



# Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum



Issue Number 52

San Luis Obispo, California, Spring 2015

www.slormm.com

About 600 visitors came to the Museum on San Luis Obispo's Train Day, May 9, which was also the start of several 2015 Amtrak Train Days around the country.

## Train Day May 2015



The Freighthouse trackside platform offered exhibits, presentations, and literature by Amtrak and by Operation Lifesaver. Saphya Lotery and David Weisman were on hand throughout the day to answer questions. Also on the platform were tables or displays by the Santa Maria Valley Railroad, railroad artist Rod Aszman, and swap meet offerings by the Museum and others. Photo by Glen Matteson



Dispatchers must have been busy keeping the wooden routes fluid at the play tables. But don't overlook what's on the wall behind them: Two 14-foot long, panoramic photographs of the San Luis Obispo rail yards, town, and more distant mountains. The monotone image was taken in 1930 by Frank C. Aston, a local commercial photographer. The full color one above is contemporary. Both are from nearly the same spot on Terrace Hill. Local photographer and graphic communication expert Brian Lawler took the upper image, and prepared and mounted both for display. Thanks to Mr. Lawler's generosity, they are now part of the Museum's permanent collection. They need to be seen in person to be appreciated.

Photo by Glen Matteson

More Train Day on page 4

## A Busy Day



The first Saturday in May was a Museum workday, with members preparing for the second Saturday's Train Day, and work continuing on the archives, the model railroad, the narrow-gauge push cars, and on La Cuesta (formerly known as La Condesa). May 2nd was busy in other ways, too. Four tracks at San Luis Obispo were occupied at once. But it was not quite like "the old days."

On the Amtrak layover track, where the evening and morning Surfliners are stored and serviced at night, Amtrak trainees were using a locomotive and two single-level coaches to practice safely making forward and backup moves, coupling and uncoupling, making all the required connections for cab control, electro-pneumatic brakes, and head-end power, as well as changing a coupler knuckle. The two customary Union Pacific helper locomotives were on their pocket track, and four additional Union Pacific engines were on the siding awaiting their next assignment after bringing empty intermodal cars to a north county siding for temporary storage. Then Amtrak's midday Surfliner arrived and waited at the station, with the Pacific Railroad Society's Pullman National Forum painted in U.P. colors and L.A. Rail's stainless steel Vista Dome, former Burlington Route Silver Splendor.

More on page 3





### Mission Statement

The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum is a non-profit educational institution founded to preserve and present the railroad history of California and specifically the Central Coast. Collecting, restoring, and displaying relevant railroad artifacts, photographs and documents is its goal. This effort is supplemented by creating models, displays and graphics as well as operating historic railroad equipment to facilitate a better understanding of how railroads have affected our areas social, cultural and economic history.

### SAN LUIS OBISPO RAILROAD MUSEUM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Karl Hovanitz..... *President*
- Gary See ..... *Vice President*
- Andrew Merriam ..... *Secretary*
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- John Marchetti, Glen Matteson,
- Aron Kahn, Duane Powell,
- Erik Rheinisch

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## TIMETABLE

The following is a list of future meetings of the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum. Business meetings are held the second Tuesday of each month at the Freighthouse, 1940 Santa Barbara Street, San Luis Obispo. Meetings begin at 6:00 p.m. All meetings are open to the public.

- June 9 ..... *Business Meeting*
- July 14 ..... *Business Meeting*
- August 11 ..... *Business Meeting*
- September 8 ..... *Business Meeting*
- October 13 ..... *Business Meeting*

### BY-LAWS AVAILABLE

Every member in good standing is entitled to a copy of the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum By-laws. For the sake of economy, we have not distributed them to all members automatically. To get a copy, send a #10, self addressed stamped envelope to SLORRM, 1940

**2** Santa Barbara Avenue, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401 or go online to [www.slorrm.com](http://www.slorrm.com) under the **members only** section.

## Renew your membership

The Museum exists thanks to continued member support. All annual memberships expire on December 31. If you have not already renewed, please provide your payment and any changes to your contact information: phone number, and U.S. mail and email address. You can renew online through the Museum's website or checks may be mailed to the Museum. If renewing online, you can provide updated contact information by phone message to 805 548-1894 or email to info@slorrm.com

The Museum will never share your contact information.

To renew your membership online using a credit or debit card, go to [www.slorrm.com](http://www.slorrm.com) and click on MEMBERSHIP, then click on SUBSCRIBE and fill out the PayPal form.

## Become a Member

Membership in SLORRM provides an outlet for anyone interested in railroad history, train travel, railroad oriented entertainment and the value of railroading to the community.

Membership is designed for those who love trains and wish to educate others, young and old, and who share an interest in railroad history and the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum.

Single members pay \$36 per year. A family can join for \$60 annually, and a sustaining member pays \$100 per year. Mail to SLORRM, 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401. Go to <http://www.slorrm.com> to download an application form. You can join or renew on line at [www.slorrm.com](http://www.slorrm.com) and click on MEMBERSHIP. This will allow you to use Pay Pal to make your payments.

**Life Members** receive an embroidered patch, enameled pin, the Coast Mail newsletter, and have voting rights for one person for life. Spouse and dependent children under the age of 18 are included as members. *Use current age to calculate amount due.*

- 40-65 ..... \$1200 or 5 payments of \$275
- 66 and older ..... \$800 or 5 payments of \$180

If making payments, the life membership card will be sent upon receipt of final payment. Until such time as the life membership is paid in full, the member will receive a yearly membership card. All payments made toward a life membership are non-refundable and failure to make a scheduled payment by the due date will result in forfeiture of all funds paid toward the life membership. Payment plans include yearly member dues.

### New Members

The following people have joined the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum since the last Coast Mail was published. James F. Collins, Jack Hutchinson and Raymond H. Strong

### Individual Renewals

The following individuals have renewed their membership in SLORRM. Rick Anderson, Rod R. Aszman, John Benson, Anne Brown, Steven Easlon, Glenn Geissinger, Stanley H. Gitler, Curtis Johnson, Thomas Knapp, Rex B. Miller, Paul Pedroni, Curtis Reinhardt, Paul Remis, G. Kathy Rios, Gordon Searle, Gary See, Patrick Sullivan, James Taylor, Alan Upshaw and Stuart Young.

### New Family Members

The following listed families have joined SLORRM. Thomas and Kathy Alexander, Ruben Garcia and Alan Estes, Jr., Greg and Monica Jackson, Bill and Peggy Kelly, and Casey and Feride Schroeder.

### Family Renewals

The following families have renewed their membership. Kathleen Gardner, Robert and Olga Harway, Ron and Louise Milot, William and Kim Ryan, and Christian Schultz.

### New Sustaining Members

Ken and Jane Reiter, and Robert Sellers.

### New Life Members

David and Aurelie Boyer.

## Members Only

This is a good time to become a Museum member or to renew your membership. This is the last current issue of Coast Mail that will be available online to nonmembers. As each new issue comes out, the previous issue will be archived along with all past issues, which will be available to anyone through the website. So to keep up with feature articles on recent and upcoming events and accomplishments, and to be the first to solve mysteries involving photos and objects, be sure that your membership is current.

## Company Store

The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum has a variety of items for sale for your enjoyment and to raise money for the Museum. T-shirts in both adult and children sizes, baseball hats, belt buckles, coffee mugs, enamel pins, embroidered patches, engineer hats and videos are all available by going to the Museum web site, [www.slorrm.com](http://www.slorrm.com) and click on **Company Store**.



Gala emcee Monica Quintero welcomes Rob Himoto of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad. Photo by Jack Hutchinson

The **Puttin' On the Ritz** Spring Gala took place on April 23rd, and a great time was had by all. Friends of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad held the fundraising soiree, designed to raise money to support the First Responders of Santa Maria, with the bulk of the proceeds being dedicated to restoration of the Museum's 1926 observation-lounge car. One of the items auctioned at the gala was the right to christen the car with its new name, La Cuesta, to fit its new life on the Central Coast.

Reported by Diane Marchetti

## A Busy Day *Continued*

The private cars brought 50 visitors from the Pacific Railroad Society for a quick tour of the Freighthouse and La Cuesta, which wasn't counted as a fifth occupied track because the Museum's display track is not connected to the Union Pacific tracks. The Pacific Railroad Society is one of the earliest established railroad enthusiast groups in the West, having been founded as the Railroad Boosters, sometimes called simply "the boosters' club," in Southern California in 1936. The boosters' early members are often the sources for articles, photos, and films (since transferred to digital video format) documenting daily operations and special excursions in the transition era, as diesels were replacing steam and as branch-line, down-home railroading was fading. One of their excursions was to the Pacific Coast Railway. For more information on PRS and a short video of their May 2 outing, including vignettes in Price Canyon and along the coast, visit their website <http://www.pacificrailroadsociety.org>.

# A New Name for an Old Car



Museum President Karl Hovanitz, left, long-time Board member John Marchetti, and special guest Sydney McGovern pull off a temporary paper covering to reveal La Cuesta's new name. Photo by Jack Hutchinson

Welcome La Cuesta to the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum. Several months ago Museum directors decided that a new name for the observation-lounge car, built by the Pullman Company in 1926 for the Santa Fe Railway, would be appropriate considering its new role. Unnamed when used by Santa Fe, the car's previous name La Condesa was used by the car's private owner before it was donated to the Museum. The new name was one of several nominated by members at a

business meeting, narrowed by Board vote, and selected by a general membership ballot (Coast Mail, Winter 2014-15). Restoration work continues inside and out, with Dave Rohr, Mike Fairbrother, and Howard Amborn putting in long hours.

## Another Mystery



This item was found in the Southern Pacific bay window caboose that now sits at the south end of the Museum's display track. It's steel, about a foot long, with finely machined threads at the narrow end. There's a hole through the threaded end and two holes through the wide end, apparently to accommodate pins. What is it?



## Train Tales



Jack Hutchinson (right) and Tom Mitchell set up their equipment to record another "Train Tales" oral history session in the Freighthouse.

Photo by Glen Matteson

The Museum's "Train Tales" oral history program got a boost with the recent membership and active volunteering of Jack Hutchinson, a professional video recorder and editor. His first session was in April, with former Southern Pacific and Amtrak locomotive fireman and engineer Ray Craig. In the photo Jack and previous video recorder Tom Mitchell set up their equipment. The "Train Tales" program coordinator Diane Marchetti continues to seek local railroad workers and their family members who can tell about their experiences.

# Donations

Major recent donations include the following: A generous financial contribution from the Santa Maria Valley Railroad toward restoration of La Cuesta (see page 3 article on the Spring Gala); Checks from Marilyn Darnell, Leon Fairbanks, Dan and Patricia Manion, Duane Powell, and Gerry Johnson in memory of her long-time friend and neighbor William "Bill" Howell, to renew chairs in Southern Pacific bay-window caboose No. 1886. The Museum now has sufficient funds to complete the chairs.

A track gauge from John Miramon. The gauge includes a bubble level and adjustable attachment at one end to set the superelevation, or banking, of curves. The bar was probably used at Camp Roberts by the Army Engineers when trackage was expanded shortly before or during World War II.

The biggest calipers you're ever likely to see, from Dwaine Nelson. They were probably used in San Luis Obispo to measure locomotive driving wheel diameters, and are stamped "PCRY."

From Tom Mitchell, a 1917, government-published book on military railways and several documents from the World War II era, including a folded mailer preprinted by Camp Roberts with a greeting and a poetic thought for any soldier to send to his mother.

A carefully restored Pacific Coast Railway "harp" style switch stand, from Severn Edmunds.

*Museum Curator Brad LaRose tells a museum guest about the circa 1876 Pacific Coast Railway switch stand, first presented to the public during San Luis Obispo Train Day on May 9, 2015.*

*Photo by Gary See*



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*The wood bar with black metal ends sitting on top of the rails is a track gauge, shown here on the Museum's display track. When the railheads' inner surfaces touch the metal parts extending down, track workers know the gauge is correct. If the metal ends don't drop between the rails, the rails are too close together; if the gauge can be shifted side to side, the rails are too far apart. The steel piece that's the same color as the rails, visible between the ties and attached to the base of the rails, is a gauge rod. When track gets "out of gauge," it's almost always because the rails have spread farther apart, which tends to happen on curves. The rod helps prevent such spreading.*

*Photo by Glen Matteson*



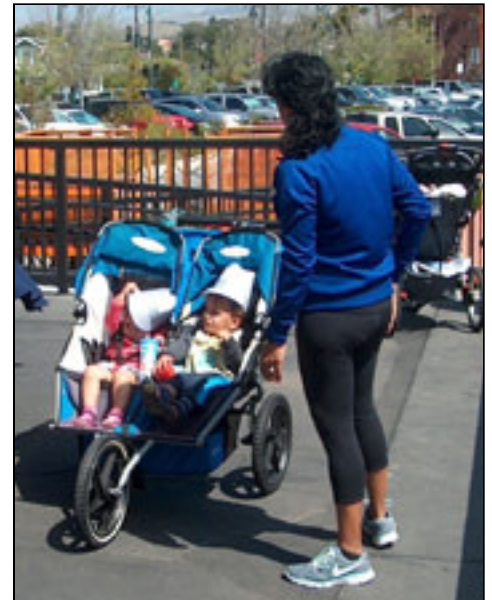
*Museum Manager Diane Marchetti shows off the latest in late-1800's tools for measuring the diameter of large circular objects, such as locomotive driving wheels. With effort, the arms of these Pacific Coast Railway calipers can be moved together and apart so that the points just contact a surface. The distance between can then be measured with a ruler, or it can be compared directly with another object to see if either object needs to be made larger, or, usually in the case when equalizing wheels, smaller. For such objects, calipers allow more convenient and accurate measurements than with a yard stick or tape measure.*

*Photo by Glen Matteson*

## More Train Day

*Stroller traffic was heavy and it seemed that no one was too young to join the spirit.*

*Photo by Glen Matteson*



## Don't stop here . . .

Go online to [www.slorm.com](http://www.slorm.com) and click on Newsletter for more pages of Coast Mail. Read . . .

Notes Along the Pacific Coast Right-of-way by Andrew Merriam. Stories and pictures of The Pacific Coast Railway. See more pictures from the Grand Opening.

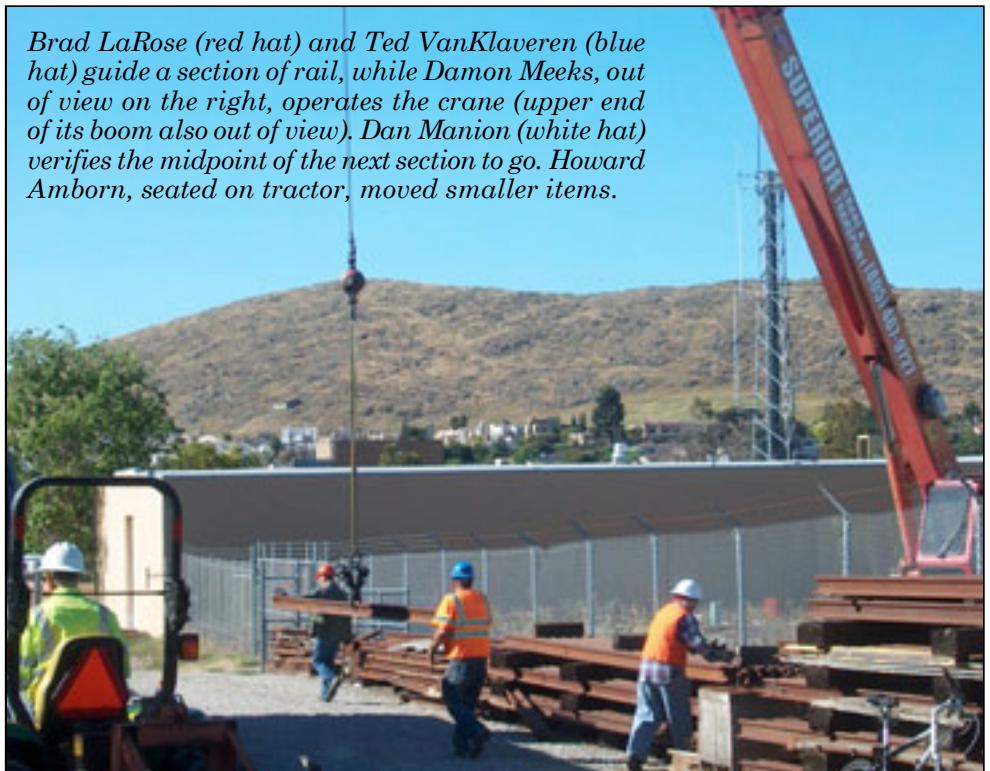
If you don't have internet access, send a #10 SASE to Bill Pyper, PO Box 885, Salem, OR 97308 for printed copies of pages 5-8.

# A Moving Experience

For several years the City of San Luis Obispo has allowed the Museum to use the unimproved northern part of Emily Street, between what is now Miner's Hardware and the Union Pacific property, to display, work on, and store track materials, signals, rolling stock, and other items. During special events at the Freighthouse, founding member Brad LaRose often leads tours through the yard so that visitors can see items awaiting or undergoing restoration — the raw material of future exhibits. This site was very convenient for the Museum, it being located only a few hundred feet south of the Freighthouse and the end of the Museum's display track, and allowing pull-through access for semi-trucks and other large equipment. However, the Museum has known that this arrangement was not likely to last forever.

A development has been proposed for the privately owned parking and storage area south of Miner's, raising issues of installing sidewalks and paving within the Emily Street right-of-way. Even more significant in the immediate future was that the fence between the Museum's Emily Street Yard and the Miner's property had been installed where it was convenient at the time, not along the property line. As a result, the many tons of rail, track hardware, and trackside signal equipment since stored along the fence have been partly encroaching on Miner's property. The encroachment ranged from about a foot at the south end to about 12 feet at the north end. For the rail in particular, stacked in courses, moving any of it meant moving all of it. Proposed changes on the Miner's property and relocation of the fence to the property line also mean pull-through access for large vehicles will no longer be possible.

Moving two Pacific Coast Railway boxcars from Emily Street to the west side of the Freighthouse (Coast Mail, Spring 2013), and shifting other items from and within Emily Street, created enough space to move the items along the fence, in most cases just a few feet across the access way. That access way must be kept open for a high-pressure gas line and a major city sewer line, and for practical access to the Museum's items such as the Southern Pacific wood caboose (Coast Mail, Fall 2013).



*Brad LaRose (red hat) and Ted VanKlaveren (blue hat) guide a section of rail, while Damon Meeks, out of view on the right, operates the crane (upper end of its boom also out of view). Dan Manion (white hat) verifies the midpoint of the next section to go. Howard Amborn, seated on tractor, moved smaller items.*

Museum members Howard Amborn, Chris Hurd, Brad LaRose, Dan Manion, Tom Mitchell, Dave Rohr, and Ted VanKlaveren have been, literally, the moving force behind this effort. Because joint bars and some other track hardware were not in containers, most had to be moved by hand, with Brad taking off his Curator hat and putting on his weight-training hat.

On April 15 Damon Meeks of Superior Crane & Transport, assisted by those

named above, moved about 100 sections of rail and other items. Damon's expert crane operations, based in Atascadero, have helped the Museum on several occasions.

With the near-term situation in hand, the Museum continues to explore potential sites in the vicinity in case its long-term use of Emily Street must be changed.

*Photo and Report by Glen Matteson*

## Where is editor Bill?

What happened to Bill Pyper, long-serving editor for this newsletter? Rest assured he's still up in Oregon, arranging text, images, captions, and titles to bring us this edition of the Coast Mail and hopefully many future ones. But even in this digitally connected age there were times when it was awkward for Bill to coordinate with our band of writers and photographers, who sometimes tend to ride off in all directions at once and not come back for awhile. Besides, he's ahead by one in the beautiful granddaughter contest with your new editor, who can see the Freighthouse and La Cuesta from the back window of his home.

Bill is too modest to give himself a new job title and keep his name on page two, but he still deserves the credit. There may be some rough track as we make the transition to having a content gatherer in San Luis Obispo and a content arranger up north. But we hope

you'll continue to enjoy and be informed by the arrival of each new issue. And we're aiming for a regular schedule, with issues coming out in March, June, September, and December of each year. If you have a thought to share with our readers, a correction to point out, suggestions for future articles, or a draft for submission, let us know.



# From the Archives

Collected by Glen Matteson

## The house was small, but not small enough

During construction of the transcontinental railroads it was not unusual for whole construction camps to be loaded on flatcars and moved from one site to another. And there must have been other cases where small company structures were loaded onto flatcars for relocation. There was not enough documentation concerning the following incident to determine if the house referred to belonged to the Pacific Coast Railway or to a customer, but it definitely was moving by train. Here's a transcription of the relevant note:

June 7, [19]40

H.C g

*Had to leave the car with the house on it at Arroyo Grande on main line at Bridge there.*

*It got wedged in the bridge and it would not clear the switch stand. Was afraid to shove it back through the bridge again to clear main line a few shingles was tore off it.*

Chris

Some notes indicate that the next day a Mr. Stewart notified a Mr. H. Bunce, and word was passed along to get the car with the house on it off the main track — no word on how, or whether additional shingles were lost.

## All in a day's work

In a previous life, your archivist had a reputation for being something of a —to put it politely— stickler for writing form. So at first the following item produced several chuckles and the thought that “He didn't get the memo on writing memos.” Here's a transcript of a handwritten message on Pacific Coast Railway stationery, addressed to that company's Superintendent Massengeil:

8/2/26

“W. J. Masengill

*“I fixed the chase [Case or chassis ?] joint the things that I used was Mister Toms give me 3 rings and the other Toms give me a piece of oil paper for a gaskit and the two axels boxes wor out and I told Toms what to do and he said for me to take the boxes in the chop and he would fill them with babet and thats the things I used, and I got em all fixed now, I did not put it in the chop because maybe it would stay there for a week or more so I would not have a car to go to work on the*

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*track so I fixed it my self. a car of lumber hit the warehouse at new port because the lumber was load to fare out and today I am going to take the track as far out from the ware house as I can. and I want you to give me a order for me to get 4 – 6 x 8 – 20 feet switch ties*

“A. Silva foreman  
Section I  
S. L. O.”

By “babet” he meant babbitt metal, any of several alloys used in axle bearings. But let's reflect a moment. In the early 20th Century, for any of several reasons Mr. Silva probably did not have the luxury of staying in school beyond the first few grades. English may not have been his first language. Every day he must have faced challenges to getting his job done: equipment wearing out; lack of spare parts; other workers protective of their domains and their own schedules; unforeseen events such as, oh, by the way, lumber loads crashing into warehouses. Mr. Silva's initiative and resourcefulness, and pride, show through the imperfect writing. Excuse some editorializing: His competence is what we should remember.

## Treachery at Harriston

Amazing feats of engineering and construction. The clash of financial titans. The commerce of a nation thundering over the main lines. Railroad history has them all. It also has the more mundane and the closer to home.

Thanks to a long chain of conscientious employees from the Pacific Coast Railway in the 1880's through several other businesses, last year the Museum received a collection of documents spanning 60 years of local railroad activities and ending over 60 years ago. One item in particular shows the drama of Man confronting ... The Vine, along the line: a letter dated July 25, 1926, from Lawrence Harris (return address — “Harriston”) to “Mr. Massengeil, Manager, P.C. Ry. Co, San Luis Obispo.”

“Dear Sir:

*“I notice that there are quite a few plants of Morning Glory which are growing in a most healthy manner right on your tracks immediately in front of your station at Harris.*

*“If these plants are allowed to go to seed this patch will only become larger and more difficult [to] check, therefor, it seems to me that if they are attended to now by the application of some exterminating agency such as salt or Carbon Bisulfide much trouble and expense will be saved as you know that ‘a stitch in time is worth nine.’*

*“Thanking you for giving this matter your prompt attention for I believe you are fully aware of the damage and evil consequences which a small patch of this treacherous weed can produce.”*

Following some other correspondence, on August 17, 1926, the superintendent replied, “I have sent to Harris three sacks of salt and instructed our Roadmaster to see that the morning glory now growing at that point is thoroughly exterminated and not permitted to spread.”

## But Wait, There's More . . .



Morning glories raise their beautiful, ugly heads again. The Pacific Coast Railway had been gone for over a decade, but beans were still being grown and processed in northern Santa Barbara County and Southern San Luis Obispo County in the 1950's. The PCRY had been involved in several screening and warehouse operations, including at Los Alamos and at what is now the Pacific Coast Center at Higuera Street and Madonna Road in San Luis Obispo. Screening was the process of separating the dried beans from bits of their pods along with any other plant debris and foreign material.

Among older PCRY items, your archivist recently found a November 1952 Santa Barbara County Agricultural Commission document approving the disposal of garbanzo bean screenings that contained morning glory seeds. This must have been an important matter, because the form was to be filled out in triplicate. The Coastal Counties Warehouse in Los Alamos proposed disposal to a ranch in Solvang, by way of feeding the cooked debris to pigs. Presumably being cooked and passing through a hog prevented the seeds from germinating. And hopefully cooking broke down the naturally occurring, toxic lysergic acid amide in the seeds. If enough seeds are consumed, that chemical produces hallucinations like those of the related compound LSD.

## Notes Along the Pacific Coast Right-of-way

By Andrew Merriam

# Oil Cans on the Central Coast

E W. Clark replaced C. O. Johnson in 1900 as superintendent of the Pacific Coast Railway. And while I doubt that he ever considered the term “oil can” as anything other than the lubrication container used by engineers, his railroad was the first to run tank trains on the Central Coast.

His immediate concerns, however, were more about loss of business. On January 1901 “The Gap” was closed as the Southern Pacific drove its last spike on the Coast Route near Gaviota. The passenger business at Port Harford would soon be a memory. (However derailments and the need to replace the light rail meant that the SP’s Sunset Limited did not become a regularly scheduled passenger train until December 7th of that year.) In addition, while 1899 had been a banner year for freight with 450,000 sacks of grain, most hauled to Port Harford, the closing of “The Gap” also meant changes in freight hauling patterns on the Pacific Coast.

However during the end of the 19th century the ranches and rural lands of the southern San Luis Obispo and northern Santa Barbara counties saw a new type of prospector: employees of Southern California oil companies searching for the geology that indicated oil. Discovery of new oil fields was to change the PCRY’s rural way of life for several decades.

According to Gerald Best ([Ships and Narrow Gauge Rails](http://www.signaturepress.com/pcc.html), now published as [The Pacific Coast Company: Ships and Narrow Gauge Rails](http://www.signaturepress.com/pcc.html), by Signature Press. See <http://www.signaturepress.com/pcc.html>) the first strike of production grade oil occurred in April 1901 when the Western Union Oil Co. leased the Careaga Ranch in the Los Alamos Valley and brought in a well that flowed 200 barrels a day without pumping. Superintendent Clark’s interest in these events turned into active participation when in January 1902 the second well came in at 2,200 feet. At that point the PCRY had no tank cars but Clark knew what to do. An emergency request was dispatched to oil companies in Southern California for a supply of steel tanks from standard gauge cars.

By the time the tanks arrived by steamship at Port Harford a series of flatcars had been outfitted to create a fleet of homemade tanks cars. In addition to meeting the demand for a new



Figure 1: A string of steel tanks on narrow gauge flatcars at Santa Maria in 1939. Photo by Harold F. Stewart



Figure 2: Union Oil Company loading facility at Avila. John Simas is the tank car loader. Estimated between 1906 and 1915. From the collection of Andrew Merriam.

type of cargo. Clark capitalized on the oil discoveries by converting the Pacific Coast fleet of locomotives to oil burners thereby beating the Southern Pacific in the use of the liquid fuel by more than a year. By the end of the year there were 14 wells producing up to 300 barrels a day. Since the tank cars of the era could only haul approximately 180 barrels of crude, the demand for more cars was heavy. Tank cars typical of this period are shown in the 1939 line-up at Santa Maria after the great boom years (see Figure 1).

Then Clark’s participation turned into a headache. On June 2, 1903, near Graciosa Station, Pinal Well #3 came in at 2,500 barrels a day “with a force so great that it spewed oil over the top of the derrick” (page 53 of [Ships and Narrow Gauge Rails: The Story of The Pacific Coast Company](#) by Gerald Best).

When the Pinal Company sought to shut the monster down, the casing cracked. When Superintendent Clark hastened back from San Francisco where he had been meeting with oil officials on the shipping problem he found oil bubbling out of the ground around Pinal #3 at such a rate that it was flowing down the canyon toward his railroad.

Hastily constructing an earth dam across the canyon, an oil lake was formed, temporarily relieving the crisis. But the busy Pinal drillers, like the school boy who sticks his finger in the drinking fountain, had been drilling a fourth well and deepening their first; both came in on the same day as gushers, creating the utmost confusion. In sympathy, Pinal #3 went on a rampage again, blew off its cap

Continued on page 8

and sent the derrick across the canyon, wrecking the bunkhouse and flooding the whole area with oil. (Again from page 53 of Ships and Narrow Gauge Rails: The Story of the Pacific Coast Company by Gerald Best).

The Standard Oil Co. had agreed to purchase all the oil that Pinal and other independents could produce. To store the oil, large tanks were shipped from Bakersfield and assembled at Port Harford where the mobile home park and marine storage yard are today. New steel tanks were arriving by each ship and Superintendent Clark telegraphed Baldwin Locomotive Works for three new consolidation locomotives which would arrive in May of 1904.

The Pacific Coast was now in the positive position of having to haul vast amounts of supplies to the oil fields from Port Harford and the large transfer dock at San Luis Obispo. Strings of tank cars went to the port for both Standard Oil and Union Oil where the oil was off loaded into storage tanks. Each company maintained their own tanks for holding the oil until it could be loaded into ships. A typical string of tank cars is shown in Figure 2.

The original oil pier was an extension of the existing Harford pier. This burned in 1915. The Pacific Coast then built another wood pile pier which was sold to Union Oil Company just before the depression. The new engines arrived not too soon and were immediately put to work hauling the 35 tank cars now on hand for three round trips a day to Port San Luis. The great activity in the newly emerging oil fields led to the establishment of a new town with Superintendent Clark naming it "Orcutt" in honor of his friend W. W. Orcutt, chief geologist for Union Oil Company.

Union Oil made new oil discoveries adjacent to the Pinal field. Their most famous well being Hartnell #1 which initially gushed at 40,000 barrels a day, again required damming a canyon to contain the overflow. The oil volume from this well then tapered down to 20,000 barrels a day, equivalent to the Pacific Coast's total hauling capacity (estimated at 171,000 gallons of crude per train). Of course the SP did not sit idly and watch the whole bonanza flow to the narrow gauge. A pipeline was constructed to their siding at Casmalia.

**8** Other noted fields were developed at Palmer and Cat Canyon southeast of Santa Maria and the PCRY extended a branch line



Figure 3: Tank car #925 lettered U.O.Co. for the Union Oil Company, Santa Maria, 1938. Photo by Ken Frick



Figure 4: Standard Oil owned tank cars for refined retail product with advertising on the sides. These cars were numbered X-106 and X-107.

Collection of Kenneth Westcott.

to serve these areas. Ultimately pipelines were constructed from the main oil fields to Port Harford with the resulting tank farms above the community of Avila which would last almost a century before being demolished in the late 1990's. While efficient pipelines would now take the majority of the oil from the fields to the refineries, there were still small independent producers and in some cases remote fields with pipelines to the railhead which were still served by the railroad into the 1930's.

The tank cars were composed of steel tanks typically with a capacity of 5,700 gallons mounted on 33-foot wooden flatcars. The Pacific Coast owned most, but some were lettered for Union Oil Company, shortened to U.O.Co. on the typically black tanks. (See Figure 3). There are also photographs of U.O.Co. cars with silver and black lettering.

All of the Pacific Coast cars were given odd numbers in the 901 to 981 series. An interesting footnote is that Standard Oil also had two tank cars numbered X-106 and X-107 imported for their reserved use, which I speculate was to supply retail products to local

service stations. See Figure 4. These cars had silver tanks mounted on 30-foot narrow gauge flat cars. Standard Oil was not shy about advertising. Each side of the car had different text but their product was "Uns surpassed" and the big block of lettering was in red.

These cars had an interesting and diverse history. They were built for the Nevada-California-Oregon (NCO) in 1913 at Reno, sold to the Standard Oil Company in 1928, came to the Pacific Coast where they lasted until 1934 when they were transferred to the Nevada County Narrow Gauge (NCNG) headquartered in Grass Valley. The two Standard Oil cars (plus four PCRY cars) were transferred to Alaska to serve there during World War II on the Alaska Railway.

While Superintendent E. W. Clark could never have foreseen today's Union Pacific triweekly "oilcans" passing next to the former PCRY, and while a 23,000 gallon tank car in a 78-unit train carrying about 1.7 million gallons would have staggered his imagination, he was the first to run "oilcans" through San Luis Obispo.