



Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo
Railroad Museum

Issue Number 87 – Spring 2024

San Luis Obispo, California

slorrm.com

Open Saturdays from 10:00 to 4:00. Other times for groups by arrangement. 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue.

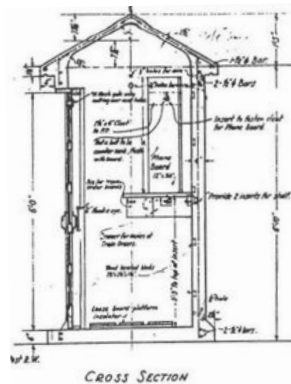


The crane operator and Museum ground crew are preparing to lift a section of rail about 39 feet long and weighing nearly 1,200 pounds. The operator will swing the rail toward the photographer and out of view to the left, and set it on a flatbed truck. The rail will move over the photographer's location; he will move away from the path beforehand.

Below, we took advantage of the crane's availability to move the second of our concrete trackside telephone booths.



Mike Burrell photo



Above, a section view of a standard Southern Pacific concrete phone booth of the type moved. It weighs 3,000 pounds. Note the roof overhang.

Surplus rail & more moved from Emily Street Yard

On January 10 equipment and restoration lead Brad La-Rose, Louie's Crane Service, workers from Santa Maria Valley Railroad, and a crew of volunteers moved many items out of Emily Street Yard. That day, over 15 tons of rails were removed. Nearly all will be used to replace rails corroded by sea breezes at the Santa Maria Valley Railroad. (SMVRR president Rob Himoto appears in front of the gray storage unit in the photo at left.)

Other items moved include 35 wood crossties weighing in total over a ton, and a 3,000-pound telephone booth (photo at bottom left).

The City of San Luis Obispo, which has allowed the Museum to use the unimproved northern end of Emily Street right-of-way for 19 years, has required all items to be removed by April 1.

A high priority for 2024 is securing suitable storage and display spaces near the Museum's solar panels and in nearby parking lot planters. Be patient, because several items will not be fully restored and looking their best. On the other hand, visitors will be able to watch restoration activities more easily and continuously than when the items were in Emily Street Yard.



Mystery photo

Here's an intricate piece of artwork. What would such a thing be doing in a railroad museum? Find out on page 4.

Brad LaRose photo



What's wrong with this picture?

Nothing, really. Amtrak's *Sunset Limited* now connects Los Angeles with New Orleans three days a week. From 1993 to 2005 it went all the way to Florida, ending when a hurricane damaged the line. That was Amtrak's longest route and the only train ever to connect the East Coast with the West Coast. For many years, Southern Pacific's streamlined *Sunset Limited* was a daily Los Angeles-New Orleans service.

But why is San Luis Obispo listed? Soon after Southern Pacific's Coast Route was put in service, the *Sunset Limited* served San Francisco and New Orleans once weekly, with S.P. subsidiary Texas & New Orleans moving the train between El Paso and New Orleans. The eastern cities listed required connections via other railroads.

From this 1935 Bulletin: "Guy O. Hanson, station master at Third Street Station in San Francisco ... nominated by *Railway Age* as the 'nation's best train caller' ... announces his trains so that his words are clearly understood." Nice megaphone.

What about the words at the bottom of this cover, "on line again," in 1935? That was not a time traveling stationmaster, back from the Internet Age. Publication of the S.P. employee newsletter had been suspended during the Depression.

And at right, what are diesels specially painted for the *Golden State* (L. A. – Chicago via Tucumcari, New Mexico) doing on Cuesta Grade? Find the answer in the next *Coast Mail*.

BofLE at SLO in 1951

Anyone reading the *Southern Pacific Bulletin* of November 1951 would know those initials stood for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. Harold Jaeger's article described the barbecue in Cuesta Canyon Park, where several long-serving engineers were recognized (*Coast Mail* Winter 2023). L. A. Everly, John L. Farley (who had retired in 1943), and A. Webster received 40-year badges. Fred Champlain got one for 50 years, meaning he started the year the Coast Route saw its first through trains, though we don't know where he worked at that time. (By the way, the original text had the labor group's initials just as you see them above, no spaces and no periods.)

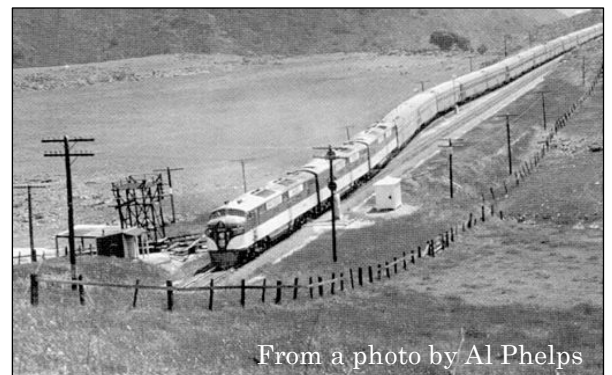
George W. Burbank, visiting from Cleveland, recalled working out of San Luis Obispo during 1910 – 1924 and 1933 – 1934.

In then-current news, former freight-house worker Michael Pentz, Jr., was serving in the Navy, on a destroyer at Japan. His father Mike was working as a conductor out of San Luis Obispo.

Roadmaster V. E. Pearson reported that new rails had been installed in Tunnel Number 6. "The job went smoothly, but sealing and packing of rail joints to prevent wear took more time than originally planned." Moisture and sand working down between the rail joints "has always been a problem," he said.

Tunnel 6 at 3,610 feet long contains the summit of Cuesta Grade. The most recent professional reference to "packing of rail joints" that your editor could find was in a 1948 publication by the American Railway Engineering Association, which said it was desirable in locations with much sand, presumably either from natural conditions or sand applied for locomotive traction. The practice was discontinued apparently because it trapped moisture, leading to excessive corrosion. (More about rail joints on page 4.)

A different part of the same newsletter said freight house clerk Roy Fairbanks was the new father of a baby girl.





Brad LaRose photo

Mystery photo answer

Jack Erhart stands next to his completed one-tenth-scale model of Pacific Coast Railway locomotive *John Harford*. The first-page mystery photo was of the steam dome. In the image above the steam dome is aligned with the farther edge of the wall mirror frame. Jack’s masterful hand-craftsmanship is clearly evident in the detail photo. It’s even better seen in person.

The steam dome received steam from the boiler and fed it to the pistons by way of a regulator. The smaller, closer dome was for sand that could be distributed to the rails to increase traction.

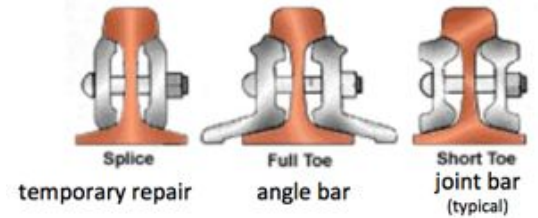
The first, 1820s proof-of-concept locomotives were simple and utilitarian. But over the next roughly 60 years many were embellished by their builders and operators. In some cases even mechanical components were given forms that recalled plants and animals. Historians of design suggest that as machines became more widespread and powerful, they made many people slightly uncomfortable by their departure from long-accustomed natural forms. The results included wrought-iron vines trailing around structural supports and nearly floral gilding on steam locomotives.



Some locomotives still display parts of birds.

Joint details

Every joint between lengths of rail is a concern. It’s subject to stresses different from the continuous rail and requires maintenance. The first image below shows cross-sections of connectors, which are bolted to each end of the rails and span the joint.



The photo below shows a shelf-type joint bar, with both of the two pieces wrapping partway under the rail, installed in the Museum’s display track. The bottom photo shows the end of such a bar.



Museum volunteers struggled to salvage the shelf-type bars and to fit them onto the rails while building the display track, requiring more precise alignment than typical joint bars. But they provide more support and spiking options where rail ends do not occur above the wood tie. Such bars are no longer used because spiking near tie edges caused splitting, and skewing ties could cause narrowing of the gauge.



What’s wrong in this picture?

This is part of Amtrak’s long-term parking lot north of the Freighthouse on December 26, 2023. Nearly every space was taken, so if you were looking for one you might have had to walk from the south end of the Freighthouse. This is a good problem to have if you want California’s passenger rail system to thrive. Work continues on several fronts to increase the frequency and reliability of passenger service along the Central Coast.



Far from the Central Coast

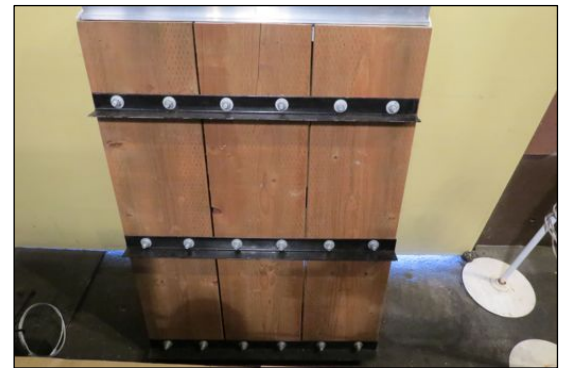
The Winter 2023 *Coast Mail* featured a Central European location that looked a lot like the upper Salinas Valley. The scene above also resemblances that valley. Sixty mph is a reasonable speed limit there. However, it may not be obvious at the resolution of this image, another YouTube screen capture, but those are concrete ties, which are not used in our part of Union Pacific’s system. And the sign’s number is for kilometers per hour, about 37 mph. Merond22 provided the virtual trip, which starts with flange-squealing curves and mountain grades before reaching flat land.

We’re approaching Javornik, in the Czech Republic. At the time of this view that country had a dense network of rural rail lines served by single, self-propelled rail cars often called rail busses.

Ramping up access

In December Cal Poly graduating senior Noah Callahan made a ramp to access our former Southern Pacific boxcar from the Freighthouse platform. Below, we see the underside while it is folded against an indoor wall pending creation of a new opening in the platform railing. Its hinged ends rest against the floor. When extended it is three feet wide and 7 feet 5 inches long.

The boxcar floor is about 32 inches away from and 18 inches higher than the platform. Restoration lead Brad LaRose is researching options for universal visitor access. Meanwhile, this ramp will help workers prepare the boxcar interior.



Individual learners visited

Above and below: On January 24 parents and students from the Heartland Charter School visited the Museum. The Santa Maria-based school supports individualized home learning with state-accredited resources.



Annual Report

Volunteers provided over 3,700 hours in general support work, plus about 200 for *La Cuesta*, and 3,344 for the model railroad. In addition, many untallied hours were invested in equipment restoration and removing items from Emily Street Yard. The year ended with about 240 memberships, slightly more than 2022. Major accomplishments were:

Facilities & operations

- Removing over 100 tons of artifacts and materials from Emily Street Yard, including the former SP boxcar, narrow-gauge boxcars, the cupola caboose, storage containers, trackside phone booth, surplus rail, scrap metal, and thousands of smaller items. Some items were made available to other non-profit organizations, some were sold to obtain funds to support Museum operations, and some were re-located to temporary or permanent display locations in or near the Freighthouse.

Exhibits

- Placing the former Southern Pacific boxcar on the display track
- Placing the restored Fairmont track car in the Freighthouse and the restored Northwestern Co. track car outdoors near the main Freighthouse entry

Model railroad

- Completing all standard-gauge operating main-line track
- Completing the East San Luis Obispo industrial area
- Installing new shelves in the work room and a display case for non-layout equipment

Events

- Return of wine-rail excursions

Museum governance

- Recruiting and retaining directors
- Envisioning directions for the coming decade
- Updating the *Development & Operations Plan*

In a world increasingly dominated by screen time and targeted content, sometimes it's good to be outdoors using your imagination. This track car for light maintenance provides such an opportunity.



Gary See photo



Brad LaRose photo

Although this link-and-pin coupler was moved from storage to a display location in the early days of 2024, it reflects the Museum's focus for 2023. Regular volunteer Howard Amborn used his tractor for several items in Emily Street Yard.

Financial Summary

Beginning Cash Balance		\$124,476
Income		\$ 59,613
Memberships	\$ 6,236	
Admissions	\$12,812	
Events	\$ 9,232	
Museum Store Sales (net)	\$ 3,458	
Miscellaneous Income	\$ 4,142	
Model Railroad	\$ 2,751	
Grants and donations		
Purpose Restricted	\$19,067	
Purpose Not restricted	\$ 1,915	
Expenses		\$79,663
Operating	\$64,520	
Capital	\$15,143	



Railway Technology image

Museum-arranged wine-rail excursions on regular Amtrak Surfliner trains, with a volunteer docent aboard, introduce a wide range of residents and visitors to our region's scenery and railroad heritage.