



# Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo  
Railroad Museum

Issue Number 80 – Summer 2022 San Luis Obispo, California [www.slorm.com](http://www.slorm.com)

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



*With the Museum's display track in the foreground and the Jennifer Street Bridge barely visible in the distance, a Loram grinder re-profiles rail heads at San Luis Obispo in January.*

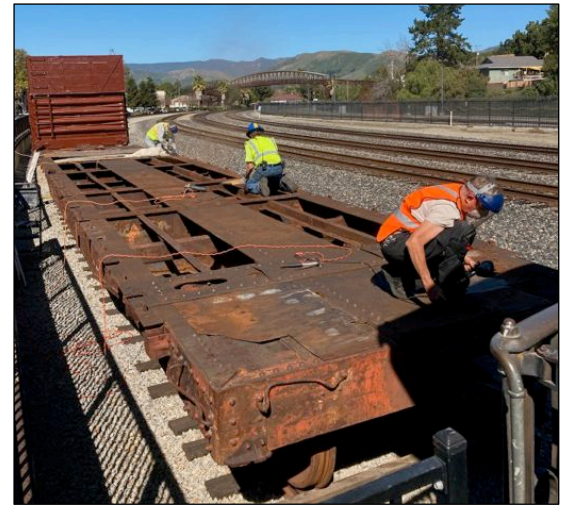
## Recent history

Before dawn on January 30, a Loram rail grinder under contract to Union Pacific worked along both main tracks in San Luis Obispo. The equipment's diesel engines provide propulsion and power for electric motors that spin abrasive disks against the rail heads. Restoring proper profile to the rail heads reduces irregularities that can lead to chips and cracks. It's something like a big, noisy, spark-throwing version of filing your fingernails. A grinder also worked here in January 2017.



## Restoration progress

In February Mike Adams, Greg Jackson, Brad LaRose, Ted VanKlaveren, and Bob Wilson removed rust from the former Southern Pacific flatcar, while Dan Manion painted the roof of the wood-sheathed caboose in Emily Street Yard. Brad LaRose photo



*Above, a track inspector checks rail-head profile with a gauge that has different faces for different positions along curves. Rail vehicles experience the best ride and cause the least wear to wheel treads and rails when both have an ideal shape. (Image by Advanced Rail Management)*

*Left above, the Freighthouse can be seen right of center as the rail grinder throws sparks along Union Pacific's tracks. The last section of the equipment sprays water to quench any smoldering bits.*

*Bottom left, a full set of rail grinding equipment. (Image from Trainweb.org)*

**Our Mission**

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

**Contact**

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 (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](http://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](http://www.slorrm.com) click on Company Store.

*Coast Mail* is published quarterly by the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum.  
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**Timetable**

**Board of Directors meetings** are scheduled for, June 14, July 12, and August 9, at 6:00 p.m. They are held at the Museum. Online participation can be arranged. Contact [info@slorrm.com](mailto:info@slorrm.com) for help with virtual attendance.



**Another trackside venue**

The Winter 2021 *Coast Mail* began our coverage of local venues that offer convenient train watching. A few months ago Curator Brad LaRose took a break from restoration work and found another: San Luis Obispo's Bang the Drum Brewery. It's a small craft brewery and bakery with a big patio and connection to the Railroad Safety Trail (Brad's photo above). "BTD" offers live bands, dancing, comedy, and trivia nights at 1150 Laurel Lane.

**RR Festival photo contest**

We're looking for photos taken at or near the Museum that would encourage people to visit. Cash prizes are offered. See our website for rules.



**More Coast Mail Online**

Pages 5 – 7: Bridge painting, locomotive moving, student help, Hawaiian bridge, new index, plus frog in yard.

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**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, use of the lending library, and invitations to special events.

**Southern Pacific engineer leaves us**

Retired Southern Pacific locomotive engineer Alex Woronovich passed away in April. Mr. Woronovich had worked the Coast Line between Los Angeles and San Luis Obispo. He was a rich source of area railroad history, sharing stories of running diesel locomotives. The museum plans to display a diesel locomotive bell he donated.

As the Museum develops its exhibit featuring former Southern Pacific workers in all roles, group or individual photos and specific information will be greatly appreciated.

**Our small library grows**

Our lending library for Museum members now includes a few child and adult DVDs. The range of books and DVDs grows almost every week, thanks to donations.





*The jib crane near the old water tank can still be turned using the handle hinged on its lower right side, but don't cross the racks to do so.*

**Mystery photo #1 Answer**

Did you identify the jib crane near the water tank from the Spring edition? San Luis Obispo's only signal department feature remaining from the Southern Pacific era, it's between the tracks and the water tank, opposite the depot. It was used to move heavy items such as battery boxes, signal masts, and relay cabinets on and off highway trucks.

Have you heard the expression "I like the cut of your jib?" It refers to a person's general appearance and demeanor. It's based on 17<sup>th</sup> century sailing ships, when the form of the jib sail often identified a ship's nationality, and therefore whether it was friendly or hostile. The jib sail (or sails) were at the front of the ship, and reduced turbulence for the larger sails that provided most of the movement force.

But this is a railroad museum, not a maritime museum. Here "jib" refers to the usually horizontal beam that can rotate around a mast, carrying the hand-cranked or motor-powered hoist away from or toward the mast. Typically the jib did not also move up and down. Jib cranes could be mounted on the ground, on a floor, or the bed of a truck or rail car. A "luffing" jib can also move up and down.

Apparently, "jib" can also mean an animal that stops and refuses to proceed, like the proverbial stubborn mule. That's not to be confused with a burro crane, a discussion for a future edition.



*This sturdy contemporary jib crane is produced by Laxmi Engineering Services, which provided the photo.*



Google Street View image

**Mystery photo #2 Answer**

This building on the southern corner of Victoria and Humbert avenues in San Luis Obispo, completed in 2017, provides affordable places to live for military veterans. Its street number on Victoria is 2775. It's in the 700 block of Humbert. Why 860? According to some numerologists, 860 means trust that good things will come your way.

Below is a current aerial view from USGS Earth Explorer, with the location of the wye track shown approximately in red. The red line does not reach the current tracks because there used to be more tracks to the west of them. The wye was built by cutting into a tall mound, so the long, cab-forward articulated locomotives could be turned around. They did not fit on the turntable, located to the north, which had been lengthened once.

This whole area was re-contoured for development of the Villa Rosa townhouses on the wye's south leg and the Moylan Terrace apartments on the north leg. "2775 860 on the Wye" is near the former wye track, but not on it.

Your editor recalls seeing the ruts made by dirt bikes on the steep slopes of the cut for the wye, but alas no cab-forwards.



## Spur of the moment

Your editor can't recall when use of words, and the combination of words and pictures, became important. It was somewhere between being in the slow-to-read group in elementary school and now. Do you collect examples of how our language is mangled by headline writers, automated transcription apps, and automatic correctors of style, spelling, and grammar? Those last are becoming more aggressive, even in email services. They want to finish one's thoughts.

In mid-January curator Brad LaRose and your editor were communicating about removal of the mostly buried spur track south of the Museum's Emily Street Yard. How would the work affect access to land that the city lets us use for storage and restoration? Would there be a way to reflect the spur's history in the paving being done as part of a neighboring development project? You may have guessed where this is going. When "...the spur" was typed in an email, the system wanted to supply "of the moment."

Brad captured the moment in the photo below.

The Fall 2017 *Coast Mail* featured this section of track. It was known as the lumber spur, because for many years it served a large lumberyard. The new project includes apartments and commercial spaces.



## More recent history

Out with the old (above) and in with the new (right & below). In February a trainload of 1,320-foot-long rail sections paused in San Luis Obispo. Union Pacific was replacing rail on curves farther south. The cars' racks have rollers so the rails can bend and shift slightly lengthwise, and be pulled on and off.



*Geographic confusion was part of the plot, and several of the bloopers, with a north-bound train getting to Cuesta Grade before San Luis Obispo.*

## “Crazy Train”

That's the title of a 2016 episode of the ABC TV series *Modern Family*. The fictional Pritchetts and Dunphys travel from Southern California to Portland by train, passing through the Central Coast. The nuttiness of some of the riders and their relatives is under discussion. If you watch carefully, through the train windows you can see ocean and inland sides of the Gaviota Coast, the former REA building and current Amtrak depot in San Luis Obispo, and the Stenner Canyon Trestle.

But there are some big bloopers. The craziest may be when several characters refer to the rearmost part of the train as “the caboose” [*Coast Mail* Fall 2016, page 14]. The film train has a second locomotive in that place. Also, they refer to the “horseshoe turn,” meaning the horseshoe curve. One rider reports learning of a plot obstacle by talking to the engineer, apparently while the train is moving.

Union Pacific Railroad and Amtrak surely co-operated, but they did not want their names or logos to be visible.

## To paint or not to paint?

This is one of many issues in railway engineering.

The Winter 2022 *Coast Mail* reported on boxcar restoration progress, noting that wheels and couplers were not painted. For operating rail cars, any benefit of weather (rust) protection is outweighed by the need to detect cracks and chips in the steel that paint can hide.

Bridges are another matter. Railroads traditionally painted their steel bridges with thick, black, oil-base paint or with thick, aluminized (silver), oil-base paint. Bridge inspectors also look for cracks, but apparently the tradeoff was decided differently. Over decades, as deteriorated paint allows layers of rust to peel off, thickness of the steel is reduced, lowering its strength. Engineers specified thicker steel than needed for structural integrity, with a margin of safety. They calculated that over the service life of the bridge, one hundred years or so, the remaining thickness would be adequate.

Sometimes, bridges are re-painted. But that can be a messy, risky process. Workers must have access to surfaces above, outside, and under the structure. Sandblasting to remove grime and rust, and applying paint, can put harmful materials into the air, soil, and water.

So railroads are increasingly using so-called weathering steels, such as Corten. These alloys rust, but the initial oxidized layer is very thin and it never flakes off. Once it forms, the metal below is protected. (Shiny stainless steel costs more and is not as strong.) The Jennifer Street bike and pedestrian bridge near the San Luis Obispo depot is made of weathering steel, as is the new bridge over the tracks near the Highway Patrol office [*Coast Mail* Spring 2022]. In the early years of using weathering steel above tracks, structural engineers were concerned that diesel locomotive exhaust would be corrosive. But the opposite was found. Components of the exhaust accelerated curing.

At least one railroad has decided to not paint bridges that use conventional steel, specifying even more thickness initially to compensate for flaking. However, Union Pacific decided to use painted steel for the new Narlon bridge, even in its harsh coastal environment [*Coast Mail* Winter 2021]. Maybe “painted” is not the right word. The manufacturers refer to “industrial coatings,” and they are protective of their formulas and application methods.

*The Jennifer Street bridge was pre-fabricated, then craned into position over the tracks. At first it was almost as bright orange as the crane cabin. Some local residents were upset that the city did not paint it the traditional black or silver. It soon weathered to its current brown.*

*Photo courtesy City of San Luis Obispo Engineering Division*



*Ballast slumping away from the track can be a problem on active rail lines. But railroads don't have workers to pick up individual rocks and put them where they belong.*

## Students lent hands

Early on a Friday during the February heat wave (!) eight Cal Poly student members of the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) helped the Museum clean solar panels and tidy the grounds. ITE welcomes students from all majors who are particularly interested in transportation. Participating were Jillian Buteau, Gabe Denson, Jacob Hamada, Bryant Lee, Liam Keeton, Jason Ng, Blake Thomas, and Lauren Zuend.

We hope to make at least one ITE visit a regular yearly event.



*Grime builds up quickly on the solar panels when there is no rain to wash them.*

## Pacific Coast Railway No. 6 arriving on...

... a compact SUV, then a dolly.

The 7.5-inch-gauge model is nearly six feet long and weighs about 200 pounds, nothing like the full size rolling stock we've moved, but definitely a bigger challenge than the HO models. In mid-March Museum member Karl Hovanitz brought the locomotive from its previous home on the Bitter Creek Western Railroad in Arroyo Grande. It's displayed in the Freighthouse, near the Pacific Coast Railway exhibit panels.

Hollywood model maker Jack Sessums built the operating locomotive in 2001 for Art Ludwicks' Easley Pacific Railroad in Glendora, California. Museum member and supporter Mr. Ludwick donated it several years ago. It was repainted and lettered for display by Jay Carsman and Karl Hovanitz.

The actual Pacific Coast Railway No. 6 was built by the Baldwin Locomotive Company.

*Top right, the moving crew uses iron pipes inserted through sturdy parts of the frame to slide the engine out.*

*Right, the crew pauses to celebrate completing the most challenging step (except for lifting the engine onto its display stand). L-R: Glen Matteson, Ted Van Klaveren, Karl Hovanitz, Dave Rohr, Bob Wilson, Gary See, and Brad LaRose.*

*Below right, the dolly is maneuvered close to the eventual display location.*

*Below, Gary See prepares to attach the smokestack, which had been removed to avoid risk of damage. The frame is rugged, the cab and appurtenances are not.*

*Photos by Stephanie Hovanitz*



## A Central Coast railroad bridge, in Hawaii

A reader saw the Spring *Coast Mail* piece on the Pacific Coast Railway bridge at Avila and sent the photo at right. Thomas Knapp, an architect in Hawaii with Cal Poly connections, is building a sectional layout of a narrow-gauge line. Tom built and photographed his prize-winning N-scale (1/160<sup>th</sup> size) model.

## Decades of details

In April Museum volunteer Ray Belknap put on his best reading glasses and combed through over 90 editions of the *Southern Pacific Bulletin* spanning 1919 through 1950. The result is an index for the employee newsletter that we had been hoping to develop since 2019. The spreadsheet has over 200 lines, with each line keyed to one or more places, people, events, or facilities of particular interest along the Coast Route or the SP system generally. As W.C. Fields might have said, "It's a veritable cornucopia of historical details." It will help expand our People Tracker listing of Central Coast railroad workers, often noting their job titles and locations. The *Bulletins* first belonged to George J. O'Hara, a clerk at San Luis Obispo. They were donated by retired SP signal supervisor Sid Marques in 2016.

Here are some of the earlier items from the listing. We will have many more in future *Coast Mail* editions.

### COAST DIVISION.

William H. McIntyre, Yardman, Santa Margarita—For efforts exerted in extinguishing a field fire that had been started by one of our locomotives; man was passing over county road in automobile, noticed fire in grass that had gotten off of right-of-way and used the contents of his automobile fire extinguisher to put the fire out. His actions in this instance are commendable in that his prompt handling of the case resulted in very little damage to outside property. Had fire been permitted to continue a great area of pasture land would have been burned over.

*All these quotes are from "Distinguished Service Order" columns. The one above is from the Southern Pacific Bulletin of November 1920. The one below is from August 1920. Can someone shed light on what "clearing" meant in this case? Did Mr. Martin simply stop using the line, or did he remove something, maybe tree branches, that interfered with the connection?*

G. Martin, Signal Maintainer, San Miguel—  
For exceptional service in clearing dispatching telephone wires at time of wire trouble.

*The quote below, from July 1921, refers to a tunnel on the part of Cuesta Grade that overlooks Reservoir Canyon to the south of the track. Railroaders often referred to a main track as "the road." The telephone referred to was in a concrete booth next to the track, like the one displayed at the Museum. The quote at bottom right is from the same edition. The "knuckle" is the front part of the coupler that curves like a gripping hand. "Dead-heading" means a railroad employee riding a train to get to a work location, who is not being paid for the time.*

A. Nissen, conductor, Tunnel No. 10, in riding over portion of the road in caboose, felt what he considered to be broken rail; he stopped the train and after investigating, found that a piece of rail had given way, making track dangerous to traffic; he got in touch with train dispatcher promptly, by train dispatching telephone, and the section men were immediately called and rail changed and a serviceable condition established with a negligible delay to traffic.



*The frog in Guad sits mainly in the yawd. Components of a track switch await removal in Union Pacific's Guadalupe yard. A frog provides a reliable path for wheel flanges to pass through the rail heads of the through and diverging routes.*  
Bill Steck photo

## More recent history

Also in April Union Pacific worked on tracks in the yard at Guadalupe, which accommodate interchange between the national rail system and the Santa Maria Valley Railroad. Tracks switches, also called turnouts, allow controlled movement from one track to another. They are essential to efficient train routing and car switching. But they cause, and are subject to, wear. They require regular inspection and maintenance, and are often the prime suspect as the cause of a derailment. So if one is not essential or not up to current standards, it's sure to be removed.

Switch frogs (arrow in the photo above) come in several types and angles, reflected in their number. A "number 10 frog" provides the diverging route to deviate from the through route by one foot for each 10 feet along the track. The higher the number, the more gradual the divergence and the faster a train may use the diverging route. A rough rule of thumb is two times the frog number gives you miles per hour.

Is it called a frog because, installed in the track, it looks vaguely like an amphibian's splayed legs? According to an online etymology the name comes from the pattern on the bottom of a horse's hoof, which was also called the frog. But where does *that* term come from? *Maybe* from the amphibian. Developers of railway technology in the early 1800s were used to working with horses and horse-drawn vehicles.

### COAST DIVISION

Edmund Williams, engineer, Pismo, for valuable assistance given at time passenger train broke in two due to a defective knuckle; man was deadheading at the time; on account of his activity delay to first class train was minimized.

*Left: Trackside phone booth at the Museum.*

SP Bulletin images from SLORRM Archives series 2460