



Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo
Railroad Museum

Issue Number 74 – Winter 2020 San Luis Obispo, California www.slorm.com

The Museum plans to re-open no sooner than January 2021. Check our website for status.

PMT trailer arrives

Highway trucks can go where railroad tracks don't. Trains can haul freight long distances economically. Transloading between railcars and trucks, or carrying truck trailers on trains, can give shippers the best of both modes.

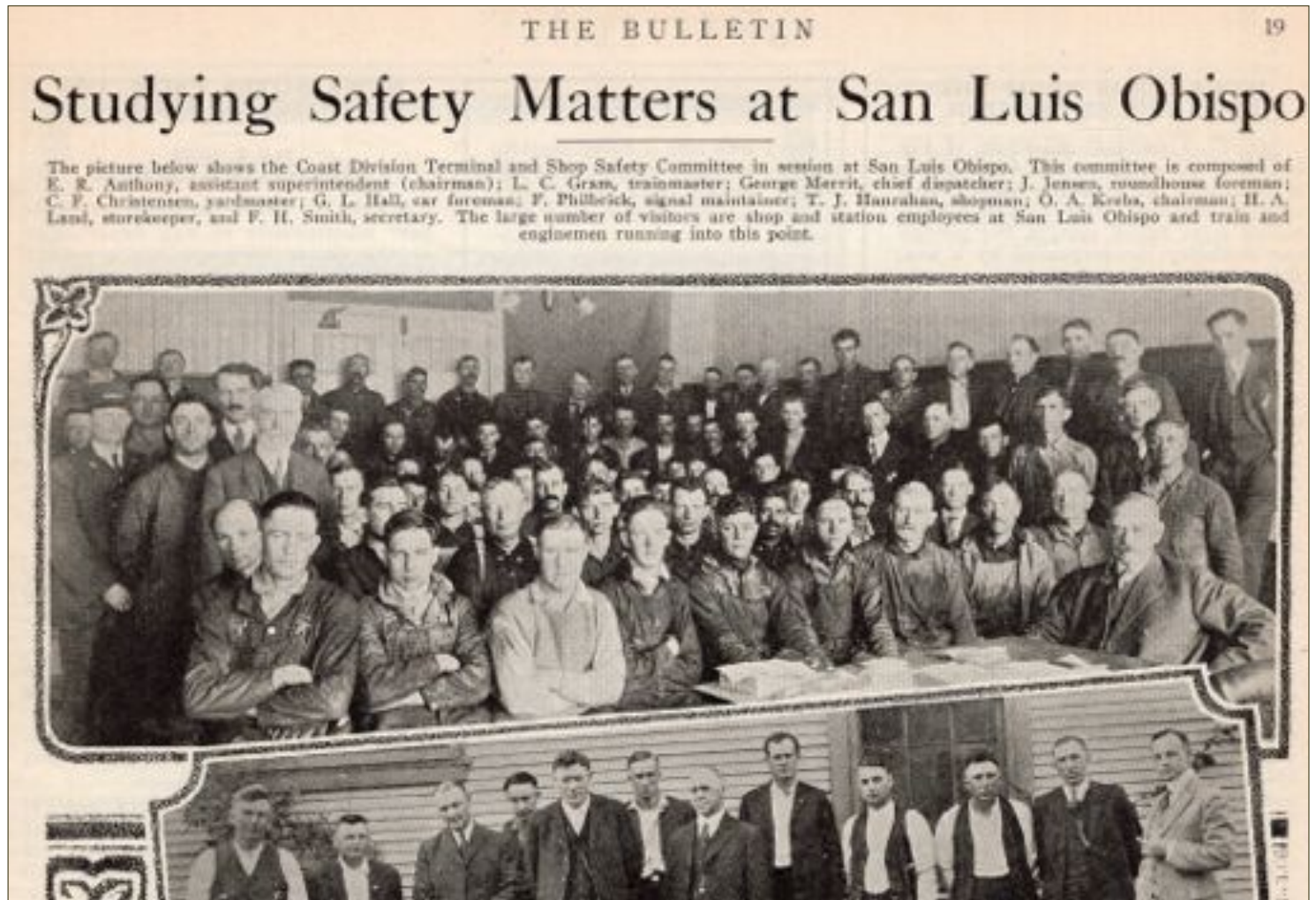
On September 2, this 1946 trailer from Southern Pacific's Pacific Motor Trucking (PMT) subsidiary arrived at the Museum (right). The Museum plans to obtain an appropriate flat car and display this newly acquired trailer, along with a similar 1934-built trailer previously obtained, as they appeared in service.

There's more on page 3.



Danny the Diesel premiers

The Museum offers a digital book to help socially distanced young ones keep in touch with the world. Have a virtual story time, or read to them yourself: [Danny the Diesel online](#)



Southern Pacific's **Bulletin** was the railroad's monthly employee newsletter. This is from the August 1920 issue, part of the Museum's collection. The lower part (cropped for use here) shows the Sacramento Division Terminal and Shop Safety Committee. SP employed far more workers in Sacramento than in San Luis Obispo, but on this day SLO had more visitors.

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
 Website: www.slorrm.com
 Mail: 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue
 San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Board of Directors

Andrew Merriam*President*
 Stephanie Hovanitz ...*Vice-president*
 Charlie Davies Norma Dengler
 Brad LaRose Brent MacGregor
 Dave Rohr Feride Schroeder

Crew List

Museum Manager .. Diane Marchetti
Assistant Manager vacant
Curator Brad LaRose
Treasurer Dave Rohr
LibrarianChris Hurd
Webmaster Jamie Foster
Operations Manager
 Stephanie Hovanitz
Events Chairvacant
Publicity Coordinator Sybil Brennan
Model RR Superintendent
 Andrew Merriam
Membership Chair vacant
Fundraising Chair Feride Schroeder
Secretary, Archivist, Newsletter
EditorGlen Matteson
 (newsletter@slorrm.com)
The museum is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, educational organization.

DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE

Anyone may access the Museum's *Bylaws, Collections Policy, Development & Operations Plan, Code of Conduct*, and other documents at 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 click on Company Store.

Coast Mail is published quarterly by the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum. © 2020. All rights reserved.

TIMETABLE

Board of Directors meetings
 December 8, January 12, and February 9, 6:00 p.m., 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue, S.L.O. Masks and distancing required. Arrangements for remote participation by those with special circumstances.

Santa on the Surfliner will not be available this year.

More Coast Mail Online

Page 5 and following: Reefer madness; Sand; Cold feet ride; Solar; Hard to believe; Cars to & from the right places; Gages, valves, levers...

Parlor Car Chats Online

Virtual ride-alongs: participate in real time on certain Saturdays, or watch recorded episodes.

slorrm.com/parlor-car-chats.html



Major grant approved

The Ludwick Foundation has approved generous funding to paint the sugar beet gondola and to prepare the Freighthouse for re-opening with additional pandemic precautions.

Swanton Pacific fire

Our sympathies to the dedicated volunteers at Swanton Pacific Railroad [*Coast Mail* Spring 2020] who were recovering from storm damage before much of their facilities and equipment were destroyed by fire this fall (at right, Cal Poly photos).

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 (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 by clicking [Membership](#) and using PayPal.

Mailing and web addresses are in left-hand column.

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



Long-term archiving

Thanks to Gary See's efforts, the Museum's many commercial and homemade historical videos originally on VHS tape are now on DVDs and in Internet-based storage.



This Is Nuts



What's that levered thing on the freight agent's desk? Could it set big staples or impress a seal into documents? It's missing some parts if those are its uses.

In the days when snacks were packaged only by nature, this nutcracker was handy for opening the packages. As the iron skillet shows, the agent kept his work area tidy. (The railroad had a rule about that.)

Collecting, display, and photo are by Brad LaRose.

A sigh of relief...

...and an accomplishment to be proud of: positioning the PMT trailer under the eave, next to the downspouts and eave's knee braces, between the boxcar and the walkway, with whole inches to spare.



Upper left, Curator Brad LaRose checks clearances. Of course they were measured first, but there's nothing like the actual objects to test one's assumptions.

Above, done! The rear doors are open. More storage space! Someday the faded *Daylight* orange, red, and black will be repainted.

Left, Jarrod Cain (behind truck) of West Coast Auto and Towing in Atascadero skillfully maneuvered the trailer into position, using a truck-mounted arm that moves in and out, up and down, and side to side by wireless remote control. Jack Hutchinson (in green vest) recorded the action with a pole-mounted video camera.

Right, Dwight Peterson of his name-sake trucking company, based in Atascadero, had transported the trailer from Calistoga, California. Next, his low-bed trailer's gooseneck was removed so the PMT trailer could be rolled off.

The trailer's lack of currently required safety features prevented it from being pulled down the highway as originally designed.

Congratulations and thanks to all who helped.



Reefer madness?

Every year from the 1920s through the 1950s thousands of carloads of California produce moved to eastern markets in refrigerator cars. The cars were supplied with ice that kept the items fresh in transit. The chunks of ice, often with added salt, melted away in metal bins at the car ends. Lettuce and vegetables from the Salinas Valley, and fruit and potatoes from the San Joaquin Valley, went over the Sierras via Donner Pass. Citrus from Goleta and Ventura growers, and melons from the Imperial Valley, went by way of the Sunset Route through southern Arizona and New Mexico. For several decades Southern Pacific and Union Pacific operated the jointly owned Pacific Fruit Express company, known for its bright orange refrigerator cars and long icing platforms at intermediate points.

The photo at right shows a Preco methanol-fueled automatic heater for use in refrigerator cars.

What? Aren't refrigerator cars, which railroad workers called "reefers," supposed to keep things cold? Yes, but not too cold. Lettuce and fresh tomatoes in particular don't like to be frozen and then thawed. That was a likely outcome in a train of reefers winding its way over the Sierras and across Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming in early winter, if loads reached outdoor temperature.

Reefers were often technically known as "insulated, ventilated boxcars." Double walls with sawdust between and roof hatches were part of temperature control. Heaters were the other aspect. The model shown was made in Los Angeles and dates from about 1948. It had four interchangeable components: tank, thermostat, wick, and chimney. Its methyl-alcohol fuel burned cleanly.

These days nearly all the fresh produce trade has shifted to trucks, and the relatively few refrigerated boxcars in use have self-contained, diesel-powered coolers, some with continuous monitoring via satellite.

If your editor recalls correctly, the movie "East of Eden," based on the John Steinbeck novel and featuring James Dean, has a scene involving a train with the family's crop being delayed by snow and the shipment turning to mush. Someone should watch the movie and let us know if the load became too warm or too cold.

Below, South of Eden, your editor's interpretation of a 1950's "reefer block" near Bradley in the Salinas Valley, westbound by timetable (acrylic on medium-density fiberboard, 9 x 35 inches, 2012). Ryan Matteson photo



This Preco heater is a rare survivor of Southern Pacific Railroad's ice-bunker refrigerator car era. It's now in the Museum's collection and on display thanks to the efforts of Curator Brad LaRose and regular volunteer Gary See.

The Santa Maria Valley RR still transports locally grown, frozen vegetables via the Union Pacific connection at Guadalupe (right and below). White cars reflect heat; end-mounted cooling units (arrow) maintain proper temperature.

SMVRR photos



Solar power comes to the Museum

Delayed by design and contract issues, personnel changes, and the pandemic, in October the Museum broke ground for its solar electric project. The 22 panels, installed between Santa Barbara Avenue and the drive next to the Freighthouse, are expected to offset the Museum's annual usage. When the panels produce more power than the Museum uses, it will flow to the grid, accumulating billing credit. When the Museum uses more power than the panels provide, it will be supplied by PG&E's distribution system. Peak solar production coincides with Museum demand, 10 am to 4 pm.



In early October, Dan's Landscaping workers cleared the densely overgrown site across from the Freighthouse.

Can we believe our eyes?

Maybe. Rail traffic at San Luis Obispo is down to the mid-afternoon northbound and southbound *Coast Starlights* three days a week, and the daily early morning departure and late evening arrival of a *Pacific Surfliner* between here and San Diego via Los Angeles. There have been no freight trains for over a year. But Union Pacific may install new yard track at San Luis Obispo, extending the Chuck Johnson Spur, which was used to store helper locomotives across from the Amtrak station, to the control point immediately north of the Orcutt Road crossing. Also, UP, Amtrak, and Caltrans are designing a new layover and servicing facility for passenger trains near the site of the former roundhouse.



UPRR surveyors verified alignment and clearances for potential new track during the first week of October.



José of Bland Solar (on left) and the Museum's Gary See discuss orientation of the solar panels.



Above, the panels as seen from neighboring property to the south. The Freighthouse roof is visible in the background. See page 10 for more construction photos.

The system is located on sloping ground that's not well suited to other uses. Donations and a grant covered 95 percent of the cost. The installation will save thousands of dollars in coming years, allowing Museum revenues to be used for operations and exhibit development.

When we re-open, a new play table



Regular model railroad docent Charles Kinzer created this O-gauge train table that can be operated by visitors ages six and older. It's sturdy, portable, and detailed. Next time you're in (the little) town, check out the local eatery.

Low-fare, dome-car views

A few months ago a visitor from the San Joaquin Valley told of riding along the Coast Route from Santa Barbara to San Luis Obispo, in the era of ice-bunker refrigerator cars [see page 4]. He and three friends, college students at the time, wanted to visit a relative in Paso Roble. But the cost of a train ticket was an obstacle. So they stowed away aboard a freight train.

They found that if they stood on the ice in the metal bunkers at the ends of refrigerator cars with their heads extending through the hatches, they had fine views.

At some point on the northbound trip, their train stopped in a siding to meet one coming the other way. The student riders had chosen a car near the middle of the train, to be less obvious to crews in the locomotive and caboose. During the stop, they got off the car and stretched their legs a bit.

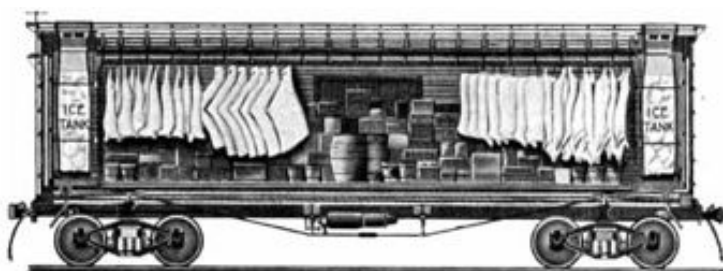
They must have been seen by railroad workers then, because on arrival in San Luis Obispo they were greeted by several members of the law enforcement community. They were asked for the fare from Santa Barbara to S.L.O. Not having it, they were advised to find other transportation to their destination.

After hitchhiking to the relative's, they got to eat and bed down hobo-style, in exchange for work such as cleaning windows.

There are many amusing train-hopping stories. None are endorsements for this illegal and dangerous practice. (There may be another one next edition.)



Digital cartoon by editor



Cut-away illustration of an early refrigerator car. Cars from the era reported would carry a single commodity, not a range of items. Image via Citizendium.org.

Car location ignorance

Here's a Southern Pacific waybill from 1927. It rode with the conductor in the caboose, a card was stapled to the side of the freight car, and various forms moved by telegraph and U.S. Mail to keep track of what went where.

Image from an Ebay auction page

Readers of the Fall issue may have wondered why railroads wanted *automatic* car identification systems that could read a car's "name" as it passed. Didn't each train have a list of the cars in it, and their destinations?

They did, usually including the cars' reporting marks (initials of the railroad or other company that owned it, plus car number), loaded or empty status, and destination. They often included cars' specific contents, weight, and whether the consignment was hazardous or required special handling. In the early years, clerks created the lists by hand, along with separate pieces of paper for each car called waybills, (image at left). Conductors brought the waybills along. Conductors also used switch lists, showing where cars were to be left and picked up (next page).

By the 1970s, most railroads were using data processing machines (many not sophisticated enough to be considered general purpose computers) and Teletype systems to transmit the information between facilities (next page). But with hundreds of thousands of cars in movement at a time, along hundreds of routes, among dozens of railroads, it was challenging to keep current information on cars' actual locations. So, automatic systems help. Now, they are applied to freight cars, passenger cars, locomotives, and work equipment.

Car location wisdom

Electronic data processing required railroad conductors to be comfortable with keyboards, touchscreens, and printouts. Shown here are parts of a work report from 1979 (right), a training manual on using the "Direct Entry Work Order - Gridpad" (below), and a more recent work report (bottom). All images are from SLORRM Archives, series 2310.

CONDUCTOR'S WORK REPORT

TRAIN ID: WEST PEDDLER ORIGIN LEAD UNIT: 9200

CONDUCTOR'S NAME: RAXRXX NEGRETE

OFF DUTY STATION: TIME OF ARRIVAL: DATE: 11/6/79

INITIAL	CAR NUMBER	KIND OF CAR	GROSS WT TONS	DEST. STATION	CONTENTS	SPECIAL HANDLING	DATE			SPINS
							MO	DAY	YR	
ATASCADERO TRACK 2855 WEST TO EAST										
UP	12036	L CH		33215	MILO	OFF SPOT				
	12548									
	12774									
	23730				CORN					
	12650	E		WEST	MTY					
	11382									
RESPOT AS FOLLOWS WEST TO EAST										
UP	12036					ON PIT				
	23730									
	12548									
	12774									

TRAIN CONSIST: SETOUT CARS

SETOUT ENTIRE TRAIN:

HEAD END	L/E	DESTN	*S/O	TRACK	*S/O	STN	*E/W	*TIME	B/O
ACFX 74102	E	251					W		
ACFX 60397	E	251					W		
SPFE 456018	E	182					W		
SPFE 459899	E	182					W		
SPFE 456367	E	182					W		
SPFE 457160	E	182					W		
SPFE 459686	E	182					W		

CANCEL ADD CAR DELETE CAR HELP ENTER

CS1306 - CONDUCTOR'S WORK REPORT

TRAIN ID: 01MCOY 27 ORIGIN LEAD UNIT SP: 8698

CONDUCTOR'S NAME:

OFF DUTY STATION: TIME OF ARRIVAL: DATE: AM/PM: MO DAY YR

ACCP	CAR	L	KND	GRIT	DESTN	G	NTFS	SPECIAL	SP	B	SPINS	STATION FROM	STATION TO	M/P	TIME	REMARKS
TONS	INT	NUMBER	/	OF	WGT	STA	R	HANDLING	C	/	OR	(PICK UP)	(SET OUT)	CODE	DAY	OR
			E		DE											SPINS
SETOUT 30200																
00026	SP	1511	E	CAR	026	45500	7	P7900	B		954					
SETOUT 90200																
00065	SP	671257	E	R5C	039L	30145	B		B		304					
00101	SSV	56429	E	R5C	036L	30145	7	B	C		304					
00179	SP	693904	E	R5B	038L	30145	7		C		304					
06714	SOU	524156	L	D5C	093L	30530	F	BRNUOS	C		314					
06773	SOU	33126	L	B5	059L	30530	C	EM	B		314					
06860	SP	242035	L	B5Y	087L	30304	F	BR	C		309					
06940	BD	485065	L	D5C	080	31065	P	PE	B		310					
SETOUT TOTALS FOR 30200 - 051 LOAD 012 EMPTIES 05145 TONS 03474 FEET																
SETOUT TOTALS FOR 32010 - 017 LOAD 01795 TONS 01733 FEET																
HIGH WIDES AND EXPLIVES:																
068 LOADS 020 EMPTIES 06940 TONS 05207 FEET																
TONS PER OPERATIVE BRAKE - 0078																
END																

Does that man on the locomotive know what he's doing?

Yes. But first let's lay to rest some speculation.

The worker is not on the locomotive's tender, which trails at the far left of the photo, and which must be supplied with fuel oil and with water that will be piped to the locomotive itself. It looks like steam is escaping from that dome shape, and the worker is directing a pipe to that spot. Is he giving the boiler a charge, like a jump-start? (Fireless locomotives using injected steam or compressed air were used in some factories that made photographic film or explosives.)

Nope. He is filling the sand dome with fine, dry sand, which was stored in a bunker in the building above. The

smaller pipes curving down the sides of the boiler allow the engineer to feed sand to the tops of the rails ahead of the big driving wheels. What we see is dust. Wet or frosty rails could be slippery. Steam locomotives used their power most effectively at speed, not when starting a heavy train. Slipping was a problem when starting.

Sudden spinning of the wheels was not good for the rails or the driving mechanism. Sanding the rails helped.

This is a 2-10-2 locomotive, a type often used on heavy freight trains and as a helper on Cuesta Grade. It's shown at Southern Pacific's Bayshore Shops (near San Francisco) in November 1953. The photographer is unknown.



SLORRM Archives No. P2571.62

Is this in our future?

In May, BNSF Railway and Union Pacific RR moved a Schnabel car with 36 axles, carrying a reactor pressure vessel, from San Onofre, California, to Las Vegas. Its final destination was a radioactive-waste disposal site in Utah.

The vessel was used in a nuclear power plant from 1968 to 1992. It "cooled off" for 20 years before being placed in the container shown here, which has two-inch thick steel walls. It sat for another eight years before being transported. Diablo Canyon power plant components face a similar future.

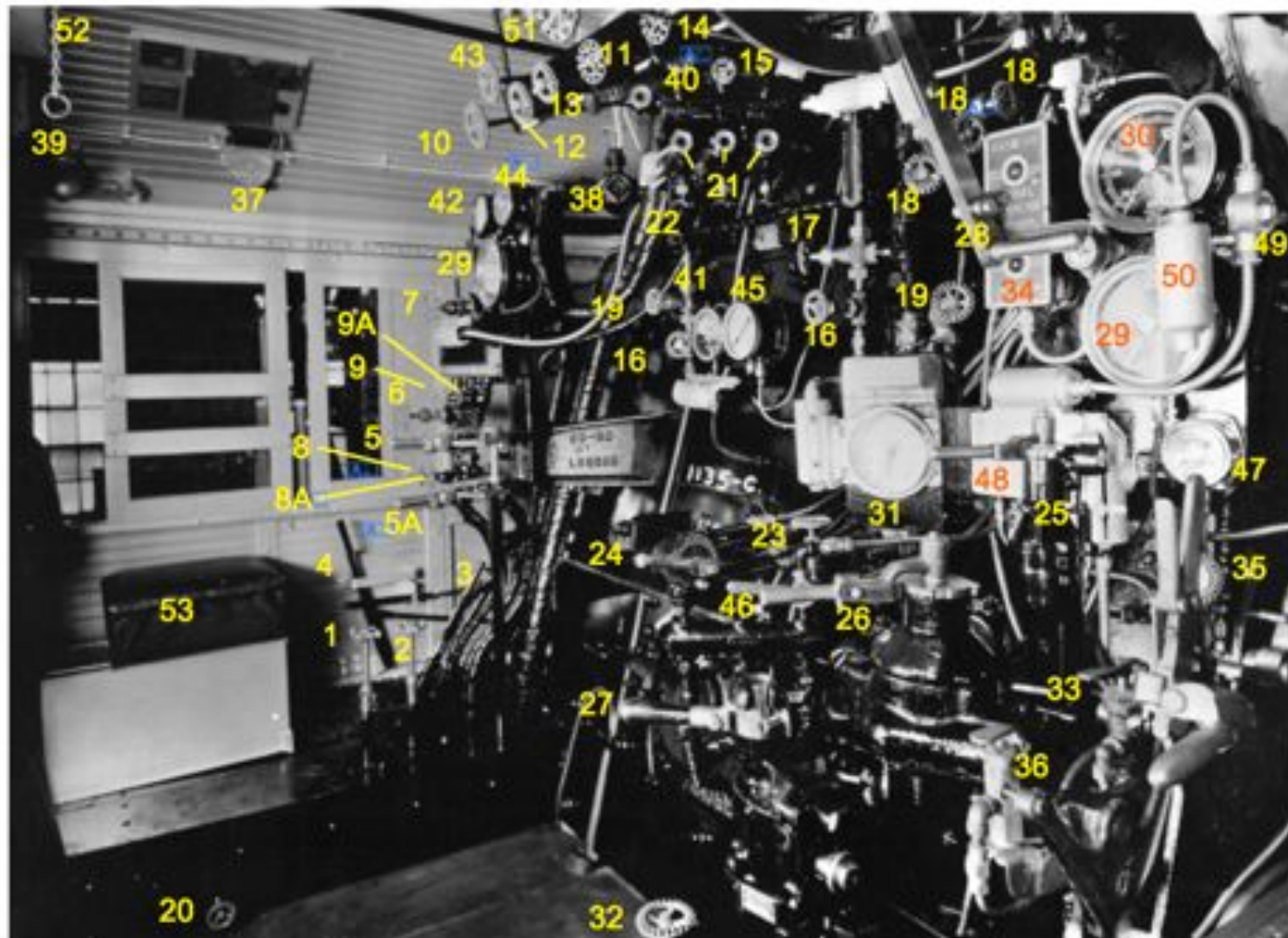


Photo by K. M. Cannon, with permission of the Las Vegas *Review-Journal*

What happens if I turn this?

Recent donation of this annotated photo expanded the Museum's material on steam locomotive controls, which are featured in an exhibit that shows a few major ones. Below, the numbers and names are in a revised format.

The photo shows nearly all the cab interior of a Southern Pacific GS-series (4-8-4) locomotive, a type that commonly operated through San Luis Obispo pulling the *Lark*, the *Coast Daylight*, and the *Coast Mail*.



- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1. Water valve | 14. Air to operate reverse(r) | 30. Booster pressure gauge | 46. Cylinder cock valve |
| 2. Overflow valve | 15. Condensing valve | 32. Speed recorder | 47. Electric brake gauge |
| 3. "Ram" [Does anyone know what this is for?] | 16. Water glass test cocks | 33. Air horn valve* | 48. Air brake gauges |
| 4. Boiler blow-down lever | 17. Water glass bottom cocks | 34. Foam meter – automatic blowdown | 49. Back-pressure gauge |
| 5. Firing valve (for oil fuel) | 18. Gauge cocks | 35. Reverse lever | 50. Steam chest pressure |
| 5A. Damper | 19. Water column drain valve | 36. Steam whistle valve | 51. Control for dynamo that powered electric activation of air brakes |
| 6. Blower | 20. Squirt hose | 37. Headlight switch | 52. Emergency fuel shutoff |
| 7. Steam valve for feed-water pump | 21. Lubricator feed | 38. Steam regulator for train heat | 53. Fireman's seat |
| 8. Air-operated bell ringer | 22. Water glasses | 39. Fireman's emergency air brake valve | |
| 8A. Blowback | 23. Air-operated bell ringer | 40. Lubricator filler plug | |
| 9. Atomizer (creates oil mist) | 24. Sander valve | 41. Water tank level gauge | |
| 9A. Tender tank heater | 25. Independent (locomotive air) brake valve | 42. Steam heat pressure gauge | |
| 10. Steam heat valve [for tender fuel?] | 26. Automatic (train line air) brake valve | 43. Mars light dynamo** | |
| 11. Hydrostatic lubricator | 27. Electric brake valve | 44. Fuel oil temperature | |
| 12. Dynamo (steam to electrical generator for lights, etc.) | 28. Throttle | 45. Feedwater pump pressure gauge | |
| 13. Air compressor valve | 29. Boiler steam pressure | | |

* Yes, these locos had horns and whistles. Apparently horns penetrated fog better.
** Power for an oscillating headlight.

If you see something incorrect, let us know. The original was hand-lettered long ago with a marking pen.

Solar project construction

Mounting the panels on the ground avoided potentially compromising the roof of the 1894 Freighthouse or having pylons interfere with views through the parking lots. But it had its own challenges. Hard, rocky ground required several holes for the framework footings to be dug by hand.

Below, Bland Solar workers dump sacks of ready-mix concrete around the framework's steel uprights and inject water with a hose from a truck-mounted tank.



*Bland workers assembled the frame (above) and attached the panels, each three feet wide and six feet long (below).
Three photos by Gary See*



Underground conduit connects the solar array and the Freighthouse electrical room. That involved boring about 80 feet under a paved roadway and concrete walkway, but avoided trenching and repaving.

Below, Robert aligns the borer with the intended destination, marked by the tall red and white pole to the left of his helper.



Robert of Robert B. Enns Construction (above) and his helper (below) hand dug the pits for access by the boring equipment, to assure that utility and irrigation lines were not damaged.

