

Preservation: A New Column

Historic Railroad Preservation... What is a Railroad Museum?

by Kent Stephens

As a member of the Feather River Rail Society, have you ever been asked about our collection at the Portola Railroad Museum? Why do we have certain diesel units? Is it just a random collection of equipment, or is there a rationale behind the acquisition of certain diesel units? Are we just "playing with trains" or are we doing a serious effort to collect and preserve a cohesive collection of historic railroad equipment and artifacts?

One of the most important steps in organizing a museum is its museum statement. What is the focus of the museum? What are we collecting? The front cover of the September/October 1991 issue of the Train Sheet displayed a mission statement for the Portola Railroad Museum:

Statement of our Mission...

"The Feather River Rail Society is dedicated to preserving the history of the Western Pacific Railroad, railroad history of Northern California and the history of the evolution of the diesel locomotive in North America over the past 50 years. To this end, the Feather River Rail Society now has at Portola, one of the largest and most historic collections of diesel locomotives in the United States."

From this statement, you can see how the Oregon & Northwestern Baldwin AS616 units #3 and #4 fit into our collection plan. First, they are former Southern Pacific (and #4 is also ex-McCloud River RR #34). Secondly, Baldwin pioneered the development and proved the concept of the six-axle road unit. Note also how our other Baldwin, NVR #51 fits in as an early Baldwin switcher.

Some of our newer members may wonder about an "odd-ball" diesel unit in our collection -- Long Island FA-2 #604, ex-Louisville & Nashville #314. At first glance, this East Coast diesel doesn't fit in with a collection in Northern

California. This unit however, does fit into the collection framework. Most obvious is that it is an Alco freight unit that competed with the more popular EMD F series of "covered wagons." Thus it is a contemporary to WP 921D, although six years newer. Secondly, it can fit into the collection's geographic basis by being restored as a Spokane, Portland & Seattle unit, numbered one number up from their fleet of FA's, all of which were retired a number of years ago. Norm Holmes' original idea on bidding for LI 604, which the Board of Directors at that time agreed with, was to eventually restore it as an SP&S unit. Why would we be interested in an SP&S unit? A portion of SP&S' fleet of Alco FA's were still in service when the SP&S was merged into Burlington Northern. Not long after the BN merger, WP and BN started pooling power between Auburn, WA and Stockton, CA on two freights that operated on the WP High Line. An interesting mix of BN power showed up in the Feather River Canyon on the two through High Line freights, including several SP&S FA's, still painted and lettered for the SP&S. The FA's only made a few trips on the WP, and were swapped back to east-bound trains at Oroville. One reportedly made it back to Stockton.

FRRS bid on LI 604, even though it is an ex-L&N unit, after being advised by LI that the former SP&S units wouldn't be retired for some years. At that time who knows? So we bid on ones that were up for bid at the time and got #604.

There are two other possible restoration choices for #604. Union Pacific once operated a fleet of Alco FA's, as did the Great Northern.

In future issues of the Train Sheet, we will continue to address issues of railroad preservation and museum concepts as they relate to the Feather River Rail Society.

Back issues of the Headlight

Issue 1 (Out of print) California Zephyr Anniversary Issue.

Issue 2 Joint issue with the Freight Car Journal; WP freight car roster; color. 28 pages.

Issue 3 (Out of print) F3s in freight service; AAR box cars; WP tank cars; index to historical articles in back issues of the Train Sheet.

Issue 4 A tale of 2 engines; PC-WP box cars; GP40s....a guide to types; circus specials. 36 pages.

Issue 5 The Reno branch; M-K remanufactured GP35s and GP40s; the Charles O. Sweetwood car; mill gons. 48 pages.

Issue 6 M-K remanufactured GP40s, part 2; Budd RDCs; cupola cabooses; 1970 freight car roster. 52 pages.

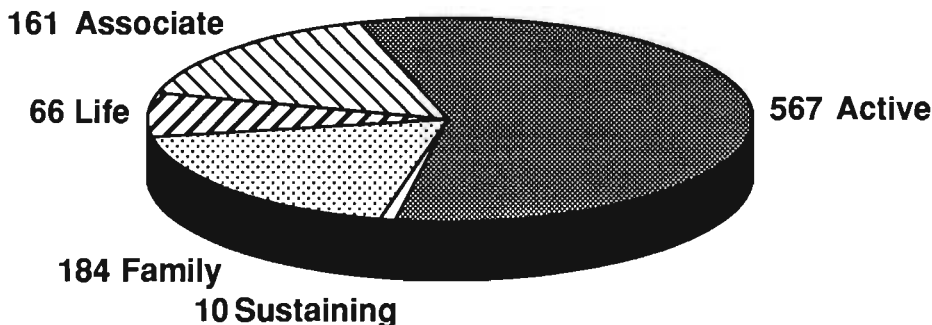
Back issues of the Headlight are available for \$4 each postpaid. Back issues of the Train Sheet are available for \$1.50 each postpaid. Send your order to:
FRRS Gift Shop at P.O. Box 608, Portola, CA 96122.

A Wholehearted Thanks...

This is just a quick, but sincere, tribute from all of us to thank FRRS founder, president and general manager Norm Holmes for all of his hard work, long hours and dedication that have gone into making the museum what it is. The museum shows his efforts, and it is a great place to work and to visit. Thanks, Norm from all of us!

Membership Report

as of December 27, 1991



*Total FRRS membership is 988.
...Of these, 31 are Charter members.*