



# Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo  
Railroad Museum

Issue Number 88 – Summer 2024 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.

## Emily Street Yard removals completed

Throughout March restoration lead Brad LaRose, varying teams of volunteers, and the experts at **West Coast Auto & Towing** and **Louie's Crane** moved a wide range of artifacts from Emily Street Yard to the Freighthouse vicinity.

Volunteers worked between February rains to prepare new temporary and permanent locations for the items, nearly all of which required services of a crane and a large trailer or a flatbed truck. Brad had worked with City of San Luis Obispo staff representative Bob Hill to identify locations around the city-owned parking lot where artifacts could be stored or displayed.



*Some of the heavy, mast-mounted searchlight-style signals were transported by trailer.*



*A trackage signal is lowered horizontally to a temporary resting place between parking lot landscaping.*

*At right, hand signals were relayed so crane operator Dennis could position signals near the Freighthouse, out of his view behind the recently moved PMT trailer.*



*Below and right, the carefully braced RIP track office was moved to a new foundation near the Freighthouse.*



**Our Mission**

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

**Contact**

Telephone (message) 805 548-1894  
email: [info@slorrm.com](mailto:info@slorrm.com)  
Website: [www.slorrm.com](http://www.slorrm.com)  
Mail: 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue  
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

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Stephen Cake                 Jim Chernoff  
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([newsletter@slorrm.com](mailto: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.

On the website click on About, then Gift Shop.

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**Timetable**

**Board of Directors meetings** are scheduled for June 11, July 9 and August 13, 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 on-line participation.

**Recognizing Life Members**

A special thank you to our Life Members. They are often the first to volunteer and to support specific acquisitions and restorations.

**Become a member**

Membership provides opportunities for anyone interested in today’s railroads, railroad history, train travel, artifact restoration, or model railroading. Membership benefits include free Museum admission and a 10% Museum Store discount.

Annual dues: Individual \$36; Family \$60; Sustaining \$100. Life member single payment: under 62 \$1,000, 62 and over \$600. Junior memberships (ages 12-18) for model railroaders are available; contact 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: click [Membership](#) and use PayPal.

**Website reductions**

Certain longstanding features of the Museum’s website may not be available. We are working to reconfigure the website to meet accessibility requirements, and to introduce an entirely new site. Thank you for being patient.

**Docent of the Year**

Our 2023 docent of the year Alan Estes (right) has been a member since our building opened. A reliable and capable volunteer, he’s usually found near our main entry. He also helps with several Museum functional divisions.

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**Museum supporters**

The Museum would not exist and could not improve without the support of many. All forms of support, from membership dues to grants and donations of expertise, materials, and funds are greatly appreciated. In this edition we recognize the following for their support.

- **Louie’s Crane Service of Oceano,**
- **West Coast Towing of Atascadero.**

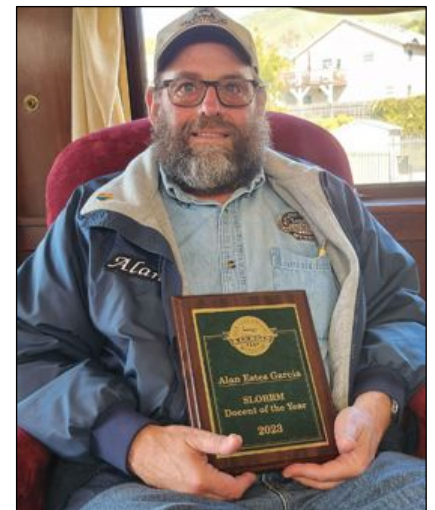
Often, simply being available to work on the Museum’s schedule is a tremendous advantage for us.



*On March 12, driver Ramon Palomino was shy, but we got a photo of the side his truck.*



*Crane operator Dennis has his back to the camera, but you may be able to see his assistant (a very small dog) sitting patiently in the cab.*





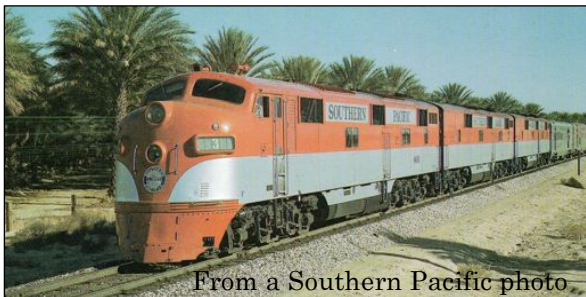
## Strangers on the grade

The Spring *Coast Mail* discussed Southern Pacific's Sunset Route train, which logically was called the *Sunset Limited*. It carried numbers 1 and 2, to this day the lowest and longest lasting passenger train numbers. For a while in the steam era it connected San Francisco with New Orleans via San Luis Obispo and Los Angeles. The sunset logo became synonymous with the Southern Pacific.

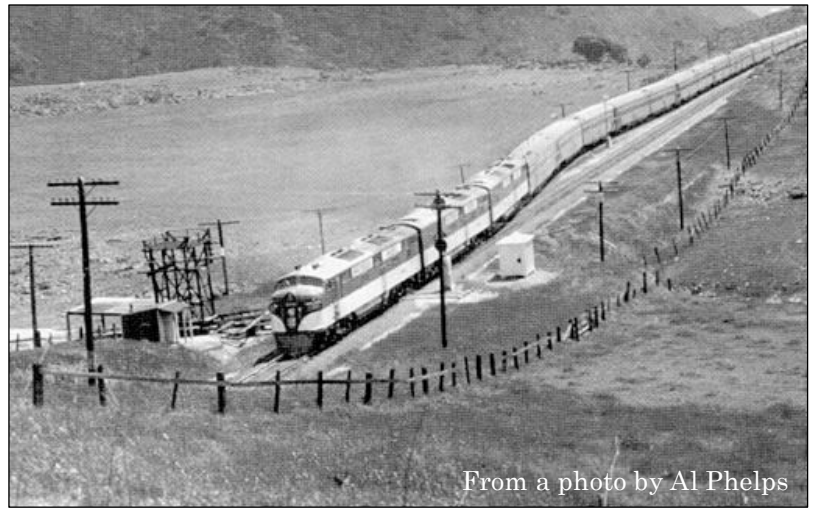
The *Golden State* connected Los Angeles and Chicago via Tucumcari, New Mexico, where the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific took over. It was one of the first S. P. passenger trains to use Electro-Motive Division E series diesels, with their twin prime movers, long carbodies, and three-axle wheel assemblies.

Southern Pacific premiered the colorful *Daylight* scheme in 1937 and used it into the early 1960s. For the 1950 inauguration of the all-streamlined *Golden State*, S. P. ordered the specially painted E units in wide bands of silver and a color different from those used in *Daylight* red, orange, and black.

*Below, Southern Pacific's Golden State, led by streamlined diesels in the train's custom color.*



From a Southern Pacific photo



From a photo by Al Phelps

Above, we see a set of three diesel units in *Golden State* colors leading the northbound (S. P. timetable westbound) *Daylight*. The train is leaving Chorro siding and is about to enter the first tunnel encountered after departing San Luis Obispo. It's 1949, and this is a test run. In a few years similar locomotives in proper *Daylight* colors would displace steam locomotives.

*Below, a Daylight-painted lead locomotive in the 1960s, when the change to simpler gray and red was underway.*



From a photo by Clark Bauer

## ITE visit and work day

On March 9 ten members of Cal Poly's Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) student group came to the Museum to learn about Central Coast railroading and to help move materials in Emily Street



Yard. ITE is open to all students interested in any mode of transportation, regardless of major. This day we had a city planner and an aeronautical engineer among the civil engineers, all now qualified to move wood ties.





# Moving adventures... and new exhibits

Over the years the Museum has moved hundreds of items, ranging from individual books to barrels of spikes, to *La Cuesta*, our 83-foot-long, 90-ton Pullman car. We've had some tired muscles, but fortunately never an injury. That's not to say everything has gone without a hitch.

While moving the RIP track office past the chain-link fence next to the neighboring hardware store, the straps securing the shed to the truck bed snagged the top of the fence. An eave board came loose. The fascia needed some work anyway.

That brought to mind the Pacific Coast Railway house-moving incident noted in the Spring 2015 *Coast Mail*, where a crew reported "a few shingles was tore off it" while crossing a bridge in Arroyo Grande. The house was almost certainly a structure not much bigger than our RIP track office.

The caption for the photo on page 1 had no room for an explanation of "RIP track office." For many, the initials will probably bring to mind *Requiescat in pace*, usually translated from Latin as "rest in peace." RIP in this context means "repair in place." working on a rail car on a local track as opposed to moving it to a major facility.

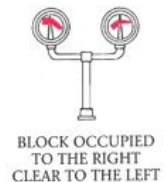
The small structure now displayed near the Freighthouse (photo top right) is the only remaining building from San Luis Obispo's freight and servicing areas, besides the Freighthouse itself. The RIP track office was originally located south of the roundhouse. It was acquired by Art Laidlaw and moved out of town about 1968. The Museum acquired it in 2004 and brought back to San Luis Obispo.

The block occupancy indicator (photo at right) allowed operators of small on-track motorized cars to tell if a train was approaching, even when trackside color-light signals were not visible.



Above, the camera lens exaggerates the size difference, but the office for the repair-in-place (RIP) track is smaller than the Pacific Motor Trucking (PMT) trailer.

Below, our second block occupancy indicator is displayed outdoors, where passersby can learn about it.



These diagrams are from *Southern Pacific's Rules and Chief Engineers Instructions for the Maintenance of Way and Structures, March 1, 1990.*



## Functional divisions replace committees

In February the Board of Directors decided to refer to the Museum's functional volunteer groups as divisions rather than as committees. This reflects the practice of railroads in naming their functional divisions, such as Mechanical or Communications and Signals and their geographic areas, such as Southern Pacific's "Coast Division" or "San Joaquin Division."

The Museum's functional groups, which include a wide range of members and levels of participation, have been and remain distinct from the committees of board members as enabled by the Bylaws. Our divisions always have room for more members, whatever your interest or ability. And you're not limited to one.

## Boy Scout merit badge counselor opportunity

For several years the Museum has offered sessions at which Boy Scouts can earn merit badges for the topic of railroading. Activities span a few hours over one day and include historical background, safety, hand signals, and assembling a simple model. Museum docents provide the instruction. Sessions are typically scheduled once or twice a year.

The Scouting America organization requires an approved, on-site counselor, who need not be an expert in the topic. The Museum's program would benefit from having an additional counselor in case a regular volunteer is not available for the scheduled day and time.

Scouting America approval follows brief on-line training. Contact [info@slorrm.org](mailto:info@slorrm.org) to help.

# Is that the Lark I hear?



Dreamstar image



Above, logos for the proposed Coast Route night train and for Southern Pacific's 1941 – 1968 streamlined Lark.

Imagine a restrained long-long-short-long horn near midnight, followed a minute or so later by the clack of wheels through the automatic rail-head lubricator in the San Luis Obispo yard. This could be if a new overnight passenger train service between Los Angeles and San Francisco is implemented. But this would not be Amtrak, by itself or with Caltrans participation.

In March entrepreneurs using the name Dreamstar signed an agreement with track owner Union Pacific Railroad to define the specific requirements for such a service. Similar agreements with Bay Area track owner Caltrain and L.A.-area track owner Metrolink were expected to follow, according to reports in several industry publications.

Updates may be found at Dreamstar.com or at Dreamstar on Facebook.

Southern Pacific's *Lark* ran on the Coast Route overnight between Los Angeles and San Francisco. It was inaugurated in 1910, converted to streamlined equipment in 1941, and discontinued in 1968.

## Annual Report correction

The 2023 **Financial Summary** in the *Coast Mail* Spring issue had its last line cut off. Here's the full table.

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	
Year-end Cash Balance		\$104,426

## A trackside wink

Amtrak's *Pacific Surfliner* between San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara is one of the most scenic railway trips in the world. With early morning, midday, and evening runs along the northern part of the route one can view a full range of weather and light conditions.

The Museum is again offering wine-rail excursions along this beautiful coast. Riders depart by bus and return by train, with plenty of time in waterfront and downtown Santa Barbara. Even if you're not a wine enthusiast the Santa Barbara station is an easy walk to Stearns Wharf and the MOXI museum featuring child-friendly science and technology exhibits.

A ride-along Museum docent provides historical and route information. See our website for dates and fares.

*A beachside crossing warning light at Surf, the stop for Lompoc and Vandenberg Space Force Base (beow).*



Linda Jackson Campbell photo



# A far from the Central Coast extravaganza



## Casmalia twin?

We're climbing the grade toward Casmalia, with flat land between Nipomo and Santa Maria in the middle distance. Joking, of course. This is the operator's view from the front of the *Yellow Train* in France, a 30-mile-long, meter-gauge line that climbs from about 1,400 feet elevation to about 5,200 feet in the Pyrenees Mountains.

And if those were not enough to make it remarkable, this line built in 1909 is powered by 850-volt direct current from a third rail. The low end of the line connects with the French standard-gauge system while the high end connects with the Spanish broad-gauge system. If you like twisting tracks crossing spectacular viaducts, this is a trip for you. The scene above is from a YouTube video by Rail Relaxation. For more information on *Le Petit Train Jaune*:

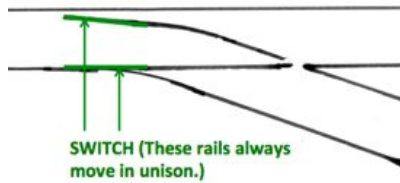
<https://about-france.com/tourism/yellow-train-pyrenees.htm>

## Something I never thought I'd see

The Summer 2017 *Coast Mail* referred to stub switches in connection with the Pacific Coast Railway. They're an obsolete type, less expensive to make and maintain because they used moving blunt rails instead of movable "point" rails tapering to narrow ends. Your editor told his Cal Poly students if they ever saw a stub switch, it would be in a museum track. "Well guess what?"

In England the Birmingham Centre for Railway Research & Education and British national infrastructure entity Network Rail are developing a modern stub switch that slightly lifts and then moves the blunt movable rails. Our British friends hope the new stub design will be less prone to troubles than conventional point rails.

Below, the moving rails of an old stub switch. Below center, diagram of a point-rails switch. Below right, parts of new stub type switch.



## Hydrogen and more

The Winter 2023 *Coast Mail* noted Amtrak/Caltrans plans to operate hydrogen powered trains, initially in the San Joaquin Valley. Several railways, transit agencies, and manufacturers are working to develop locomotives or passenger train sets powered at least partly by fuel cells that produce electricity through a chemical reaction.

*International Railway Journal* (January 2024) reported a project by several Spanish companies, the national railway RENFE, and Universidad Pontificia Comillas to create an "entire renewable value chain from generation to consumption."

But that's not all. The train will be a high-speed set which is able to change track gauge between the broad-gauge historical Spanish system (about 66 inches) and the high-speed system that connects with the rest of Europe (56.5 inches, which matches North American standard gauge.) The set will be modified from one that runs on overhead electrical supply but also contains a diesel engine so it can run on non-electrified parts of the system. The project will replace the diesel engine with hydrogen fuel cells, and with batteries that can be charged from the overhead wire.



Image via Railway Gazette International  
*Spanish railway equipment maker Talgo is the lead on developing a high-speed, gauge-changing train powered by green hydrogen.*

