



Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum

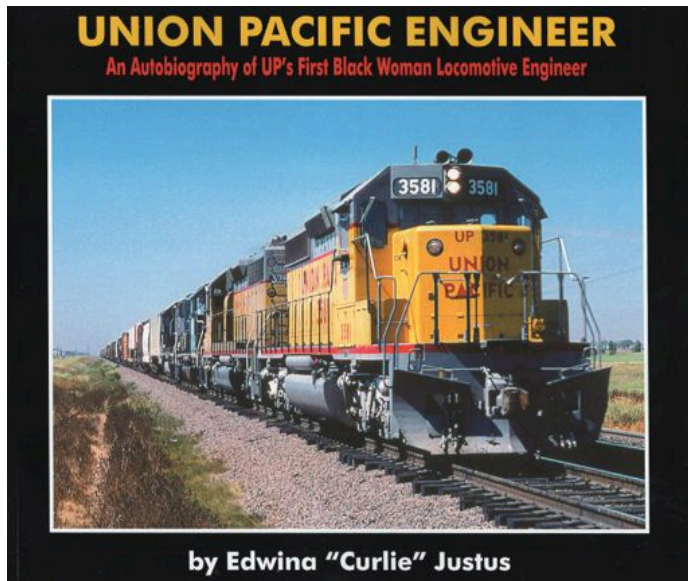
Issue Number 79 – Spring 2022 San Luis Obispo, California www.slormm.com

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

New website under construction

The Museum's new website (right) will have the same address but a different look. The experts at Digital Agility Media in Atascadero donated their services to get us started. The new design is meant to provide the same basic resources, in a format appealing to first-time visitors. It should also be easier for the several Museum volunteers who provide content to update material without burdening a single webmaster. This effort will also help the Museum manage offerings across several types of devices and social media platforms.

We will need several months to refine and bring over content from the current site and to add new material.



The tracks of our lives

February was Black History Month. March is Women's History Month. And at the Museum, it's *always* railroad history month. Though it's not about Central Coast railroading, your editor found the book above worth reading. Written by Union Pacific's first Black, woman locomotive engineer, it's available in the Museum's newly established lending library for members. You can literally check it out.

Other books in the lending library, which is separate from the Museum's research library, are:

Double Jacks, by Michael E. McGinley, a former civil engineer for Southern Pacific and Metrolink. The novel recounts a career as a railroad civil engineer, with a railroad that bears a striking resemblance to a well known western line.

China's Great Train, by Abrahm Lustgarten, tells about building the line to Tibet, reaching altitudes where oxygen is available to passengers.



Restoration progress

Warm, dry weather in January did not help the local water supply situation, but it was good for painting our former Southern Pacific boxcar. The metal and wood parts of the body look great. "Why didn't you paint the coupler and the wheels?"

The railroads never painted them. Paint would obscure any cracks or chips in the steel. Cracks in particular may be a sign of impending failure. A streak of rust can reveal a crack too small to be obvious by itself.

Our Mission

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

Contact

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EditorGlen Matteson
 (newsletter@slorrm.com)

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

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 8, April 12, and May 10, at 6:00 p.m. In-person meetings will be at 1940 Santa Barbara Ave., S.L.O. Masks and distancing may be required. Online participation can be arranged. Contact info@slorrm.com for help with online participation.

Board of Directors changes

We thank departing directors Charlie Crabb and Stephanie Hovanitz, and welcome new directors Peter Brazil, Greg Jackson, and Ted Van Klaveren.

More Coast Mail online

Pay rates, hitting metal, fire and rain, and Annual Report.



Productive new volunteer

Ray Belknap (above) recently came forward to help organize the Museum's archives. He has identified duplicate items that don't need to be retained and sorted railroad documents by date. He has video-recorded summaries of how the research library and archives are organized and accessed. That's important in assuring that the knowledge is not limited to one person.

Ray, who has degrees in landscape architecture, has also worked with the San Luis Obispo County Land Conservancy and with the Historic Center.

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.

Docent of the year

Paul Edwards is our 2021 Docent of the Year. Paul (below) builds scenery and regularly introduces visitors to the Pacific Coast Railway section of the model railroad. He cheerfully makes local history come alive.



Andrew Merriam photo

Train Day 2022

See our website for the status of our traditional May event.

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Mystery photo #1

What and where is this?

Several months ago a signal maintainer who had retired from a Union Pacific division beyond the Central Coast shared a YouTube video of his road trip to San Luis Obispo. He recorded arrival of the north-bound Amtrak *Coast Starlight* and toured the depot area. His commentary asked about the feature shown in the photo below.

Do you know what and where it is? See the next *Coast Mail* for the answer. (It's not a signal.)



What is a “busy” signal?

Years ago your editor had an engineer co-worker (civil, not locomotive) who often started telephone conversations with “Is this the party to whom I am speaking?” That memory still brings a chuckle. He borrowed the line from a 1960s TV show that included a telephone operator. But can't almost everyone operate a telephone? “Switchboard operator” is a better term.

Current telephone systems integrate copper wires, fiber optics, and wireless (radio) pathways, and lots of digital switching devices. But in the early days, you could directly dial only within a few miles of your location (literally, rotate a dial multiple times to activate a series of mechanical relays to convey a string of digits). “Long distance” calls required the help of a switchboard operator, nearly always one of several women in a windowless room who manually plugged wires into sockets to complete a circuit. Numerical extensions and automatic answering or recording devices came later. So a busy signal let callers know the system was working but the phone they had hoped to connect with was being used, or was “off the hook” (maybe to avoid ringing interruptions).

At right we see the cover of a Southern Pacific employee newsletter, which boasted that the company's phone system was about to have “86 long-distance voice channels in and out of San Francisco and 59 in and out of Los Angeles.” The SP's own 1956 system was installed with help and equipment from the Bell System, which was the only telephone company at the time. SP's new internal system covered the Pacific Lines. Extension to Texas and Louisiana was planned.



Mystery photo #2

Why “on the Wye?”

Where is this building, and why does its address sign include “on the Wye?” Hint: It's in San Luis Obispo, in a neighborhood that's transitioning from commerce to housing. The answer will be in the *Summer Coast Mail*.



Using names with the first two letters taking the place of numbers was an aid to memory and clarity when human operators were needed to complete telephone calls. Some groups protested the change to “all number” dialing.

Is there a setup to do the reverse?

The Fall 2021 *Coast Mail* reported bringing a flatcar from Northern California for our planned Trailer On Flat Car (TOFC) exhibit. That required removing the deteriorated plank deck so pieces would not fall onto roads during the trip.

What if you had hundreds of flatcars, roaming the country in all weather and carrying everything from lumber to tractors? Eventually the planks would need to be replaced. Prying each one loose by hand is time-consuming and hazardous. According to the Southern Pacific *Bulletin* of August 1958, “A bunch of the boys were sitting around one day at Fresno...” and “One of the men said, ‘I’d like to just take an old mule and plow ‘em off.’”

The photo at right shows the result of that remark: a movable crossbar with five prongs, under which a locomotive pushes the car, peeling off the planks in about one minute.

Beyond the plow we see a flatcar with new decking installed. Note that beyond that one is a flatcar with side stakes, loaded with lumber; the boards stick out somewhat randomly at the end. Now, nearly all lumber is carried on flatcars with sturdy bulkheads, and the boards are banded with steel straps, both of which minimize shifted loads.

Check future *Coast Mail* editions for progress on replacing the deck of the Museum’s flatcar, carefully, one plank at a time. Donations to support that effort are always welcome.

Old Decking Is “Plowed” From Our Flatcars



Documentary evidence

In one of our Train Tails oral histories (available at slorrm.com) former Southern Pacific signal supervisor Sid Marques tells of working on the pole lines along the coast. The overhead wires carried telegraph and telephone circuits. The photo at left shows a signal maintainer brushing fresh aluminized paint on the back of a signal head, in connection with installing centralized traffic control (CTC), probably in Nevada on the Overland Route –the original transcontinental. The Coast Line south of San Luis Obispo and north of Goleta is only now getting CTC, which allows dispatchers hundreds of miles away to operate track switches and direct rail traffic by trackside signal indications. This photo is from the cover of the August 1958 *Bulletin*, the SP employee newsletter.

So, what’s the connection between the Coast Line in Mr. Marques’ era and Nevada in the 1950s? Sid got in trouble for climbing a pole wearing no clothes! No, of course he didn’t. But he tells of being confronted by an official concerning a woman riding a passenger train, probably the *Coast Daylight*, who complained that when she looked out her window she saw a naked man on a pole. Because the poles were set at different heights along the track, accommodating banks sloping up or down, the woman must have seen only the top part of Sid or one of his crew, the part without a shirt, such as the man in the photo.

That incident being many years before nearly everyone had a cell phone with a camera, we have no proof that Sid was shirtless, or possibly naked, on a pole. But this *Bulletin* image is credible documentary evidence that on hot days SP workers may have sometimes taken the bare-skin approach to not overheating.

Both automatic block signal (ABS) and CTC systems often used trackside pole lines for their signal circuits. Systems installed or upgraded today no longer do, relying instead on buried cables or wireless connections. Positive train control (PTC) takes it further, with satellite links. Most wires that provided rhythmically dipping lines seen from a train window have been taken down for scrap.

On a creosoted wooden pole, a long-sleeved shirt protected against painful splinters if you slipped, according to a utility worker’s statement to your editor.



In an operation familiar to the Museum, an extended-boom crane lifts into place the span for a new bicycle and pedestrian bridge over the railroad, north of Mill Street and west of California Boulevard.

City of San Luis Obispo photo

More bridge news

Last October the City of San Luis Obispo completed a major link for the Railroad Safety Trail, with installation of a new bicycle and pedestrian bridge over the Union Pacific track near the Highway Patrol office on California Boulevard. The span over the railroad is 90½ feet long. The bridge allows riders on the west side of the track to access the path that extends north into the Cal Poly Campus. Eventually, the path will provide a route largely separate from streets from the southern edge of the city in the Edna Valley to Cal Poly.

The city’s Public Works Department led the effort, which required close coordination with the railroad. TRC Companies designed the project. Trusses were fabricated by Contech Engineered Solutions. Local firm Souza Construction was the prime contractor, with crane work by Bragg Crane Services of Santa Maria.



You never know where it will lead

If I had not become involved with the Museum, I would not have become involved with Cal Poly’s transportation engineering program. If I hadn’t become involved with that program, I would not have received a subscription to *Railway Track and Structures* magazine. If I had not read the article in the December 2021 issue by Kerry Jones and others on “Ultrasonic Impact Treatment of thermite rail welds” I wouldn’t have seen a reference to peening welds to relieve stress. And probably I wouldn’t have learned what peening is.

I’ve been using a ball peen hammer since I was a kid, mainly to drive tacks and very small nails. To “peen” (probably from northern Germanic) is to shape metal by striking it—one of the oldest technologies.

The lesson here is, get involved. You never know where it will lead.
- Glen Matteson



Small ball peen hammers from your editor’s toolbox, and a big one from the Museum’s collection. For industrial applications, powered peening tools are often used.



The Alisal Fire in October burned about 17,000 acres, closing Highway 101 and the Union Pacific Railroad between Goleta and Gaviota. From videography by KSBY.

Guess the date

The following describes a train trip heading north from Goleta and approaching Gaviota. When do you think it was it written?

To the left and right the landscape is mostly black, burned by the disastrous fires of last September. The men ... praise the maintenance forces who protected our track against the flames.

New grasses are already sprouting green in the black fields. Some trees are partly in new leaf, but mostly they are dead. Blackened ruins of houses, with only the chimneys standing, are evidence of the fury of the fire that swept the hills and down to the ocean shore.

The omitted words (...) would have been a clue. They are *in the caboose*. The text is from the January 1956 Southern Pacific *Bulletin*, the employee newsletter. The same story about a local freight train notes efforts to stabilize blowing sand on dunes farther north.

“If it had been a snake...

... it would have bit me.”

Your editor’s father used that expression when he found something he had been looking for that should have been obvious. Your archivist faced a similar situation when he noticed “from” and “to” station code numbers on 1958 train-crew personal time records like those shown at right. In those documents some numbers are close to mileposts, such as 0 for San Francisco and 97 for Watsonville. But few matched exactly. And what about the hyphenated numbers, such as 0-44?

A source on the rail-interest website Trainorders.com noted that Southern Pacific employee timetables used station codes. True. But if you never had occasion to relate them to anything, they are easily overlooked. And like many things in the timetables, they changed over the years.

Date	11-8	29-58-3425	Run No.	207
Train No.	X5329	bat1257	Trip No.	10
Eng. No.	5329-5616	1230am	Service	FRT
From Station	0-44	430a	Departed	
To Station	97	8a	Arrived	8a 9a
Int. Delay		30	Ter. Delay	115
Rate	19.13	24.83	Amt. to Date	234.46
Miles	100	Miles to Date	Expenses	Exp. to Date
Condr. or Engr. NEWELL - MOORHEAD				
Remarks: 63 20963 235 15304 2483 29817217 23446 3826 570024 1913 2483				

Date	11-7-58		Run No.	207
Train No.	373		Trip No.	9
Eng. No.			Service	FRT
From Station	97	33a	Departed	4a
To Station	0	65a	Arrived	70a 80a
Int. Delay		1-10	Ter. Delay	
Rate	1878	21.52	Amt. to Date	20963
Miles		Miles to Date	Expenses	Exp. to Date
Condr. or Engr. Same				
Remarks: 188.11 2152 1146 20963				

SLORRM Archives No. 2420.2

WESTWARD ↓		STATIONS		↑ EASTWARD	
Station Number	Siding Length	Coast Line			Mile Post
13600		SAN LUIS OBISPO	QY	DTG ABS	252.1
13575	5100	CHORRO		C	246.3
13570	5750	SERRANO		T	243.4
13565	5830	CUESTA		C	238.9
13560	19015	SANTA MARGARITA			233.0
13550	5585	HENRY			228.0
13540	4700	TEMPLETON			221.8
13535	2650	PASO ROBLES		D	216.3
13530	4750	WELLSONA		T	210.9
13520	#1 5000 #2 3770	McKAY		C	203.8
13515	5150	BRADLEY			195.9
13510	4700	WUNPOST		A	189.7
13504	5780	SAN ARDO		B	182.9
13496	4875	SAN LUCAS		S	172.4
13485	6300	KING CITY			163.7
13465	4800	HARLEM			148.3
13460	7450	SOLEDAD			143.6
13445	7475	GONZALES			135.1
13435		CHUALAR			129.1
13410	6300	SPRECKELS JCT			120.3
13400	9895	SALINAS	QTY	ABS	118.2
13350	6300	CASTROVILLE		C	110.4
13200		WATSONVILLE JCT	T	DT ABS	100.4

(151.7)

And speaking of pay...

From the Archives, “Coast District, Basis of Pay [for] Brakemen, Corrected” dated August 12, 1966, a very small sample of the possible combinations:

Through freight service	Basic Rate	w/81 to 105 cars
SLO – Watsonville	21.47 \$/day	22.02 \$/day
	19.01¢/mile>100	19.56¢/mile >100
SLO – Santa Barbara	21.16 \$/day	21.71 \$/day
	18.71¢/mile>100	19.26¢/mile >100

For a while Southern Pacific conductors and locomotive engineers used 3x5-inch slips like those above to record the dates, times, distances, and other details of their trips. That allowed the trainmen to check what they were paid according to the information shown on different forms kept by the company.

It appears that station numbers were not used until the 1950s. By 1964 San Luis Obispo was station number 248 (close to its current milepost), while in 1967 it was number 31000. In 1987 S.L.O. was number 13600. In 1964 San Francisco was number 0, but in 1967 it was number 31000 and by 1987 it became 12710.

At left is part of the Southern Pacific Lines *Western Region Timetable 4*, effective November 24, 1990. Station numbers are shown in the leftmost column. Similar numbering for the Santa Barbara District continued to a few miles north (timetable west) of Burbank Junction, whose number jumped to 20965 in line with (Los Angeles) Basin District station numbering.

And don’t forget, “station” on the railroad meant a place identified for train movement control, not necessarily where passengers or freight were handled. Every siding (passing track) or crossover between two tracks was a station known by a name, a number, or often both.

Allow your archivist another recollection. When his father was asked about his occupation, he often replied, “I’m sort of a jackass of all trades.” That’s something Museum volunteers can aspire to.

Local freight service	Basic Rate	w/81 to 105 cars
SLO – Watsonville	21.89 \$/day	22.44 \$/day
	19.43¢/mile>100	19.98¢/mile >100
SLO – Santa Barbara	21.88 \$/day	22.43 \$/day
	19.43¢/mile>100	19.98¢/mile >100
Road switcher service	23.90 \$/day	24.45 \$/day
	21.32¢/mile >100	21.87¢/mile >100
Work train service	21.60 \$/day	22.15 \$/day
(except SF to Wtsnvl)	19.13¢/mile>100	19.68¢/mile >100

Who’s ready to be a pay clerk or a union negotiator?



What do these photos have in common?

They both show people involved with the Southern Pacific Railroad in 1909. And rain.

Above, the Coast Division baseball team poses. Left-to-right, top-to-bottom we have M. A. Michelson, Patton, Fair, A. P. Michelson, Sullivan, Masengil, Werner, Manager Millsap, Griffin, and Delaney. For the season, they came in second of six teams. The season had opened April 3. Games between the Coast, Western, San Jose, and Trainmen teams “were postponed on account of rain,” according to an album produced by the Southern Pacific Railroad Athletic Association.

Below, we see a washout near Concepcion. Torrential rains in the first three months of 1909 affected subsidiary Northwestern Pacific, the Santa Cruz Branch, the Salinas Valley, and the Coast Route including Cuesta Grade and the line along the shore at least to near Goleta.



Whose pilings are these?

In discussions of property rights and development along beaches and floodplains, two statements may be heard: “the beach belongs to the ocean,” and “the floodplain belongs to the river.” These expressions reflect the reality that large masses of water, feeling the effects of gravity and wind, will do what they can to landforms and structures. They ignore rules and land titles.

Below we see the stumps of wood pilings for a trestle that led to Pacific Coast Railway’s wood, through-truss bridge over San Luis Obispo Creek at Avila. December’s intense rains produced runoff that scoured previously deposited sediment, revealing the remains. A concrete abutment appears on the far bank, which has eroded.

The bridge was built about 1876 and largely washed away by floods in 1983. PCRY expert Andrew Merriam took this photo on January 9, 2022.



The photo above shows the bridge as modeled on the Museum’s layout, at 1/87th full size. It was built by Andrew Merriam and the late John Marchetti.

Bridges in the full-size world must deal with stability of the rock and soil that support them. Display models must consider potential expansion, contraction, and warping of the supporting benchwork due to changing temperature and humidity.

Annual Report

The year 2021 continued to be a challenge for the Museum, as the community emerged from the pandemic.

Volunteers provided over 1,944 hours in general support work, plus 675 for La Cuesta and 1,530 for the model railroad. In addition, many untallied hours were invested in equipment restoration. Memberships remained above 200, with new memberships more than offsetting losses.

Major accomplishments were:

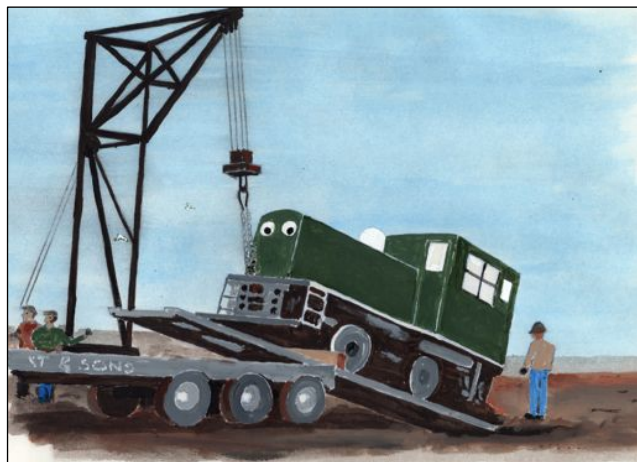
- acquiring and transporting a flatcar for the Trailer On Flat Car (TOFC) exhibit
- constructing an indoor display track for the Track Inspection Car exhibit, to include the velocipede, handcar, and motor car
- installing the basic components for the interactive locomotive cab simulator and the virtual Amtrak Coast Route ride
- painting the sugar beet gondola
- installing the Griswold rotating crossing signal
- making the upper level of the model railroad operational and providing additional scenery details on the lower level
- publishing a children’s book sequel, *Danny the Diesel Locomotive Hauls Rocks*.



Above, the Museum brought a former Southern Pacific flatcar from Northern California. Below, volunteers created a virtual window to watch passing scenery.



Left above, we made the locomotive cab simulator operational. Left below, another in the series of *Danny the Diesel Locomotive* children’s books was published digitally.



2021 Financial Status

Beginning Cash Balance		\$124,758
Income		\$148,605
Memberships	\$ 7,253	
Admissions	\$ 8,107	
Events & Excursions	\$ 6,270	
Store Sales & Misc.	\$ 6,546	
Model Railroad	\$ 5,127	
Grants and Donations	\$115,302	
Restricted	\$99,302	
Unrestricted	\$16,000	
Expenses		\$ 78,497
Operating	\$ 31,544	
Capital	\$ 46,953	
Year-end Cash Balance		\$194,866