

Museum Managers Report September 2004

Donations: Virgil Staff brought up a box and several bundles of old papers. Thom Anderson brought up a poster of the California Zephyr that belonged to Pete Solyom. As a tribute to Pete I have this displayed in the engine house. T.E. Mooney sent up some train pictures and a map of San Francisco. Richard Kirker of Oklahoma donated some old HO models, which he would like us to use in a display.

Correspondence: Received a letter from Fred Smith of Oregon, who donated some HO cars to the museum earlier in the spring. Fred wanted to know why he had not received a confirmation of delivery or a thank you letter. Rod McClure also brought a similar letter to my attention. And Pat Brimmer asked if the museum had sent a thank you card to a friend of his who signed up as a new member and made a donation of \$500.00.

The gist of all of this is that we have somehow fallen down on acknowledging donations and gifts. I have been forwarding monetary donation information to Susan Scarlett and assumed that Susan was doing something with it or forwarding it to someone else. I had been acknowledging other donations in the Trainsheet, but admit that I have not done this in awhile as I thought Frank Brehm was picking this up out of these museum manager reports.

I just found out that Frank has a formal thank you letter already put together on his computer and we will work together to get thank you letters out to people in a timely manner.

Operations: The lack of crewmembers on some weekends was still a problem in August. We either have too few or too many. We either have four brakeman and no conductor or four brakeman and no engineer. This has resulted in a couple of "push-pull" operating weekends. On one weekend, Norm had to do both the RAL's and some push-pulls, as we had no other engineers and no conductors. It shouldn't be that hard to schedule crews a little better to ensure we have adequate coverage. Other than that, I want to congratulate the OP Dept. on another fine season. I especially appreciate the help I have received from people like Charlie Spikes, Rick Edwards, Paul and Ken Finnegan, Dave Epling, Don Nelson Pat Watkins and Bill Parker who pitched in and helped me in between runs instead of just standing around drinking sodas.

Mechanical: Everything is okay, I guess.

Building & Grounds: Most of the paint projects were completed by Railroad Days. Still a few touch up projects to do. The eaves of the oil house and battery house need paint before this winter as they appear to have never been painted and will rot away if something isn't done to protect them. Brittany K. Linda Brimmer and Dave and Vicki Epling were a big help on painting projects.

Charlie Spikes, Norman Holmes and Matt Parker were very helpful in August on various projects. Don Hammock, who supervises the Juvenile community service kids did get a one-person crew in on Wednesday before Railroad Days to pick up trash around the entry road and parking lot. I would still like to get another crew in some day to work around the hospital. Don is still trying to get us some adults with skills to come down and do some jobs for us.

Several new displays were unveiled for Railroad Days. Andy Graham did most of the work on these and they turned out very nice. I was really hoping that we could have done more, especially with the northeast wall alongside the gift shop. There is a lot of display room there if we can set up some kind of structure or wall covering to hang new displays on.

I hope to get the sidewalk area landscaped before winter. Need some backhoe work done here to speed up the process. Would like to replace the rope stands along the entry road to the parking lot with some shrubs next

spring. In time, this would provide a good barrier between the parking lot and the track and would be much more appealing to visitors as they drive in.

Ticket booth in the parking lot has been cleaned out and the paint touched up. On busy days and special events, we can utilize this a lot more than we did before. The electric fans and lights still work although they must be powered off an extension cord. We should try to get permanent power out there, which would also help with the Christmas lighting.

Would like to clean out a couple more boxcars before winter so we will not have to trip over so much junk stored in the engine house again this winter.

Injury Report: A sprained ankle on Railroad Days. **Recommendation:** We need better stairs to get up on equipment. The rolling ladders we use around here are too steep, too narrow and too ungainly for general public use. They are fine for mechanical jobs and temporary use but not suited for everyday use by the general public. As we have discussed before, we need to set up some of the equipment on permanent display with appropriate signage, walkways and steps. We should have a representative amount of equipment on display that we can direct visitors to instead of telling them its okay to climb on everything. All things considered, we are very fortunate that we don't have more injuries here from people and kids falling off ladders, falling through handrails, tripping on steps that are too high and getting cut on rusty metal doors and steps on our equipment. We have several locomotives on the rip tracks that really need to be locked up and engine compartment doors sealed. They are unsightly and unsafe for human habitation. They are an accident waiting to happen.

Security: The door of the SN caboose was kicked in last week. Nothing appears to be missing and no damage was done other than the door jam was torn up. It appears as though Errol Spangler's caboose (the ONW caboose) was broken into via one of the side windows on the cupola. One board came off a window on the hospital but I don't think anyone got in through this way. There is evidence of someone crawling into the front porch of the building for reasons unknown. I will post new "no trespassing," signs again on the building to discourage this. People are dumping garbage at the hospital. We need to get a fence up around the building and "let loose the hounds" (get some guard dogs up there). The same goes for the south side of the museum. We had a bear in here for about a week that went through all the trashcans and the dumpster. There is also a pack of dogs that regularly comes through in the mornings. Again, a fence would help.

August sales: I'm fairly disappointed with our income for August. We barely matched the figures from July. I was projecting another \$10,000 in income for the month and was hoping to break \$40,000 for the month. On closer examination, there was a noticeable decline in daily sales for the month. There were twenty days of less than \$1,000 per day and three days of sub \$500.00. In general, visitors to the museum dropped off in August. I can only contribute this to the recent rise in gas prices again. I have been hearing various reports of tourism at places like Disneyland and Fisherman's Wharf being off by 5-10% this summer. More information will come in on this later, which will hopefully confirm this suspicion as to why August wasn't better than it was.

We also had eight days without RAL's in August. Half of this was due to four days being blocked out for Railroad Days. But once again, we have been short of RAL instructors this year. Norman Holmes has once again done Yeoman's work taking on everything that no one else could handle. Ken Iverson helped out this summer but took a three-week vacation in August and September. We lost Jack Zygnier for most of the season due to illness and the passing away of his mother. We had big plans for Loren Ross to come in and work several days a week this summer but his wife broke her leg and he was tied up taking care of her. Terry DeCottinginies was also supposed to handle several weekends for us this summer but he was swamped with work in his business. Andy has been steady on the weekends when not on call for fire season. Lew Barnard, Jack Palmer and Don Nelson helped on three-day weekends. With Charlie Spikes, Bill Parker and myself in training, and Jack Zygnier and Loren Ross returning next year, hopefully we can spread this out better next year and have at least one person assigned to each day of the week to handle walk ins. I know we could increase the RAL's by

another 10-15% if we just had the instructors available. Still, I'm proud to say that we did not have to cancel any reserved appointments this year. Everyone who signed up in advance was taken care of this year.

Railroad Days: Quite frankly, I was disappointed. I was expecting a much bigger crowd than what we got. We eliminated a lot of choke points inside the engine house this year and we tried to spread things out a little better so we wouldn't have a lot of people jammed into a given area. The city was happy with the event and everyone claims that attendance was up. Still, the crowd seemed rather light to me.

Our overall income was up about 20% from last year and train rides did very well. Debbie's Dog's of Quincy did well which cut into our snack and drink sales. The historical society did okay and we made a little money on the raffle. Operations were fine and the building and grounds looked well after the usual last minute shuffle to get everything cleaned up and organized.

All in all, I considered it to be a mediocre event. Given that most of the directors and department heads I spoke with in preparation for this year's event were apathetic or completely uninterested, I guess we got exactly what we put into it.

Since no one else in the organization wants to spearhead this event, I guess it will fall on me to run Railroad Days again next year. So, I'm formally asking all of you to give me some direction on what you want and expect from Railroad Days. I'm open to suggestions and criticism. What can we do to make this a better event? What can we do to get more people to attend? Do we even want to bother anymore? Do we want this to be our stellar event of the season or just an "over glorified operating weekend"?

Some suggestions for next year include the same ones I made last year. Handcar races, a track-building contest or demonstration. Speeder car rides, movies and a slide show. The city would like us to host a wine tasting again. I think we could expand our venter sales, and would have this year had I known how big the model displays were going to be.

I think it would be a great idea to borrow a small operating steam locomotive from somebody for a few weeks to run at the museum. We did this for the tenth anniversary, can we do it again? Question: If we are going to have Union Pacific locomotives on display for Railroad Days, then why do we keep it a secret? We should be advertising this in order to bring more people up to see them.

Overall: Everyday, the museum seems to get a little easier to run. I noticed this in the beginning of August (ironically, right about the time we had a corresponding drop in attendance). We made steady progress this year without any major setbacks. We have more of a regular day-to-day routine around here and fewer surprises each day. Once things are fixed, they are fixed and don't remain a reoccurring problem. Area's get cleaned and stay clean. The worst comment I've heard this year was that a couple of ladies surmised that the women's restroom must have been painted by Martha Stewart, which a lot of people would take as a compliment!

There is less junk to trip over and people are more productive because they can find what they are looking for. I'm constantly amazed that I know where things are. Volunteers are always asking me if we have something (a cotter pin, hose washers, empty binders, green paint, a certain tool, etc), and I'm surprised to find that yes, we do have some and I actually know where it is.

There is still a lot of work to do and we need more people to do it. I know that I've been rather crabby and short with some of you this last month. I made it my personal mission to have a great Railroad Days event this year as I feel it is the most important event of the season. Many times I felt like I was doing it all myself and that nobody else cared (and some of you apparently don't).

But Railroad Days is behind us now and we got through it okay. We got some good compliments and we made a good impression. I've already heard from several people in the community who have some renewed interest in the museum and a couple of new offers to help. I bumped into Jim Murphy and County Supervisor B.J. Pearson at the Elks Lodge recently and Jim repeatedly asked Pearson how they could get us some funding for the hospital. Another lady has expressed interest in helping us find funding for some of the items on our master plan (which is posted inside the engine house now – no sense in keeping this a secret either). Several people offered donations to the museum as a result of visiting on Railroad Days and several people renewed their memberships. We also got a new Life Member from Fremont California. The Elks Lodge has offered to come in and cook for us next year and we have an open invitation to use their facility if we need it. We have been getting a lot of local people in lately who say they have lived here for several years now but have never been to the museum before.

So, all in all, things are getting better and there seems to be a renewed optimism for the museum. Now that I've had a few days to decompress from Railroad Days I want to apologize for snapping at people and complaining about the lack of assistance. I've heard it all this year, from medical to moving, everybody is tied up this year. But we still have a lot of work to do this year and I look forward to working with you to get it done.

Respectfully Submitted,
John Walker
Museum Manager