



Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo
Railroad Museum

Issue Number 75 – Spring 2021 San Luis Obispo, California www.slormm.com

The Museum building remains closed due to the pandemic. But outdoor displays can be viewed, and our website is open and providing updates.

Museum celebrates 30th anniversary

Hundreds of tons of track material and rolling stock acquired, transported, and displayed. Model railroad components as delicate as butterfly wings crafted and installed. Thousands of in-person and on-line visitors of all ages and origins welcomed and informed. Hundreds of books, photos, and documents cataloged. A building now nearly 130 years old saved and upgraded for use by the public. Disagreements discussed and resolved. A narrow-gauge wood boxcar converted to code-compliant restrooms.



February marked 30 years since our organization was incorporated, first as the Avila Valley Railway Museum. AVRVM focused on preserving artifacts from the narrow-gauge Pacific Coast Railway, and intended to develop an operating track along that line's former right-of-way near Avila. Reflecting an expanding scope to encompass all Central Coast railroads, the name changed to San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum in 2005.

In the mid-1990s, the City of San Luis Obispo acquired the 1894 freight house and adjacent land, intending to remove the building and create additional parking. Members of the Avila Valley Railway Museum persuaded the city to save the building and to support grant funding that enabled the seismic safety, fire safety, and universal access features needed for public use. Work began in 2000, with opening to the public fall 2013.

Recent history: Working on the railroad

In September, under skies filled with smoke and ash, Union Pacific Railroad crews used a tamper (below left) to adjust track alignment and a ballast regulator (below right) to form and sweep the profile of ballast rocks that anchor the track. Both pieces of equipment are self-propelled

The tamper has a long, small trailer (out of view to the left) and optical sensors that check side-to-side and vertical rail position. The tamper also has devices that can grip the rails and slightly shift them and the ties they are attached to. Steel fingers then reach into the ballast and vibrate to settle the whole track structure into the preferred position.

In December a long train carrying continuous welded rail sections (right) came through on its way to siding extensions and track renewal locations farther south.



Our Mission

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

Contact

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Board of Directors

Norma Dengler.....*President*
 Stephanie Hovanitz ...*Vice-president*
 Stephen Cake Charles Crabb
 Charlie Davies Brad LaRose
 Brent MacGregor Andrew Merriam
 Dave Rohr

Crew List

Museum Manager .. Diane Marchetti
Assistant Manager vacant
Curator Brad LaRose
Treasurer Dave Rohr
LibrarianChris Hurd
Webmaster Jamie Foster
Operations Manager ..
 Stephanie Hovanitz
Events Chairvacant
Publicity Coordinator Sybil Brennan
Model RR Superintendent
 Andrew Merriam
Membership Coordinator vacant
Fundraising Chair Feride Schroeder
Secretary, Archivist, Newsletter
EditorGlen Matteson
 (newsletter@slorrm.com)
 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 March 9, April 13, and May 11, at 6:00 p.m. If in-person meetings are allowed, they will be at 1940 Santa Barbara Ave., S.L.O. Masks and distancing will be required; online participation can be arranged. On-line meetings may be required. Contact info@slorrm.com for help with online participation.

Train Day will not be held this May. Central Coast Railroad Festival is planned to return in October.

New board members

Welcome new board members Stephen Cake and Charles Crabb. Stephen is retired from the transportation field. Charles has managed the Swanton Pacific historical railroad.

Parlor Car Chats Online

This looks interesting. Join host Jamie Foster live on certain Saturday mornings, or watch recorded adventures on your own schedule: slorrm.com/parlor-car-chats.html



"El se retumbaba y se sacudió..."

Danny el Locomotora de Diesel

The dramatized story for young readers about our 1940s switching locomotive is available in Spanish, thanks to S.L.O. High School student Ana Valero. Rosa Santana Espino reads the book aloud via an audio file. Teacher Jane Hawley facilitated the effort as a community service project.

<https://slorrm.com/Danny-the-Diesel.html>

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*.

Amtrak celebrates 50th

Amtrak, the semi-public federal corporation, took over nearly all remaining intercity passenger service on May 1, 1971. At first, cars and locomotives were obtained directly from the railroads. In a few years, they received Amtrak color bands. Later, Amtrak obtained original equipment.

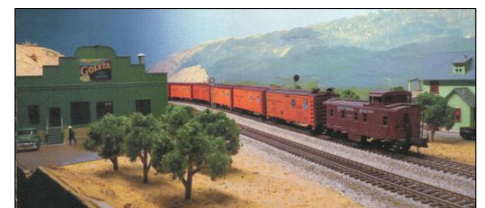


More Coast Mail online:

Dose of cuteness; lost stamps; stopping politely; work train burros; new technology; Annual Report.

Goleta lemons...

Your editor's model and photo of a 1950s Southern Pacific train passing through Goleta appears in the 2021 Walthers HO and N catalog (below).



Nice day for a ride

But there's work to be done.

In its last years, the late 1930s and early 1940s, the narrow-gauge Pacific Coast Railway hauled a lot of gravel for the roads that were taking its place as the main connection between Port Harford (now known as Port San Luis), central and southern San Luis Obispo County, and northern Santa Barbara County. The train shown below is carrying a lot of gravel.

But more likely this train is building the railroad's four-mile long Palmer Branch in 1913 (sometimes called the Sisquoc Branch). The clothes imply a cool, dry day. An oil field had been opened at Palmer, southeast of Santa Maria near today's Dominion Road. The PCRY brought in pipe and equipment, and hauled out crude oil.

According to the Interstate Commerce Commission abandonment docket of March 13, 1940, "The installation of pipe lines from the field has diverted all the traffic formerly carried, and there is slight probability of any other traffic developing in the future. Train service has been discontinued for the past 5 years. There are no connections with other railroads, and there is no population requiring service of the line." Operating expenses "were \$12 for section labor in 1935 and \$634 total tax assessments from 1935 to 1940." Salvage value was estimated to be \$5,713. The ICC concluded, "... continued operation under the circumstances would impose an undue burden upon the applicant." Abandonment was approved.

But 27 years earlier, there was work to be done, in fine working weather.



SLORRM Archives No. P1572.1

Is this the bus to San Miguel?

Nope. It's a bus body fitted with flanged, steel wheels to operate on track. It's pulling a rail detector car of what must be the first generation, probably in the mid to late 1930s.

Early detector cars used electromagnetic fields to spot internal rail defects that could lead to broken rails. Later generations include other types of vehicles, most self-propelled, that also use ultrasound to find invisible flaws.

The one shown below, or one like it, must have rumbled through the Central Coast, keeping Safety First.



SLORRM Archives No. P2572.3



Docent of the Year Howard Amborn

With the Freighthouse closed since March 2020 there has not been much for the regular docents to do. But outdoor work has continued. And Howard has been a regular outdoor worker, helping with Pullman car *La Cuesta*, our Plymouth locomotive, the Southern Pacific boxcar, and various tasks in Emily Street Yard.

It's hard to get a photo of Howard when he's not concentrating on a task. But Gary See managed to catch him next to the concrete telephone booth (in visibility vest, pre-pandemic photo at left).

We didn't have an in-person celebration this year; so if you see Howard from a suitable distance outdoors, give him a shout and a friendly wave.

The beet gon had a shower

On December 30 our former Southern Pacific gondola that was used to carry sugar beets received a brisk shower. Funded by a grant from the Ludwick Foundation, local contractor Advance Pressure Washing spent most of the day blasting away decades of grime (right). The following weeks were among the warmest and driest ever recorded, stressing plants and water supplies but providing great weather for drying the wood side extensions. Rains soaked the Central Coast during the last week in January.

Webmaster needed

The pandemic has reminded us how much we depend on a continually updated web presence to serve our volunteers, members, and visitors. With Jamie Foster's planned retirement after 25 years, the museum seeks a new webmaster. Jamie will be available until the end of the year to help with the transition, which will likely include migration to a new site-building application and possibly redesign of the site. Contact info@slorrm.com if you can help.

Starlight spent the night

The last weekend in January Amtrak's southbound *Coast Starlight* was annulled at San Luis Obispo due to storm damage to the track on Vandenberg Air Force Base. Passengers rode busses, while the train eased onto the layover track opposite the Freighthouse that usually holds the shorter *Surfliner* train sets (below).



Stephanie Hovanitz photo

Museum member John Marchetti passes

John served as a board member, president, and membership chair. He built the finely detailed pier and warehouse for the narrow-gauge part of the Museum's model railroad and the track switches for the entire layout.

In the photo at right by Dave Rohr, John rides a dome car at a convention of private rail car owners in 2018.

John's participation in historical re-creations went beyond railroad subjects. He sometimes donned costumes for Hearst Castle and other regional events.





Blue Chip stamps, shoes, all gone...

The previous *Coast Mail* included an account of traveling many years ago by refrigerator car northward along the Coast Route. Here's another true story from a little later, traveling the opposite direction.

Our rider was attending Cal Poly. One summer evening he decided to visit his sort-of hometown girlfriend in Santa Barbara, for the first time traveling by freight train. While he was waiting in the railyard, an older, regular freight-hopper shared tales of meals of beans and other carnal delights at points around the system.

The young rider, owning no luggage, had borrowed a carrying bag from a friend. He stuffed it with a change of clothes, his only pair of regular shoes, and Blue Chip Stamps that he'd saved as an offering to his sort-of girlfriend's mother.

The night was clear, warm, and breezy. His train stopped to do switching at the Nipomo Mesa refinery and to meet a northbound train near Gaviota. When his train got up to speed, the empty bulkhead flatcar he was riding jounced around considerably.

Approaching the Santa Barbara depot, the train slowed, and slowed some more, but it did not appear to be stopping. Maybe speeding up again?! A quick check of both ends of the car failed to find the bag. It must have jumped overboard during one of those 60 mph stretches.

There followed an inept detraining, a scraped cheek and palms, a *long* walk to his parents' house, a cautious entry considering his father's gun collection, a midnight shower, a scolding the next day, a lame apology about having no Blue Chip Stamps, plus a diagnosis as being obsessed with trains. And, as they say, "the rest is history."

There are some amusing train-hopping stories. Some are not funny; none are endorsements for this illegal and dangerous activity.

New technology

The two previous *Coast Mails* covered ways railroads maintain information on cars' locations, including automatic equipment identification devices read by trackside scanners. Metro systems with frequent trains on close headways increasingly use communication based train control (CBTC), which requires constant, accurate data on trains' locations and speeds. Recently developed ultra-wide-band cellular communication devices enable very accurate data, with wearable tags even monitoring workers within safety zones on the tracks (image at right).

Piper image via *Smart Transit Online Event*, August 25, 2020

A little dose of cuteness

In case the railbus on page 3 wasn't cute enough for you, here's former Santa Maria Valley Railroad express vehicle No. 9 (below). Built by Fairmont in 1932, it was used by the SMVRR for its original purpose only about four years, when it was painted orange and demoted to maintenance-of-way service. In 1962 it was sold for scrap to a Santa Maria salvage company.

The company owner donated the little vehicle to the Pacific Southwest Railway Museum Association in 1965, the museum's first piece of rolling stock. A 26-year volunteer effort restored it to operating condition and original appearance. It can be seen at the PSRM Campo facility, in southeastern San Diego County. This web page provides more information and photos:

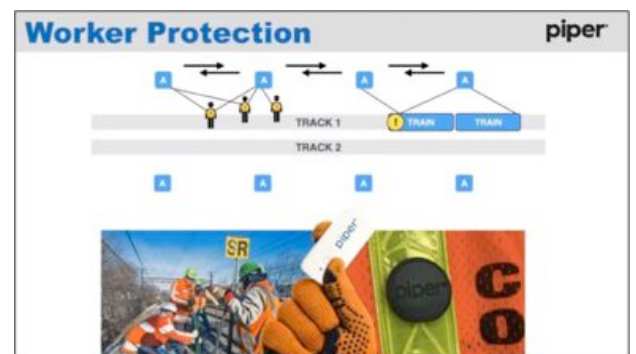
<https://www.psrsm.org/trains/passenger/smv-9/>



Santa Maria Valley Railroad "Railway Express" motor No. 9 pulls a trailer along that line during an excursion in 2008.
Jamie Foster photo



Last Fall Atascadero high school teacher Johnna McGuire took her economics students on a three-hour virtual tour of the Museum and nearby railroad features.



Please stop

A locomotive weighing 200+ tons can't get up much speed from a dead stop on a turntable. But a locomotive weighing 200+ tons has a lot of momentum even at a speed of two or three miles per hour. So, this wheel stop bolted to a rail, which Curator Brad LaRose recovered last fall from a garden track at the San Luis Obispo locomotive servicing area, seems more like a gentle reminder than a sharp command (photo top right).

“Garden” refers to a track radiating from the turntable, but not having a roof as those in the roundhouse did (photo below). At several locations Southern Pacific decided not to enlarge roundhouse buildings to accommodate cab-forward, articulated steam locomotives, instead adding adjacent outdoor tracks. (In Dunsmuir's harsher climate, a rectangular “Malley” shed provided shelter.) Likewise, rather than rebuild the turntable pit and bridge again in the 1940s for reversing direction of long locomotives, a wye track was installed at what is now a housing development between the tracks and Broad Street, several hundred feet south of the turntable.

Most wheel stops (photo at right) at the ends of stub tracks were more substantial than the bolt-on lump. Track bumpers anchored to the rails (lower photo at right) are a step up from wheel stops. A pile of dirt, gravel, or ballast was also effective (photo at bottom right).

Railfans can probably recall seeing photos of a Pennsylvania RR GG-1 electric locomotive in New York City and a Santa Fe F-type diesel set at Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal that continued past end-of-track with sad and embarrassing results. Not even these devices could overrule brake failures.

SLO's roundhouse (dark-roofed, curved building) and turntable pit (lighter disk crossed by rotating bridge) in 1955. Garden tracks are at bottom center.

Image from City of San Luis Obispo Engineering Division Collection



Wheel stop bolted to rail, from San Luis Obispo's roundhouse area, removed with permission of current owner Union Pacific Railroad. Dan Manion photo

Below, wheel stops at the San Luis Obispo Surfliner layover facility.



Track bumper on the San Luis Obispo pocket track, where helper diesel locomotives for Cuesta Grade were kept.

Dirt pile at the end of San Luis Obispo's team track. A loading ramp out of view to the left allows transfers between rail cars and trucks. The team track, connected to the main track by a switch, gets its name from the days of horse-drawn wagons.



**More recent history:
Two burros are better than one.**

In November Union Pacific ran a work train down the coast. It spent some time relaxing in San Luis Obispo, its two burro cranes and other equipment parked



opposite the Amtrak depot. Paints jobs and reporting marks show that some cars originally belonged to Southern Pacific, Western Pacific, and BNSF Railway.



Annual Report

The year 2020 was challenging for the Museum, with a large operating revenue drop. Pandemic precautions prevented public hours and in-person events. But the pandemic did not stop major efforts for outdoor displays and online content:

- A second Pacific Motor Trucking trailer was obtained and placed next to the Freighthouse (right above).
- A solar power system was installed (right below).
- The roof and sides of our Southern Pacific wood-sheathed boxcar were sealed, in preparation for an exhibit on employees of the SP.
- Thanks to the tireless efforts of webmaster Jamie Foster, 20 Parlor Car Chats were made available online, covering subjects as diverse as the Cuesta Grade to garden railroads.
- The Freighthouse platform was sealed and termite treatment performed.
- A children's book about our former Camp Roberts Plymouth locomotive was digitally published in English and Spanish (below)
- Major funding was obtained for further work on Pullman car *La Cuesta*, the sugar beet gondola, and pandemic mitigation in the Freighthouse.

Volunteers provided over 3,731 hours of work, including 350 for *La Cuesta* and 1,624 for the model railroad.



Financial Status

Beginning Cash Balance		\$134,661
Income		\$ 89,311
Memberships	\$	4,566
Admissions	\$	2,184
Events & Excursions	\$	30
Store & Surplus Sales	\$	5,156
Grants and Donations		\$77,252
Restricted	\$66,651	
Unrestricted	\$10,724	
Expenses		\$99,214
Operating	\$	24,805
Capital	\$	74,409
Year-end Cash Balance		\$124,758

Some Central Coast Model Railroad accounting is separate.