



Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo
Railroad Museum

Issue Number 73 – Fall 2020

San Luis Obispo, California

www.slorm.com

The Museum plans to re-open no sooner than January 2021. Check our website for current status.



On the evening of August 11, the Museum's Board of Directors continued to conduct business, on the Freight-house platform, spaced six feet apart, and wearing masks.

Train Tales now online

Don't feel alone at home. Sit down with area railroaders (photo at right) virtually as they share memories via the Museum's YouTube channel:

<https://slorm.com/train-tales.html>

Can you help the Museum?

Closure due to the pandemic has stopped revenues from admissions, special events, and Museum Store sales. Measures to assure a safe opening add to costs.

Many of us faced hardship from closed businesses and lost jobs. But some of us have pensions that were unaffected, or received federal stimulus payments that were nice but not crucial. After you have helped those most in need, please consider also sharing with the Museum, so we can continue to promote California Central Coast railroad heritage.



Bully pulpit at Surf

President Theodore Roosevelt toured the West in 1903, advocating conservation of natural resources. He went on to protect areas such as the Petrified Forest and the Grand Canyon in Arizona, and Lassen Peak and the Pinnacles in California.

The image at right shows his train stopped at Surf (between San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara), only two years after that part of the Coast Route was completed. There was quite a range of hats on that foggy day.

According to Chris Epting's book [Teddy Roosevelt in California: The Whistle Stop Tour That Changed America](#) (The History Press, 2015), the president's private Pullman car was named *Elysian*. Though at least two decades older, its size and basic structure and mechanical features were very similar to the Museum's *La Cuesta*. After serving as Western Pacific Railroad's crew locker room at WP's Sacramento roundhouse during the 1940's, sadly *Elysian* was scrapped.

Historians' consensus on Roosevelt's basic position appears to be that he favored property rights, but not at the expense of human welfare, advocating "a square deal" for all, with racial views somewhat ahead of, but constrained by, his era. One wonders how he would view the world today.

This image is item W490693_1, from Harvard University's Houghton Library collection.



Our Mission

Promote California Central Coast railroad heritage through community participation, education, and historic preservation.

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The museum is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, educational organization.

DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE

Anyone may access the Museum's *Bylaws, Collections Policy, Development & Operations Plan, Code of Conduct*, and other documents at slorrm.com. Or request a paper copy via the contact information above.

Museum Store

To raise funds, the Museum offers several items for sale on-site and online: T-shirts, hats, belt buckles, mugs, enameled pins, embroidered patches, and engineer hats.

At www.slorrm.com click on Company Store.

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TIMETABLE

Board of Directors meetings are scheduled for September 8, October 13, and November 10, at 6:00 p.m., at 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue, S.L.O. Attendance will be limited; masks and distancing will be required. We will make arrangements for remote participation for those with special circumstances.

A new event, **CoastRail**, and the recurring **Central Coast Railroad Festival** are planned for Fall 2021, rather than this year.

Santa on the Surfliner will not be available this year.

More Online

See page 5 and following for information on automatic car identification, restoration progress for our S.P. wood-sided boxcar and for *La Cuesta*, and pandemic history.

Become a member

Membership provides opportunities for anyone interested in today's railroads, railroad history, train travel, or model railroading.

Individual members pay \$36 per year, a family \$60, and a sustaining member \$100. Junior memberships (ages 12-18) for the model railroaders are available (see our Model Railroad Superintendent for details).

Application forms can be downloaded from the Museum's website and mailed with payment, or you can join online by clicking Membership and using PayPal. (Mailing and web addresses are in left-hand column.)

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



Recent History: UPRR Engineering Special

In mid-May, Union Pacific operated a special train through Nevada, California, and Oregon, including along the Coast Route with an overnight stop in San Luis Obispo. Locomotive No. 1111 has been painted with images of the many worker roles that keep the railroad functioning. Efforts to streamline operations and to accommodate reduced shipments due to the pandemic-induced recession have been hard on employees across many sectors, including rail transportation. Above, the train approaches the S.L.O depot in the evening. Below, it prepares for an early morning departure.



La Cuesta's sister helped the Knickers and Chukkers

In the photo below, does that café-lounge-observation car built by Pullman in 1926 look familiar? It's former Santa Fe No. 1509, a twin of the Museum's *La Cuesta*, former Santa Fe No. 1512. The view is of an October 23, 1965, polo fans' train, the third annual "Knickers and Chukkers Special." The ten-car train, otherwise consisting of Southern Pacific equipment, ran from Glendale to Santa Barbara, where a benefit match was held. The rocks behind give away the location as Santa Susana Pass near Chatsworth.

Some Internet research reveals that "knickers" means more than women's undies in Britain. The word also means trousers gathered at the calf. "Chukkers" are the typical six periods of play in a polo game, each lasting 7½ minutes. (Not to be confused with "chukars" –picture large quail.)

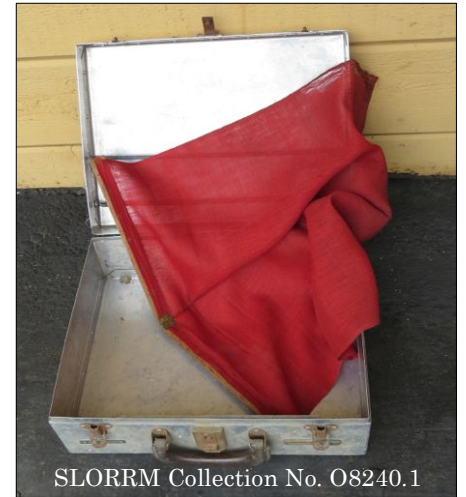
The prolific writer and photographer, and railway engineering expert, William D. Middleton took this photo, which appeared in the April 1966 *Trains* magazine. No. 1509 now resides at the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum in Campo, California (www.psr.org).



The image below, of the interior of newer model EC-5, is from the Plasser-American website.



Is that a bull by the tracks?



SLORRM Collection No. O8240.1

If so, you may want to restrain your usual enthusiasm for waving the signal flag.

The flag shown above was used by C. Ray Goodwin, and was donated earlier this year by Mike Goodwin. What makes it unusual is the hinge neatly installed in the exact center of the handle so it can be folded along with the fabric and stowed in Mr. Goodwin's aluminum case, which he brought along as a Southern Pacific conductor working out of San Luis Obispo.

Second question: Was the railroad too cheap to provide flags for its train crews? No. Mr. Goodwin came to work with some of his own items, and some of the railroad's (rule book, employee timetable, special instructions, and fusees), in his personal case. That way, he was assured of always having what he needed at hand. It's a sign of a conscientious worker, a man concerned for the safety of his co-workers, the public, and himself.

Recent history: UPRR inspection car

Places around town were quiet in mid-March, with people maintaining social distance. But track maintenance and inspection continued for the railroad. Union Pacific's self-propelled EC-4 measures and records several track geometry parameters, tied to locations via a Global Positioning System (GPS). Spots needing attention can be marked with spray paint as the car finds them.

Built in 1999 by Austrian company Plasser & Theurer, the car can also be towed by locomotives, as it was here.





That little girl standing between grown-ups and the tracks must have been impressed when a first section the Coast Daylight pulled into San Luis Obispo in 1952. The locomotive is "General Service" type No. 4453.

Thanks, Mac

Malcolm R. "Mac" Gaddis worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad as an electrical engineer for over 35 years and for the Santa Clara County light rail system for over ten years. He took many photos, several published in various railroad history books. Mac passed away in 2011, age 84.

Due to the efforts of Mac's son James and Curator Brad LaRose, digital images of 93 of his photos are in the Museum's archives.

Here are three noteworthy examples.



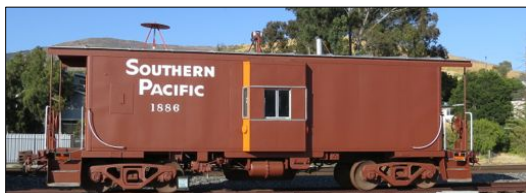
Above, it doesn't seem fair that this non-fancy locomotive of the same 4-8-4 wheel arrangement as the other two shown here has a higher number, as if it's newer or more advanced

Locomotive numbering followed different priorities. This one was originally St. Louis Southwestern (Southern Pacific affiliate "Cotton Belt") No. 804. After working freight in Gulf Coast states, it came to the West Coast, where it pulled commute trains between San Francisco and San Jose, probably venturing to San Luis Obispo on a week-end freight.

This was 1953. The site of that huge gas company aboveground equalizing tank in the background is now the city's main fire station.

Below, No. 4449, the only Daylight-styled locomotive to be saved, stops short of the Osos Street crossing (yes, there was one) in San Luis Obispo in 1957. Its train is No. 72, the southbound (timetable eastbound) Coast Mail.





Caboose 1886, where are you?

In the early 1960s railroads in North America looked for a system that would automatically identify rail cars. In the late 1960s the Association of American Railroads (AAR) adopted an optical identification system that used color-coded labels, mounted on each side of the car (photo at right). This system was called Automatic Car Identification (ACI). All rail car owners were required to install these labels on their cars, which led to the full-scale implementation of the ACI system in the early 1970s. However, dirt accumulated on the labels and they deteriorated with age, so the system's accuracy was less than intended. ACI was eventually abandoned in the late 1970s. Because of this failure railroads did not seriously search for another system to identify rail cars until 1986.

Burlington Northern Railway (BN) was the first to start searching again. BN had been following ocean shipping companies' efforts to automatically identify containers. Maritime companies' success with radio frequency based identification (RFID) systems prompted BN to start a testing program. Two vendors who had long supplied railroad signals, General Railway Systems, and Union Switch and Signal, provided equipment.

Based on nearly 100 percent accuracy of both systems, BN asked the Association of American Railroads to write an Automatic Equipment Identification (AEI) standard for the North American rail industry. In 1989, the AAR's AEI committee selected a technology and defined the tag's data format. The only major issue was the location of the tag on the car. This became a controversial subject for several months. One group wanted to put tags on car sides; the other wanted them underneath. Each location had advantages and disadvantages in terms of cost and maintainability. The tags were tested and found to operate well in both locations. The AEI Committee decided in 1990 that two tags would be mounted on each rail car, one on each side. Scanners are mounted next to the track.

AAR asked its principle committee to perform a cost/benefit analysis on mandatory AEI implementation and to recommend an implementation schedule. The AAR decided that by the end of 1994 1.4 million rail cars in North American interchange service were to be tagged.

Back to the big question: Former Southern Pacific bay window caboose No. 1886 is on the Museum's display track (photo above). Over its career it had first optical and then radio-frequency identification tags (photo at right).

These days, refrigerated boxcars that carry produce from the West Coast to the East have global positioning system (GPS) devices that communicate location and condition, such as temperature, via satellite.

The historical information above is based on a summary provided online by the Softrail company.



The color bar code on this boxcar gives it a unique identity, linked to its owner's name and car number. Track-side optical scanners could report the car's location as it passed. Grime and damage prevented the continued use of this system.

photo by Michael Hicks via Flickr



Brad LaRose photo

Radio frequency identification proved to be a more durable system. It uses electromagnetic waves not in the visible spectrum. The antenna that reads the coded data also supplies power to the tag by induction. RFID tags are also used in merchandise, pets, and library books.



In May, contractor Tom Smith of Advanced Pressure Washing blasts grime from the sheathing boards, in preparation for painting. Brad LaRose photo

Restoration Progress

S.P. wood-sheathed boxcar

The 1920's Southern Pacific boxcar (left), now in the Museum's Emily Street Yard, is being prepared to house an exhibit on People of the Southern Pacific, as well as storage space. The exhibit will feature photographs of Central Coast workers (see next page, lower right) and videos of typical activities. This project continues with the generous support of former SP brakeman Bill Walthers.

La Cuesta café-lounge

Last year, La Cuesta (below) received black roof coating. Earlier this year the car was given warm gray sides, with a darker gray window band and white stripes. While the car was originally built for and used by the Santa Fe, and wore dark green, this color scheme is a close match for Southern Pacific's Lark, the overnight, all-Pullman train connecting Los Angeles and San Francisco via the coast.



A colorful acquisition

By the time you read this, the Pacific Motor Trucking 1930s trailer (right) may have been moved from Calistoga, California, and be on display at the Museum. Plans call for it to join a similar trailer already in the Museum's collection on a newly acquired Southern Pacific flatcar, showcasing how SP pioneered the rail hauling of highway truck trailers (SPH&TS model photo below).



Brad LaRose photo

Have we been here before?

In 1918-19 an especially troublesome strain of influenza, often referred to as the Spanish Flu, swept the world. From an editorial in *Railway Age* magazine, October 11, 1918:

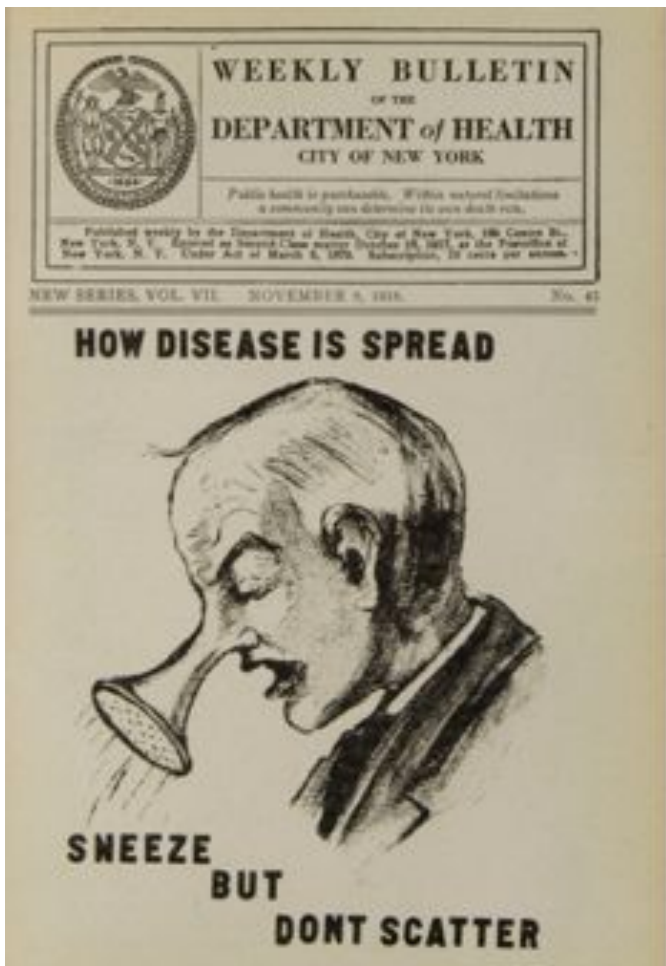
“The danger of contagion is most serious in crowded places. For that reason, it behooves the railways to take every possible measure to the end that they may not serve in any greater degree than necessary as an agency in spreading the disease. Crowding in passenger trains should be avoided as much as possible. The presence of an influenza victim in the midst of a crowd is exceedingly serious. A car added here or there will no doubt help considerably in many cases. Insistence on open windows and ventilators is a positive necessity. [Here, “ventilators” refers to ducts in clerestory roofs that could be opened or closed with a damper.]

“Spitting in passenger coaches is still occasionally seen and is a particular evil in smoking cars. It is not only a most obnoxious habit, but under present conditions is positively dangerous. The present signs in cars on many railroads saying that spitting is against the law are almost a joke. Such signs should explain in far more emphatic terms how obnoxious and dangerous spitting is. Trainmen should be instructed to remonstrate with those who persist in the habit. The situation is exceedingly serious, and no steps should be left untaken to remedy it.”



Posters designed by the federal government were posted by state health departments. This one used a railroad signal theme to reinforce dos and don'ts.

National Archives image



Before radio, television, and the Internet, there were bulletins.

New York City Municipal Archives image

Local visual storyteller Hank Biddles generously gave permission to use his photo of a healthy Mr. Ray King, Southern Pacific engineer based in San Luis Obispo during the 1940s and '50s. Hank took the photo at age seven when visiting Mr. King's property in the Los Osos Valley.

