



Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum



Issue Number 56

San Luis Obispo, California

Summer 2016

www.slorm.com

Museum open every Saturday 10:00 to 4:00; other times by arrangement for groups. Contact media@slorm.com.



Train Day (this year May 7) has become a tradition for local families and visitors, while being a new experience for many.

Every year the gathering includes art sales, a swap meet, food vendors, guided tours, and entertainment, plus new and updated exhibits. May weather is hospitable, and the month is known for the transcontinental Golden Spike (May 10, 1869), the official arrival of the Southern Pacific in SLO (May 5, 1894), and the start of Amtrak service (May 1, 1971).

An Impressive Tally

Museum volunteers put in about 3,000 hours during 2014 and 3,700 hours in 2015, as docents and working on the Freighthouse and grounds, exhibits, archives, library, and publications. These totals do not include the model railroad (about 2,500 hours in 2015), or much of the work on rolling stock such as *La Cuesta* and the bay-window caboose.

And speaking of the model railroad...

See a special section on this exhibit, pages 9 and 10.



It's More Clear That We're Here

New signs went up the day before Train Day. Pierre Rademaker Design prepared plans, Southpaw Sign Company fabricated and installed them, and Museum member John Marchetti tracked the budget and approval steps. Still to come: the semaphore signal sign next to Santa Barbara Avenue [*Coast Mail* Spring 2016].



The roof sign at the south end of the Freighthouse follows Southern Pacific practice for identifying station buildings.



The city has installed guidance signs on the street.



A building entry sign will help avoid confusion.



The north-end wall sign features the Museum logo.



The John Callahan Memorial Heart Safe Program has donated an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) for the Freighthouse. Museum Manager Diane Marchetti took the prerequisite CPR-AED certification course. On March 26 several docents were given basic training and installation help by City of S.L.O. Deputy Fire Chief Jeff Gater. The AED is on the Gift Shop wall behind the counter. Anyone can use the AED by following its voiced directions.

Railroad Festival Returns in October

Watch the next *Coast Mail* for details.



Preserving California's Central Coast Railroad History

The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum is a non-profit educational institution. Founded to preserve and present California Central Coast railroad history by collecting, restoring, displaying, and operating relevant railroad artifacts, photographs, models, and documents, its goal is to facilitate a better understanding of railroads' impact on our area's social, cultural, and economic history.

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Contact

Telephone (message) 805 548-1894
 e-mail: info@slorrm.com
 Website: www.slorrm.com
 Mail: 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue
 San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE

Any member may access or receive a copy of the Museum's *By-laws*, *Collections Policy*, or *Strategic Plan* by going to the website noted above or by sending a #10, self-addressed, stamped envelope to the address above.

Become a member

Membership provides opportunities for anyone interested in railroad history, travel, current activities, or modeling to learn and experience more, and to share with others.

Individual members pay \$36 per year. A family can join for \$60 annually, and a sustaining member pays \$100 per year. Application forms can be downloaded from the Museum's website and mailed with payment, or you can join online (mailing and web addresses below left) by clicking on MEMBERSHIP and using PayPal.

Membership benefits include free admission to the Museum and access to Members Only features of the website, including current full issues of *Coast Mail*.

Renew your membership

All annual memberships expire **December 31**. If you haven't renewed, please provide your payment and any changes to your contact information. You can renew online on the Museum's website (via Paypal) or by mailing a check to the Museum. If renewing online you can provide updated contact information by phone message or email (contact listed below left). The Museum never shares your contact information.

Membership News

The Christian Schultz family has renewed, and Kenneth Chaffee, Teri Mitchell, and Dennis Stuart have joined.

A Member Passes

Arnold Jonas, former board member during the critical time that the Freight-house was saved and remodeled, and garden railroad enthusiast, passed away in April. Arnold grew up in the east SF Bay Area and was a fan of the SP and the Sacramento Northern. He had come to San Luis Obispo in 1989 to head the city's Community Development Department.



Special Presentation & Matinee Movie

The Museum will present "Coastal Railway Guns" on August 13 at 3:00. Find out how things did not go as planned when huge rail-borne artillery was fired during the 1930s along the California Coast. A showing of Buster Keaton's 1926 silent film "The General" will follow.

Free to members and with Museum admission.

Editor Red-faced

A few months ago, in response to a suggestion, your editor started to prepare a subject index to all issues of *Coast Mail*. After compiling about five pages of spreadsheet, a discovery was made. On the Museum's website, under About, then Newsletter, there's a "Search the Newsletters" function.

It works! Type in a term such as "706" and you'll see a list of all issues that included a reference to the Pacific Coast Railway number 706 boxcar. It won't show the page number, but it has an excerpt of text to give some context.

We don't have all the Museum's original newsletters, *The Wig Wag*, online and searchable, but we're working on that.

Donations

Tim Friend has donated many HO model freight cars (available in the Gift Shop if not sold at the Train Day swap meet) to help raise funds for the Museum's layout exhibit. Several donations in memory of Arnold Jonas have been made.

Company Store

To raise funds, the Museum offers several items for sale. T-shirts, baseball caps, belt buckles, mugs, enameled pins, embroidered patches, engineer hats, and videos are available through the Museum website www.slorrm.com

Click on **Company Store**.

TIMETABLE

Business meetings of the Museum Board of Directors are held on the second Tuesday of each month at 6:00 p.m., at 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue, San Luis Obispo.

- June 14 – Board action meeting
- July 12 – Public meeting

August 9 – Board action meeting
 For dates, times and locations of committee meetings, contact the Museum (number or email at left).

How did you get interested in trains?

Chris Hurd

Just as the Museum was starting to update and catalog its book collection, who should step forward but Chris, with a degree in library science and retired from a career as librarian and record-keeper for the U.S. military. He was born in Winnemucca, Nevada, (few people can say that) a town on the main lines of the Southern Pacific and the Western Pacific, now both owned by Union Pacific. But his family moved when he was very young, so he doesn't remember the railroad aspects.

Chris says his interest in railroads was sparked by living in Laramie, Wyoming, and seeing UP's earth-shaking "Big Boy" steam locomotives in action. At the time there was a walkway over the rail yard, offering great views. But because he was in second grade and lived some distance from the tracks, he did not get there often. He says, "One of Union Pacific's gifts to Laramie was a lot of cinders borne by the frequent Wyoming winds."

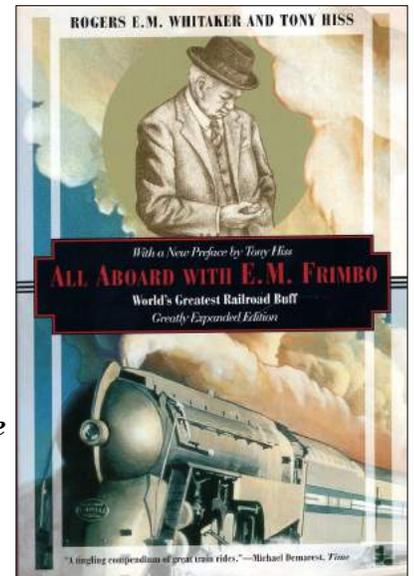
His next home was Rapid City, South Dakota, where train viewing was slim. Both the Milwaukee Road and the Chicago & North Western came to town, though trains were few as neither line had through traffic. But he did get to sit in the cab of a C&NW cab-type diesel locomotive. A move to Juneau, Alaska, further limited train watching. However, a trip to Skagway allowed a ride on the scenic White Pass and Yukon narrow-gauge line.

Chris says the railroad-as-neighbor situation improved dramatically when he went to college in Salem, Oregon. There his dormitory room overlooked the SP main line, complete with "Black Widow" painted F-series diesels and a local Baldwin switcher. Working and raising a family while in Portland of course limited his train-watching time, but trains moving along the Columbia River were a great sight, with Burlington Northern (formerly Spokane, Portland and Seattle) on the north shore and UP on the south side.

Moving to a base near the Arizona-Mexico border put Chris within 30 miles of Southern Pacific's Sunset Route through Benson, a busy freight corridor. That line still had some semaphore signals [*Coast Mail* Spring 2015], and solar panels to provide signal power. Also, for many years a huge coaling tower stood along the tracks. Chris notes that this area was called "The Stormy" due to frequent summer thunderstorms. His last move was to San Luis Obispo, where the weather and the rail line are quieter.



Chris is a regular docent on La Cuesta, where he's easy to spot in his striped overalls. Photo by Glen Matteson



*Should this be
"From the
Library" or
"From the
Gift Shop?"*

Thanks to generous donors the Museum's library has over 500 volumes, and there's a wide and constantly changing selection of gently used books in the Gift Shop. Sometimes it's a tough call whether a book is closely enough related to the Museum's mission to be a keeper. A book with broad geographical coverage usually goes to the sale shelves, unless it has a particularly good and uncommon photo, work of art, or chapter on the Southern Pacific in California.

Have you heard of E. M. Frimbo, the "World's Greatest Railroad Buff?" (Railfans prefer to be called "fans," not "buffs," maybe because buff implies naked, and you generally don't want to see railfans that way.) Frimbo, a fictional character that author Rogers E. M. Whitaker based closely on himself, was shaped by a childhood in England, wrote for *New Yorker* magazine, and was a connoisseur and a bit of a dandy. He traveled the world by train for eight decades, and shared his experiences through many wry articles.

Your archivist had seen references to Frimbo for years but had never read his articles or this book, until a couple months ago. Frimbo was a mileage counter. In 1980 he was set to mark precisely 2.5 million miles of train travel. The place he chose? In then-new Amtrak bilevels "aboard the Coast Starlight ... a few miles north of San Luis Obispo," as "the train dramatically rounded the great horseshoe curve" where the recent rains had turned "the customary dun-colored scenery... Vermont green."

Mr. Frimbo made his final departure soon after, and so did not reach his planned three million miles. His postscript: "Get on a train!"

Don't let this story get away.

Does anyone remember Harold "Shorty" Wheeler? His railroad career probably spanned 60 years and ended as a conductor on the Central Coast. A Museum member is hoping to write a biography of Shorty that would also be a history of railroading over that time. If you knew Shorty, please contact the Museum (contacts on page 2).

From the Archives by Glen Matteson

That was awkward.

Have you ever been in a situation where you were “along for the ride” but not really part of the group? That must have been the case in the spring of 1893 when some Southern Pacific Railroad officials toured the Pacific Coast Railway territory partly by buggy, having arrived by their own train at Ellwood (near Goleta), the northern limit of their line from Los Angeles while work between there and Gaviota was underway. The Southern Pacific had not quite reached San Luis Obispo from the north, with work continuing to finish the section between Santa Margarita and there. PCRY staff must have seen the writing on the wall: their narrow-gauge line from the port near present day Avila into San Luis Obispo and into northern Santa Barbara County would become superfluous or it would be absorbed by the SP and rebuilt to standard gauge. The second choice would obviously benefit the PCRY’s owners more. Better to sell than to simply fade away. The SP officials were scouting to see which route would be best: along the existing PCRY right-of-way, or an entirely new line via points such as Casmalia.

The awkward part comes with SP officials riding a PCRY train as part of their tour. On March 20, 1893, PCRY superintendent C. O. Johnson in San Luis Obispo wrote to J. L. Howard, manager of the PCRY’s parent company in San Francisco, reporting on his travels with SP’s H. E. Huntington (nephew of Central Pacific founder C. P. Huntington), Huntington’s private secretary, Chief Engineer Hood (of Tehachapi Loop fame), a Midwest newspaper editor, and “Mr. Solomon, a capitalist from New York.”

Mr. Johnson wrote: “My impression ... from different remarks passed in the car, was that the bonds for the line South of San Luis Obispo had not been placed, and that [the Midwesterner was along] to make a report of the earning possibilities of the Extension from San Luis to Ellwood.” In those days, having numerous lineside sources of traffic was important – quite a contrast from today, when major railroads focus on high volumes travelling at least 500 miles. “I quietly felt around for pointers,” Johnson continues, “and caught from a slip made by Mr. Solomon that some idea of an inside route ... had been talked of favorably... The entire party seemed to be very impressed with the crop prospects and the general appearance of the country and settlements on our line. Of course this is the most favorable time in the year in which they could make the trip.”

Drawing on secondary sources, Mr. Johnson observes: “The Arroyo Grande Herald, in its last issue, spoke of the trip of the party, and queried as to what line the Southern Pacific people would adopt.” (Throughout the 19th century, a railroad could make or break a town by going through it, or a few miles around it.) “It said if these capitalists were taken over the P.C.Ry. to see the earning capacity of the Coast line, then it would be obtaining money from the capitalists under false pretenses, as the Coast Line from Arroyo Grande to Gaviota would not furnish subsistence for a side-hill goat, but if the trip over the line were made to see the



Neither the Pacific Coast Railway nor the Southern Pacific was about to adopt the Great Northern Railway’s mountain goat emblem. In the era when line-side agricultural traffic was a major consideration, an 1890s reporter referred to SP’s potential route from Arroyo Grande to the coast at Gaviota as not being able to sustain “a side-hill goat.”

(Stock image.)

earning capacity of the P.C.Ry., possibly to be purchased by the Southern Pacific, then the trip was properly made, in good faith.”

Then a little low-key industrial espionage:

“I found that Mr. Hood had a very correct topographical map of the Coast Line and ours, and that they also had a line through the pass, down the Santa Maria River, as a branch line from theirs, over near Bakersfield, covered on this map.” (Interesting. Were they also considering a line through Cuyama, along what is now the route of Highway 166?) “I spoke of its being so far superior to anything we had in our records, and asked where it would be possible to get so correct a topographical map. This brought out what I intended, a request from Mr. Hood to Mr. Huntington to furnish us a copy of the map, and this Mr. Huntington gave rather reluctantly, so that if no changes are made on the blue print of this topographical map, we can possibl[y] get some information as to what the Southern Pacific people are figuring on...”

We can imagine Mr. Johnson looking out the coach window, one ear taking in the clacking of wheels on rail joints, the other straining to get the voices nearby. The last sentence of his letter: “There was some guarded conversation in the car, the points of which I could not get, but not much of it.”

More From the Archives on page 5 (online).

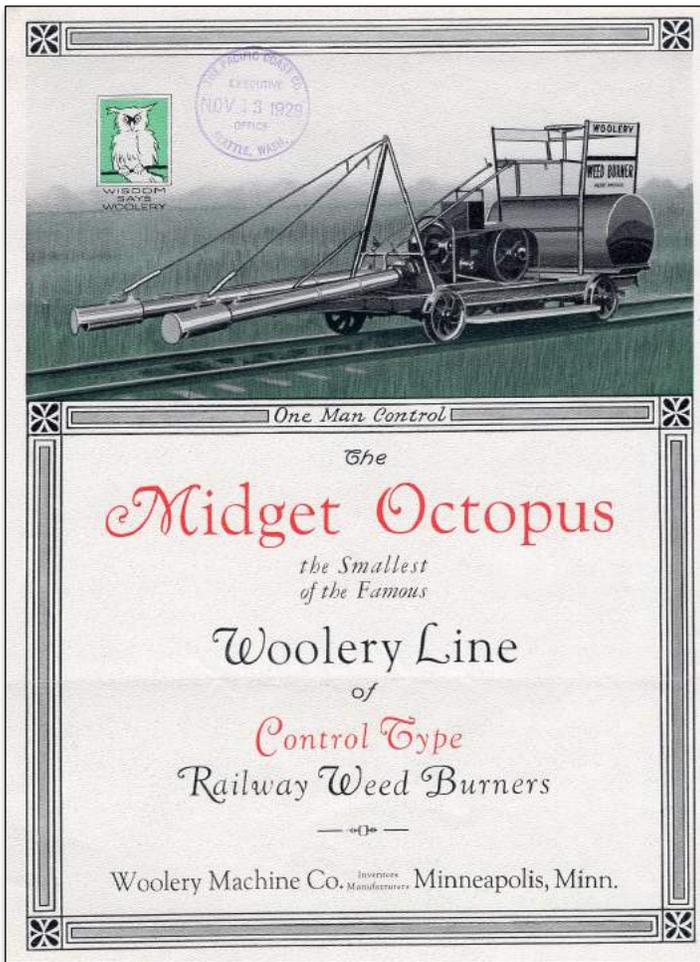
Help Given – Help Wanted

Recent Cal Poly graduate and Museum intern Arlo Elliott is helping organize hundreds of pieces of Pacific Coast Railway correspondence in our collection. You too can mine for informative and amusing nuggets in our vast collection of documents that need cataloging. Contact info@slorrm.com or call 805 548-1894.

Proper Credit

The image in the Spring 2016 *Coast Mail*, page 7, of a Daylight locomotive crossing Orcutt Road is from an often reproduced photo by Donald Duke.





All brochure images from the SLO RR Museum collection.

More From the Archives by Glen Matteson

Octopi of All Sizes

In the Midwest, railroad rights-of-way became sanctuaries for native prairie grasses that were nearly eliminated by cultivation. On the Central Coast, they tended to have the opposite effect, harboring invasive weeds, including some that had been brought along with European livestock. Morning glory figures in more than one tale from the archives. Vegetable growers in particular were concerned about weeds interfering with production and harvesting, and about weed seeds getting into their seed stock, within southern San Luis Obispo County and northern Santa Barbara County. In addition, dry weeds were a fire hazard, and overgrown tracks led to slippery rails and decaying timber cross-ties. The Pacific Coast Railway apparently put much effort into controlling weeds in their own interests and in response to complaints from the railroad's neighbors. Weed control was labor-intensive and costly, especially for marginal operations like the PCRY.

Frank Norris' 1901 novel *The Octopus* drew on the Southern Pacific Railroad's role in the Mussel Slough Tragedy, in what is now Kings County, to dramatize conflicts between established and aspiring farmers, and railroads.

But what could an octopus, let alone several, have to do with weeds?

The PCRY kept the promotional literature and letters it received from several companies offering goods and services, and its formal replies to those companies, often saying the railroad could not afford, for example, weed control chemicals that year. (Because arsenic was a typical ingredient that may have been a good thing.) About the only practical alternative to chemical sprays was burning, literally scorching the plants before they matured but generally at a time of year when fire danger was low.

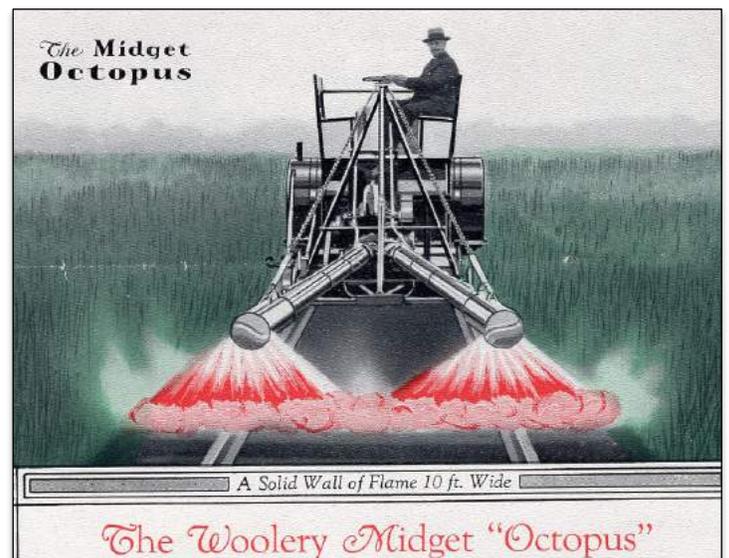
Enter "the famous Woolery Line of Control Type Weed Burners." The brochure shown at left is undated, but the Pacific Coast Company Executive Office's faint purple date stamp shows November 13, 1929. Knowing the PCRY, they probably already had a push-car type weed burner involving a barrel of fuel, a nozzle, and some brave, smoke-saturated section men.

The Woolery machines were in a different league. According to the brochure, even the Midget Octopus could "present a solid wall of flame" to burn a strip 10 feet wide (the typical span of ties, rails, and ballast). Depending on extra fittings and multiple passes, it could handle an area up to 50 feet wide (including trackside ditches, to be kept clear for drainage).

In a November 14, 1929, letter the president of the Pacific Coast Company in Seattle asks the Woolery gentlemen to "advise if this can be adapted for service on a three foot gauge line, and if so what price you will quote so adapted." Mr. H. R. Woolery himself, president of the Minneapolis-based manufacturer, replied on November 20:

"Since receiving your letter we have checked over the dimensions of our Weed Burner and find that we can alter the construction somewhat and make it adaptable for a

Continues on page 6



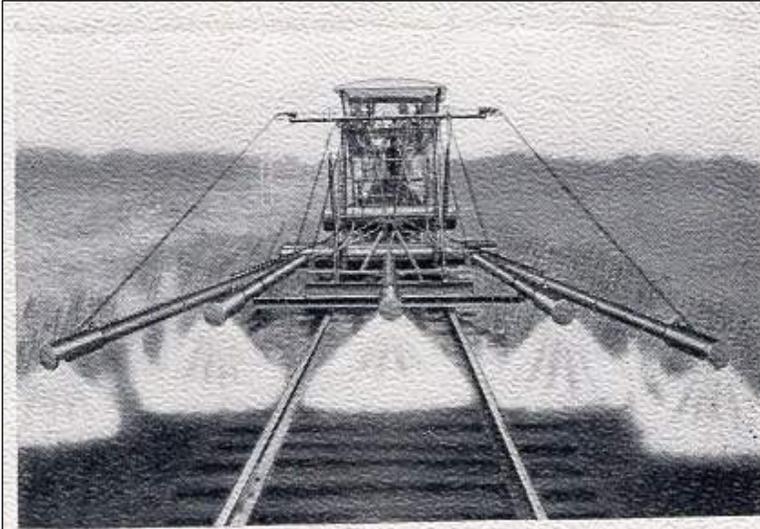
Even the Midget Octopus was an impressive machine, even in it's least expansive mode. On the Central Coast, seasonal and weather timing would be everything in this approach to weed control.

Octopi continued

three foot gauge road. The price of such a machine would be \$1980.00 f.o.b. flat car, factory, Minneapolis. As it would be special we would want to receive the order several weeks in advance of the time delivery would be required. This Weed Burner is better adapted to use on your Road than any we have made heretofore as it is a smaller and lighter outfit and more simple in construction."

According to the website *US Inflation Calculator*, an item costing that much in 1929 would cost \$27,340 in 2016, probably more than the PCRY was willing to pay right after the stock market crash that at least symbolically triggered the Great Depression.

If the Midget or the Little Octopus versions weren't up to the task for a particular 1920s railroad, the Big model presented "a solid wall of flame 25 feet wide."



The Big Octopus

FIVE BURNER TYPE. Presents a solid wall of flame 25 feet wide, or its long side arms may be swung out to burn weeds to a full width of 35 feet. Send for literature illustrating and describing this machine in detail.

You can help build a bridge to the future.

What aspects of today's Central Coast railroading will be seen in the future as quaint and amusing, or as the impressive features of a golden age? The Museum's long-term success depends on your continued financial support. A tax-deductible gift of any size in memory of a family member or friend is a good way to help the Museum obtain, preserve, and make available to visitors and researchers the objects, documents, photographs, and audiovisual recordings that will continue to tell our story.



We aim for authenticity, but...

No, that's not really one of the proposed California High Speed Rail trains on Union Pacific's tracks crossing Tank Farm Road in south San Luis Obispo. It's your editor playing with a graphics program called Acorn just to see if he could do it. The basic photo is his (he had been waiting for the mid-day *Surfliner* on a day it was annulled) and the blue-and-yellow speedster is clipped from an artist's rendering on the CHSR Authority website.

Museum docents are sometimes asked if the high-speed service will come to the Central Coast. The system being planned and built will link San Diego, Los Angeles, Bakersfield, San Francisco, and Sacramento by an *inland* route. But the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (Metrolink), Union Pacific, and Caltrans Division of Rail are extending sidings and double track, improving switches, signals, and grade crossings, and easing curves to make coastal passenger service quicker and more reliable.

More From the Archives by Glen Matteson



Is it ever too late for root beer?

Your archivist sometimes wonders what he has gotten himself into as he peels apart moldering sheets of paper from a box containing hundreds. But more often than you might guess a nugget turns up. Consider this correspondence from the Pacific Coast Railway agent at Los Alamos to the agent at San Luis Obispo, dated July 20, 1920:

"Please refer to your S.L.O. to Los Alamos W/B [westbound, train number] 170 July 10, covering shipment of Matches, Wonderkey, Smoking Tobacco and root beer. C.K. Cline the consignee refuses the Root Beer and the Boxed Barrel claiming it was shipped too late in the season, etc., etc. He has said he would get disposition from shippers but so far nothing has come of his efforts. Will you therefore kindly see Chann Comm Co. and try and [sic] get disposition."

That last is a reference to the Channel Commercial Company, which according to the City of San Luis Obispo's "Citywide Historical Context Statement" occupied 1880 Santa Barbara Avenue (now known as Railroad Square) and was a wholesale grocery outlet that facilitated shipment of produce via the railroad. The "etcetera's" are intriguing because they imply a longer discussion or more reasons, which may have been commonly known at the time. Was Los Alamos party central part of the year, winding down as the days grew short?

The term "Boxed Barrel" had your archivist stumped for a while, with a Google search turning up references to themed mugs being sold on eBay and to ocean shipping methods, where "boxed" and "barrel" were clearly two options, not something combined. But persistence paid off. In an e-book version of *The Practical Farmer* (1908) was reference to a boxed barrel as part of a dairy-creamery operation. The box contained water flowing around the barrel, cooling the barrel's contents.

Wonderkey? Google turned up references to a school in Pennsylvania, a musical group, and a digital enterprise. Because it's next to "Smoking Tobacco" in the list, a brand of chewing tobacco is a reasonable guess.

What do you think happened to the root beer?

Young Authors Wanted

Know a young person who likes to write? If so, encourage him or her to write "The Story of the Root Beer," with or without pictures. How much root beer had been ordered? Who were the usual drinkers? And what did happen to the late shipment? Stories sent to the Museum may be in a future *Coast Mail*.

Mystery Photos

Do you know what and where these are? Check the next Coast Mail for answers.



Ready for a dose of history?

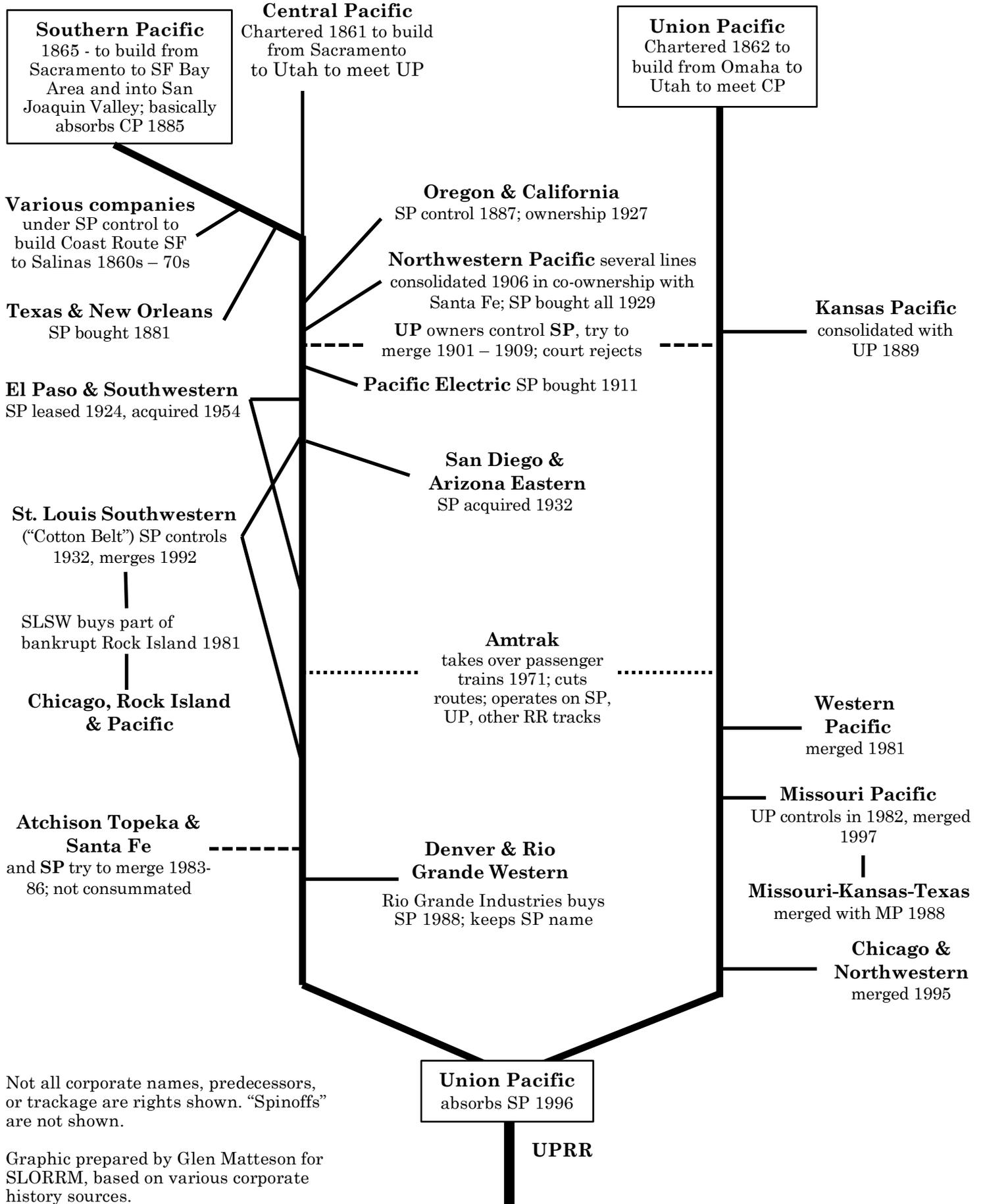
In our year-end survey, members identified railroad history as a topic they wanted to see more of [*Coast Mail* #55, Spring 2016]. This may be a case of "Be careful what you ask for." The chart on the next page is an attempt to summarize one aspect of the history of the Southern Pacific Railroad (the first railroad to connect the Central Coast with the nationwide rail network, in 1894) and the Union Pacific Railroad (the one that has owned the tracks for 20 years, since 1996). This is brief summary, leaving out many company names acquired or set up by the railroads shown in the chart. Also omitted are all the co-ownerships and financial maneuverings that entertained, thrilled, and aggravated citizens throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. And finally, it does not show the many short-line companies that have taken over relatively lightly used track "spun off" by the remaining big railroads, mostly since a major deregulation in the 1980s.

Maps to go with the chart would be great, but interested readers are encouraged to search for them online in their spare time. Still, as can be seen from the names in the chart, for railroad building and consolidation, with a few exceptions such as reaching Chicago, the Mississippi River has been and remains a continental divide for corporate railroad organization, though freight cars and whole trains routinely move through the whole U.S., Canada, and Mexico. A similar chart could be made for the three other major railroads remaining in the U.S.: BNSF (Burlington Northern – Santa Fe) in the west; and Norfolk Southern and CSX in the east. Kansas City Southern, primarily a north-south line, is smaller and has a less complicated history. Canada has long had two continent-spanning railroads, the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian National; both have had U.S. subsidiaries and have lines extending far into midwestern and eastern states. CP recently proposed acquiring NS.

For a century, mergers and technological innovations have greatly increased efficiency, and allowed rail transportation to survive and thrive. But the big systems have also become ever more removed from smaller communities and shippers.

For a taste of how complex the maneuverings for control of railroad routes could be, see the article by Bill Fowler on the SP reaching Chicago in the Spring 2016 S-P Trainline, the quarterly publication of the Southern Pacific Historical & Technical Society.

A Southern Pacific – Union Pacific Family Tree



Not all corporate names, predecessors, or trackage are rights shown. "Spinoffs" are not shown.

Graphic prepared by Glen Matteson for SLORRM, based on various corporate history sources.

Honey, I shrunk the railroad.

Probably the best way to explain something big and complicated, such as the Southern Pacific Railroad from the coast near Lompoc to Paso Robles, is to make a smaller representation of it. Plus, how cool would that be?!

As soon as a core group of members who were modelers knew that the Museum would have a building to call home, they started making plans, led by Andrew Merriam who prepared concept plans. First some definitions:

Toy trains – They're fun for kids, and adult collectors, because they're generally rugged, and they can move by hand-pushing, winding a spring, batteries, or wired track power. But they tend to be the cartoon version of railroads.

Model trains – They are mostly accurate depictions of actual railroad equipment, are electrically powered, and operate on track and within scenery designed to represent the real world, or a close alternate version of it referred to as "freelance." For model trains in general, for example, sometimes a type of car will be painted and lettered for a railroad it never operated on.

Museum-quality model railroad – The rolling stock, track, scenery, structures, and train movements are all in scale and portray an actual place and time. This is what the Museum's modelers strive for, with the main exhibit depicting, at 1/87th full size, the Southern Pacific Railroad about 1950, centered on San Luis Obispo. Of course some concessions must be made to space limitations ("selective compression" of the distance between locations) and practicalities of construction (a roadbed entirely of granite sand would send even the most dedicated modeler over the edge).

So here's a look at the scenes, and behind the scenes, of the model railroad exhibit.



Part of the exhibit shows the narrow-gauge Pacific Coast Railway at Port San Luis about 1930, including the pier extending 13 feet. The warehouse model with interior framing detail is by John Marchetti.



You can almost hear water lapping against pilings and the rumble of a cab-forward steam locomotive crossing this bridge over the Santa Ynez River near Lompoc. Mike Boyack built the bridge and modeled the water.

Photos above and below by Andrew Merriam.

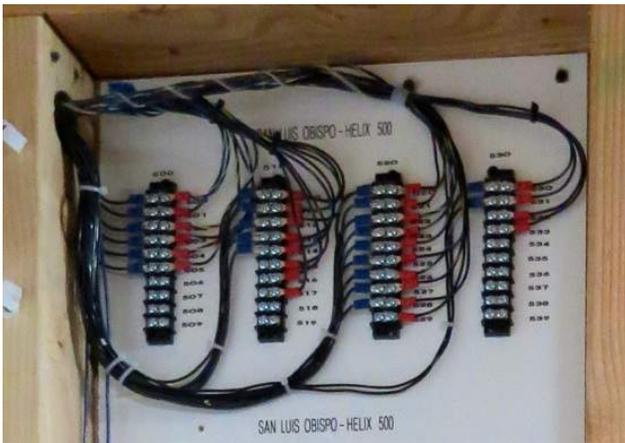


The Lark rolls into Oceano behind diesel locomotives painted in the famous Daylight scheme.



Track switches in the SLO yard are operated by devices mounted under the layout and accessible from the workshop below. Components are labeled to help find and fix any problem that arises. Wiring is by Tom Machut and Karl Kvilvang.

Photos top right and above by Glen Matteson.



Labeled terminal strips and bundled wires keep the electrical system tidy and accessible for maintenance. This panel and a desktop computer are also under the SLO yard.

Photo by Glen Matteson.

“Where’s the transformer?”

In effect, there are several. The power supply is coded to carry instructions for individual locomotive’s direction, speed, and sounds. The sounds mimic the engines or exhaust, and the bells, horns, and other appliances of real locomotives. Handheld controllers are keyed to specific locomotives and use radio, so operators can walk along the layout’s aisles and provide commentary.

Eventually the layout will have working trackside signals.

The layout has 138 track switches, all handmade, including seven narrow-gauge and five where a sharper curve diverges from a wider curve. The mainline run is about 500 feet, so trains operating realistically need nearly a half hour to traverse all the scenes spanning Surf station (on the coast near Lompoc), through S.L.O. and over Cuesta Grade to Paso Robles. Where possible, scenes are based on period photographs. Structures, including stations, bridges, and industries, are expertly modeled to depict ones that existed or still exist. Landforms, groundcover, trees, and painted backdrops are also patterned on real ones.



Accurate foreground details blended with restrained backdrop painting put the viewer in the scene. Sometimes the trains are not front and center. The backdrop painting here is by local artist Jim Trask.

Photos above and right by Mike Boyack.

The group building the model railroad has 22 members. They can run their own compatible equipment from all lines and eras at some sessions. If you’re interested in joining, contact Superintendent Andrew Merriam via info@slorrm.com.



Logan Bertollete and Mike Boyack mount the backdrop painting by Andrew Merriam for the Pacific Coast Railway at Avila in the 1930s. Mike Fairbrother built much of the layout’s benchwork to support both trains and people.

Photo by Andrew Merriam.



Price Canyon is slow going. Enjoy the scenery as you cross this bridge built by Pat Cully.

Watch the next *Coast Mail* for scenes of Price Canyon facilities and the Stenner Trestle.



On March 17 a special Union Pacific train of 18 company business cars arrived in San Luis Obispo from the north, carrying members of the railroad's board of directors, executives, and invited guests. On short notice, Museum volunteers had arranged a reception at the Freighthouse, hoping but not knowing definitely that the riders would attend.

That evening several did, including managers, technical staff, and crewmen with a wide variety of responsibilities in running the whole railroad and this particular train. Valuable contacts were made with employees who will be helpful in obtaining, restoring, or modeling historic railroad equipment and buildings.

*Photo at left by Tom Cooper.
Photo below by David Weisman.*

The wearing of the (safety) green. Or is it yellow?

Several Union Pacific staff said they were impressed by the Museum's efforts to preserve area railroad heritage. Museum Curator Brad LaRose was also impressed the next morning when he was invited aboard the updated and meticulously maintained business cars (generally built in the 1950s) where he met U.P. President Lance Fritz and discussed obtaining another former Southern Pacific freight car for display near the Freighthouse.

Photo below by Karl Hovanitz.



Safety First

City of San Luis Obispo Fire Department Deputy Chief Jeff Gater was first on the scene for this Amtrak bi-level lounge car on Union Pacific's "team track" near the Museum on March 21. But there was no emergency. Jeff was helping conduct a training session that involved his department, UPRR, Amtrak, and Cal Fire. The gathering was an orientation to Amtrak's equipment.

With each *Coast Starlight* train carrying about 250 passengers (of all ages and abilities) and crew in 10 cars (each with high voltage cables, transformers, and batteries –one with a kitchen), it's good to know the layout in case someone or something needs attention along the way.



Amtrak lounge car #33049 rests safely on the SLO team track, with first responders gathered for an orientation session on March 21. The Museum's Freighthouse is in the right background. Photo by Glen Matteson.

And speaking of fire departments...

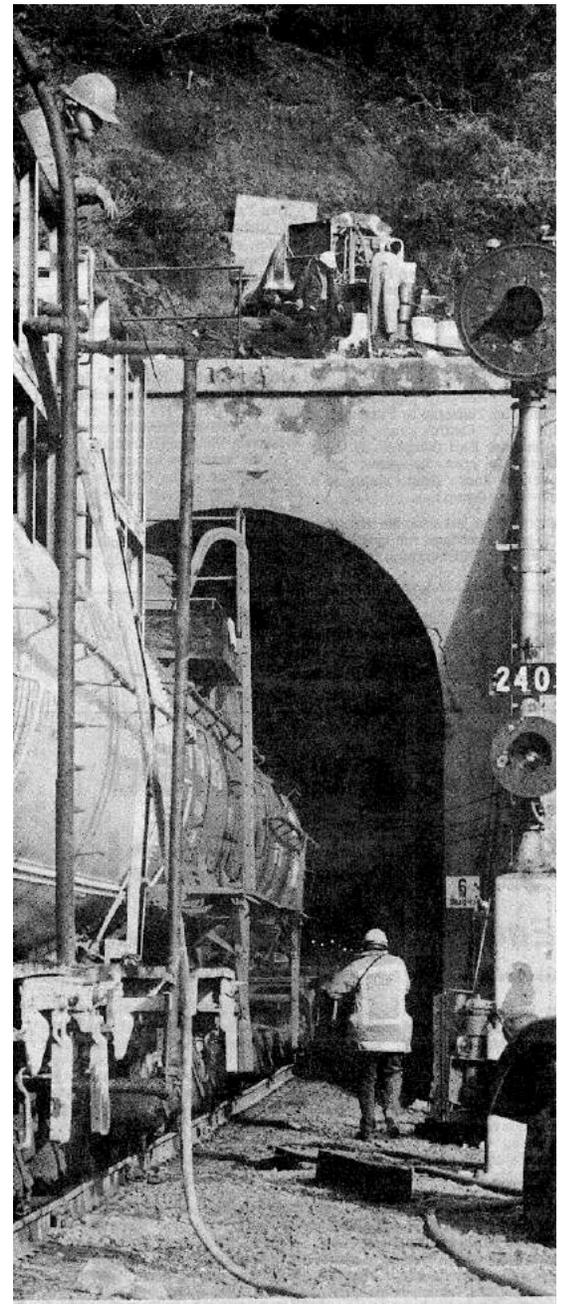
(in our archives but originally from the newspaper)

The Winter 2015 *Coast Mail* reported on fire-fighting water cars temporarily stationed at San Luis Obispo that summer, and referred to their use on a 1987 fire in Cuesta Grade's summit tunnel that closed the line for several weeks. They were also used in 1979, when timber-lined vents in that tunnel caught fire. According to a January 8, 1979, article in the *Telegram-Tribune* by Glen Scott, the California Division of Forestry (now named Cal Fire) pumped foam supplied by the railroad into the vents. The railroad wasn't sure that would extinguish the smoldering wood in the inaccessible passages, and planned to slurry in cement if needed. Does anyone know the outcome?

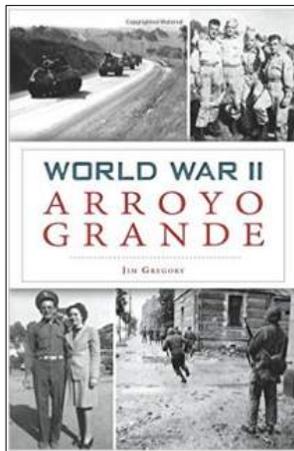
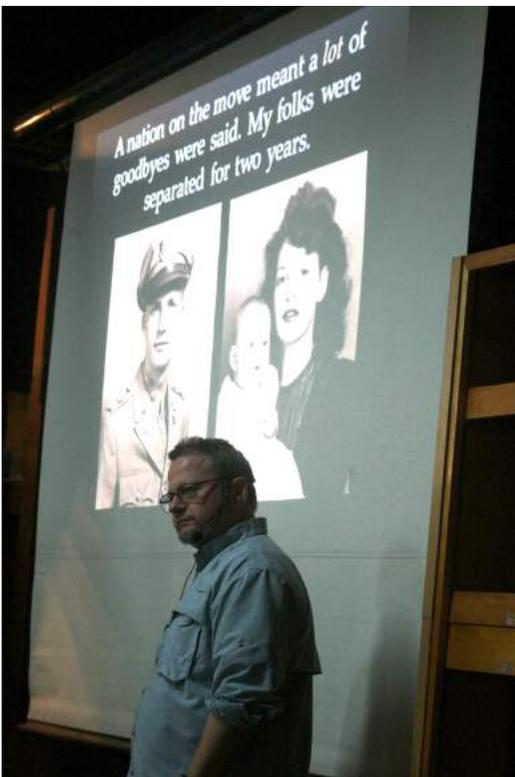
The vents allowed steam-locomotive exhaust to escape from "small outlets in the side of the brush-covered mountain" according to the article. Because steam locomotives were last used in the mid-1950s, there was no need to maintain the vents. Unlike with the 1987 fire, "no delays or re-routed trains were caused by the fire," according to a railroad spokesman at the time quoted in the article.

At the time of the report, investigators were trying to determine whether the fire had been set, or caused by a hot particle of soot blown loose by the exhaust of a passing diesel locomotive, which eight years later would cause bigger problems.

In this image by Telegram-Tribune photographer Wayne Nicholls, Southern Pacific crews and water cars work with CDF firefighters to mix buckets of foam concentrate and water to be pumped into the vents of Cuesta Grade's summit tunnel, nearly 7/10 mile long. It's tunnel #6 (lower number next to the opening), as counted south along the Coast Route from the center of SP's world, the headquarters in San Francisco. Tunnels #1 – #5 are near that city (#5 was bypassed in 1956 in connection with highway construction), with tunnel #5½ in the Salinas Valley near Greenfield.



Departures & Arrivals



On March 19, local author Jim Gregory gave a presentation at the Museum on Arroyo Grande during World War II, the subject of his recently published book.

The Museum works with individuals, Cal Poly, and other museums to document and present area history, whether or not focused only on railroads, such as Chinese on the Central Coast [Spring 2016 *Coast Mail*]. The caption of the slide in the photo begins "A nation on the move meant a lot of goodbyes were said." Nearly all those goodbyes, and welcomes home, involved travel by train. With construction materials prioritized for training-camp barracks and mess halls and housing for defense-plant workers, it was remarkable that San Luis Obispo's current train station was built in the midst of the war. *Photo by Gary See.*

Future Coast Mail articles will cover coastal railway guns, Army hospital cars, and the branch to Camp San Luis Obispo.