salinas River by a bridge near the great Paso de Robles Hot Springs, a new city and famous resort." (Harrumph; at that time the SP line was merely a branch, not even reaching San Luis Obispo.) Next, the line would proceed into the "Monte Diablo range" (not to be confused with Mount Diablo in the eastern San Francisco Bay area), thence east into the San Joaquin Valley. Branches would reach Fresno, Visalia, and Bakersfield.

That Salinas River bridge and crossing the Santa Lucias would be "the only extraordinary works of expenditure on the entire route, the country generally being very favorable for railroad construction and operation, and no portion subject to any elemental disturbance or obstruction, or damage in the least. No severe storms ever occur; it is out of the region of snow, and no part of it is exposed to disastrous floods." It had been awhile since a major earthquake, and the flooding that took out the Stone Canyon Railroad bridge was 30 years in the future (*Coast Mail*, Winter 2014-15).

Angel does acknowledge SP's recent role in stimulating development of the region, but observes "It is superfluous to state that the natural shipping point for this large region is the port of San Luis Obispo, not fifty miles distant, rather than the expensive port of San Francisco more than two hundred miles away. No railroad making so long a haul to an expensive port could successfully compete with the road to the cheap and convenient port near at hand." (Take that, city slickers.)

Mineral traffic was often the impetus for 19th century railroad ventures, and this one was no exception. Mr. Angel claims the base of the Coast Ranges hold "vast and inexhaustible beds of asphaltum, bitumen, sulphur, gypsum, and ... antimony." In the Carrisa Plain "masses of rock salt and salt springs indicate an inexhaustible supply." In western Kern County could be found "running springs of bitumen and maltha." Before we get carried away with visions of milk and honey, bitumen is a natural form of asphalt (thick oil with sand) that was used for paving, including the Museum's Freighthouse floor; maltha is basically a more soupy form of asphaltum.

Agriculture was not overlooked. "...the climate of the coast and western slope of the range is the most pleasant, healthy, and uniform known in any country of christendom," benefiting crops such as the sugar beets recently grown as an experiment in the Santa Maria area by the enterprising Mr. Spreckles. "There is no glutting the sugar market," Angel predicts, because "A bounty paid by the National Government to the producers insures great profit." The only missing piece of the sugar-bonanza puzzle is "the construction of the railroad... enabling the importation of coal [for sugar-refining mills] at cheap rates."

Continues on page 12.

The railroad that never was... *continued*

Lastly, tourism: "The interior valleys are very warm in summer, and large numbers of people ... seek the cooler climate of the coast for health and comfort... In wagons and in the saddle they cross the valley and the hills with camp equipage and home comforts, and make their temporary homes in the many pleasant nooks along the beach of San Luis Obispo county from Cambria to Pismo... For these [trips] and for postal facilities this railroad is much needed."

These minerals, crops, and travelers produced, Angel said with a verbal flourish, an opportunity for wealth not seen since "the magnificent opportunity of the Union and Central Pacific railroads. Men of clear intellect and gigantic energy sprang forward to grasp and improve that opportunity, and it is hoped that men of as bright intellect will see this and carry it triumphantly forward."

What appears to be a handwritten note at the end of the prospectus contains the only cost information, an estimate that the trunk line and its branches would comprise 300 miles and require four million dollars to build. (A statement in the body of the text asserted that the right-of-way could be acquired at no cost.) That was a lot of money in 1891, but "This proposition is the most important to the people of the entire section interested that has ever been placed before them, and a united effort should at once be made to carry out the plan." Angel clearly wanted to impress potential East Coast investors. His final paragraph refers to following maps comparing the area to be served by the railroad with that encompassed by "more than three entire Eastern States" and equivalent to extending "from 60 miles north of New York to Savannah."

The railroad of course was never built, not even started. But in a personal aside, a relative of your archivist who worked in sales for Southern Pacific in the 1970s once commented that Central Coastal and southern San Joaquin Valley shippers sometimes asked about rail freight between the two areas, and were disappointed that there was no direct route.

A barely readable fragment of a map photocopied with the Prospectus has some interesting features. Harford is misspelled "Hartford." Grangeville and Central City (early names for Santa Maria) are not shown, but Graciosa (Spanish for "funny") near present day Orcutt is. And the implied route of Southern Pacific's extension beyond San Luis Obispo follows the Pacific Coast Railway to Los Alamos.

On that map, Southern Pacific's Coast Route reaches as far as Elwood. Another archival find is an 1893 letter from a local Pacific Coast Railway official to corporate headquarters reporting on a narrow-gauge trip by SP executives. The PCRY man was in the same car but was not invited to be part of the conversation. Based on what he overheard, he speculates on whether SP is thinking of buying the PCRY, or choosing a different route to the coast through what the PCRY man sees as the less agriculturally blessed area now known as Casmalia and Vandenberg Air Force base. But that's a story for another day.

Membership News

Since the last *Coast Mail*, 28 individual memberships have been renewed, along with seven families and three sustaining members.

New members are: Rick Devoy, Leslie E. Jones, Jan Kirkwood, Rick Kvechenig, Cheri Roe, Alan E. Turk (individuals); Kevin O'Roark (sustaining); and Marilyn Darnell, Ted Dubost, Corki Henderson, John & Shanelle Henderson, and Wendy Knight & Louis Zimmerman (family).

Take the next step

You don't need to be a train expert to serve on the Museum's Board of Directors. If you're enthusiastic about helping our all-volunteer organization set and reach goals, contact a board member. Or recommend someone new to the area who would enjoy participating in the Museum's role of community building.

Member Survey Results

In December survey questionnaires were sent to Museum members along with ballots for the directors election. The response rate of 40 percent was gratifying (mail-back survey rates are typically much lower). Following is a summary of the results. The results probably reflect the preferences of those most likely to be involved in Museum activities.

- 41% visit the Museum once a month or more.
- 52% visit the Museum area when the Museum isn't open, such as when seeing people on or off the train.
- Visitation is about equally divided among those who come mainly on regular open days and those who come mainly for special events.
- Nearly half of visits are by individuals wanting to see exhibits themselves, rather than bringing family or friends or to volunteer.
- Special exhibits, programs, and events are each about equally likely to encourage visits.
- In terms of exhibits, models, full size rolling stock, and photos were the features most desired.
- Nearly half visit the Museum's website once a month or more, and members would like the site to have more information about and photos of items in the collection.
- Nearly all read "From the Freighthouse" emails and *Coast Mail* newsletters whenever they're made available, but very few look at the Museum's Facebook page.
- In terms of email and newsletter content, members would like to see more about railroad history, coming events, the model railroad, and current local railroad news, in that order. More material on artifacts and recent events was somewhat less desired.

The board and committees will use the results to set priorities for continuing efforts. Future surveys will check progress on how we're doing in the eyes of members and of non-member visitors.

Feed the lions coins for good fortune.

On February 20 the Museum began a series of special events with a presentation by Phil Tillman on the role of Chinese on the Central Coast (below). Chinese immigrants had major roles in building the Pacific Coast Railway on the Central Coast, and the Central Pacific and the Southern Pacific in other locations. Also, they were a major part of early local agriculture and of other construction efforts, and other enterprises. Facing discrimination in several situations, their local numbers declined in the late 1800s.

Later that day, Cal Poly's Lion Dance Troupe helped welcome the Lunar New Year, a traditional Chinese time of celebration, that began on February 8 (below right).

In one of those twists of history, China now leads the world in railway construction.



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A Raincoat of Vast Proportions

In January members Brad LaRose, Dan Manion, and Bob Wilson installed a custom-sized RV tarp on the Museum's 1926 wooden Southern Pacific caboos, which is stored in the Emile Street Yard (below). Before the tarp, heavy plastic carpet protector strips were put over the roof and cupola to help keep the tarp from tearing on the sharp metal flashing at the edges. With work underway to restore the bay window caboos, the Pacific Coast Railway 1200-series boxcar, and *La Cuesta*, the tarp is to help preserve the wood caboos until work can begin on it.



Three photos by Glen Matteson

“It’s your turn.”

The Museum's new activity and coloring books (page 4) conclude with some suggestions for more family activities involving trains, including inventing your own board game. Editor Glen took his own advice and with his six-year-old granddaughter made this one from a piece of cardboard he found in some neighborhood recycling. If moving markers made from pieces of ice cream sticks representing trains according to a roll of the dice gets boring, the surface can be used for break dancing. (Consult your doctor before engaging in any new physical activity.)



Photo by Robyn Matteson

You never know where research will lead.

Have you ever sat down at your computer intending to do one thing, then realized hours later that you've made little or no progress on that thing? Social media have become a favorite distraction for many. Your archivist of course maintains a laser-like focus on carefully prioritized tasks and never goes astray – unless he sees something else interesting.

In January a question came to the Museum concerning the demolition date of the Southern Pacific depot at Santa Margarita. After a quick check of books at hand did not reveal the answer, an Internet search was done. Google, what can you show me about “Santa Margarita Southern Pacific Depot Demolition?”

The closest was this, from the *Sacramento Union* of November 4, 1910. Apparently, a couple guys had in mind a demolition schedule a little ahead of anyone else's, at least for the freight station. The brief article gives no clue to motive. But it does mention a main character from the Great San Luis Obispo Train Burglary of 1904 (*Coast Mail* #53, Summer 2015), Sheriff Yancy McFadden. It looks like blowing up things that don't belong to you is not a recent invention. And it's a case of it not being better to have your tanks of flammable fluids fastened down. Was it coincidence that on October 1, 1910, the *L.A. Times* bombing killed 20 people and destroyed the building, and on Christmas day a dynamite bomb destroyed part of the Llewellyn Iron works in L.A.? Labor strife was blamed for both.

Image from the California Digital Newspaper Collection (www.cndc.ucr.edu).

Recent History: Easy come, easy go...

Today's Amtrak *Surfliners* have something that Southern Pacific's short-run trains never did, not even the commute trains on the San Francisco Peninsula: the ability to arrive at a depot and, without being turned, depart in the opposite direction. (The single SP exception, other than some electrified trains of SP subsidiaries, was a lone Budd rail diesel car that operated in Northern California, which had controls at each end until one end was crunched in a collision.) Double-ended trains with a steam locomotive were not practical. The inability to reverse direction in terminals such as Las Angeles and San Francisco was due to their stub-end design. (Only now is a project being designed to provide run-through tracks at LAUPT, to partly avoid the awkwardness of stub tracks.)

The *Surfliners* overcome the problem by having engineer's controls at both ends: in a second locomotive (right above), a cab car (as shown on page 7; note the end windows); or an older locomotive that's had its engine removed and a side door installed, to serve as a cab control and baggage car, known informally as a “cabbage” (right below). The last is known formally as an NPCU – Non-Powered Control Unit. On several days in late November 2015, one “cabbage” painted to recognize veterans was on the south end of midday *Surfliners* operating into and out of SLO. On particularly heavy travel days, the trains have more cars, often of bi-level equipment, and a locomotive at each end for faster acceleration.

*Photo right above by Glen Matteson;
right below by Gary See.*

ATTEMPT TO BLOW UP SOUTHERN PACIFIC DEPOT

SAN LUIS OBISPO, Nov. 3.—Part of the Southern Pacific freight station at Santa Margarita was destroyed last night by an explosive believed to have been dynamite. A section of the wall eight feet long was blown out and a big hole was torn through the station platform.

The explosive was thrown between two tanks of distillate, one containing forty-five gallons and the other twenty-five gallons. Had these tanks been on a solid foundation they probably would have exploded, but, not being securely fixed, they were only dented. The furniture of the station was thrown across the room, and all the walls were loosened from their foundations. Two men were seen running away from the depot, and Sheriff McFadden and a posse are searching for them.

