

Circle the Wagons

By Norman Holmes

Although not up to the expectations of the committee, our Tenth Anniversary event brought about 2,000 people to Portola to help us celebrate our 10th Anniversary.

The Fourth of July weekend is a time for family get-togethers, going to the beach, the lake, the mountains; but for about 65 members and friends of FRRS, it meant that they came to Portola to help with our 10th Anniversary celebration. In choosing a date we looked ahead and backward. Our organization was formed in 1983, had the Grand Opening in 1984. Western Pacific's line was completed in 1909. 2009 will be Western Pacific's 100th Anniversary and our 25th Anniversary. That is the reason for our selection of the 1994 date. Our Grand Opening was on Memorial Day Weekend. Usually we have cold rainy weather and occasionally snow on that date. Not exactly what you would want for an outdoor event, that is the reason for the July 1-2-3-4 dates. (Of course this year Memorial Day weekend was nice!)

Preparation for the event started in 1993 with committee meetings every two months. In 1994 the meetings were every month. The committee started with ten members and was down to six by the time the event came on line. As is often the case the work falls on a few who have the time and desire to see the job through.

The initial thought for the event was to have a "gathering of wagons" or as the event's name became "Circle The Wagons." (WP's F units were called covered wagons and we do have a balloon track!) Invitations were sent to all western railroads and museums inviting them to send their E and/or F units to our event. California State Railroad Museum, Mt. Rainier Scenic and a privately owned E3 were the only positive responses. Union Pacific had agreed to send their three E9's and a streamline passenger train to operate through the Feather River Canyon, but these units would not come onto museum property. As time progressed, details in the movement of the visiting units became more complicated. There was extra insurance to be carried and some transportation costs to be paid for. It was finally decided to cancel Mt. Rainier's Northern Pacific F9 and the E3 from Wisconsin. Only CSRM's F7A WP 913 was to attend the event. Union Pacific provided free a transportation move for this unit from Sacramento to Portola and return. For the first time in twelve years, three WP F7 cab units were operating together. Our newly repainted California Zephyr unit, 805A, although not completely finished, stole the show with its bright orange nose and red passenger wings. A night photo session orchestrated by Vic Neves, had the three cab units lined up on parallel tracks for a once in a lifetime shot.

Union Pacific's passenger train pulled by their completely rebuilt A-B-A set of E9's brought a trainload of passengers from Fremont to Portola on July 1, made two round trips between Portola and Keddie and two round trips between Portola and Reno Jct. on July 2 and 3, then made the trip back to Fremont on July 4. This operation helped bring visitors to our event and was an attraction in itself. The Pacific Limited Group was the operating entity for the UP train and provided the ticket sales and car hosts.

After the visiting units, the next major feature of the event was the "Feather River Transportation Pageant." Skip Englert was in charge of this important program. Contact was made with Vern Williams, a rice farmer from Sutter who portrays Jim Beckwourth in Marysville's Beckwourth Frontier Days, to come to our event. (Jim Beckwourth was the man who discovered the lowest mountain pass through the Sierra which was subsequently named for him.) A wagon train was recruited from Doyle, Indians from Nevada and cowboys and dancers from Quincy. Arthur Keddie, the sur-

veyor and engineer who realized a railroad grade not exceeding 1% could be built through the Feather River Canyon, was to be portrayed by our own member, Jim Ley.

Bleachers were set up near the picnic area, a stage was borrowed from the high school and Clyde Lippincott loaned his trailer for the announcer platform. With all this arranged, the locomotives were ready and in order of appearance, the actors were all ready and the pageant proceeded on time Saturday at 1 PM. After some Bluegrass music, the Indians walked across in front of the audience, followed by Portola's Mayor Joe Moctezuma, who portrayed Capt. Don Luis Arguello (the man who discovered the Feather River Canyon), The Black Powder Boys and dancing by the Flat Car Floozies. Jim Beckwourth was next and told how he discovered Beckwourth pass and led wagon trains west. Next naturally was the wagon train, then That Quincy Quartet, Arthur Keddie and draft horses pulling railroad ties. The railroad portion started with a hand car, then NSRM's steam engine No. 8, Western Pacific's first diesel No. 501, CZ unit 805A with 925C, WP 921D and WP 913 with UP 6946 and UP 849 being the last units in the parade.

Sunday the pageant was slightly abbreviated as Vern Williams had to return to Marysville; the wagon, Indians, cowboys and dancers were scheduled elsewhere. The traveling minstrel "Kuddle" entertained the audience and Arthur Keddie told how he discovered the railroad grade, which was followed by the steam engine and diesels which made their runby. A number of visitors told us how much they enjoyed the event.

Our ticket booth was moved to the main gate to sell tickets for the Keddie shuttle trains and to sell admission tickets to our event. This was set up Friday to allow for advance sales and continued to be staffed Saturday, Sunday and Monday. The \$10 admission fee applied Saturday and Sunday. Monday, this was reduced to \$5. When our parking lot filled on Saturday and Sunday we used the vacant lot up alongside our entrance road. We hired a shuttle bus in case we had a really big crowd, but it was not needed.

Food service for the event was a concern. Our Beanery could not accommodate the expected crowd so we contracted with the Portola High School Athletic Club, who is raising money to fund their athletic program. We asked them to set up a hot dog stand and drink booth and when we told them that they could keep all the profits, they enthusiastically accepted. As is our policy, working members receive a free lunch on operating days. A deli-sandwich bar was set up in the Santa Fe diner and this worked well. We also served a pancake breakfast on Saturday, Sunday and Monday and Calpine Lodge had a BBQ dinner available on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Also to accommodate the expected visitors we augmented our five porta-potties with four regular potties and a handicap unit. Most of our crew members stayed at the museum for several nights. The need for an occasional shower became evident so a shower trailer was rented for the weekend. Some of the cost of the potties, shower unit and rent of the bleachers was reimbursed from Plumas County Supervisor Fran Roudebush from the recreation fund, a big help. Extra dumpsters were ordered and a nice patio dining area on the dock was set up complete with a parachute canopy cover.

Inside the shop building we had several model railroad layouts and an Operation Life Saver booth.

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Conclusion: Pacific Limited 1994, By Steve Habeck

to obtain permission to use their facilities during the station stops. Special thanks are also due to Gary Quilici, owner of the Depot Restaurant in Oroville (the ex-WP depot) and his staff, for allowing us to make his facility a depot again for a couple of weekends.

Lastly, and most importantly, the efforts of the FRRS volunteers who donated their time and travel expenses and put in long hours in hot weather need to be recognized.

When I offered to take on the planning for the July 1994 trips in August of 1993, due to Hal Lewis' workload in preparing for the May 1994 trips, I had no idea what the next 10 months would be like. The learning curve was steep and full of obstacles, and very early on in the planning stage it was clear that help would be needed. Right from the beginning, Norm Holmes was involved, as we tried to coordinate Pacific Limited and "Circle the Wagons." Also participating from the earliest planning stages were Gary and Pat Cousin of the FRRS, and Hal Lewis and Bob Bunch of the Central Coast Chapter-NRHS. Several others contributed key pieces of the planning puzzle as the trips got closer.

On the "Thank You People" page elsewhere in this issue, special recognition is given to a group of FRRS members and other volunteers from Southern California, who, due to a misunderstanding between myself and Hal Lewis, were not notified in advance that they had been selected to work the Barstow turns. These people, gathered up through persistent efforts of Pete Solyom, were able to help out on very short notice when Gary Cousin and I discovered the lack-of-notification error, and saved Pacific Limited from having to run short-handed with full trains.

If anyone who volunteered their time and effort is not recognized on the "Thank You Page," I apologize for my oversight. I attempted to maintain car host lists from the trips specifically for this acknowledgment.

Again, many thanks go to all the FRRS volunteers who worked the Pacific Limited excursions, and/or supported the trips by working at the museum. We could not have accomplished what we've done without your help.

Steve Habeck
FRRS Pacific Limited Rep.

Conclusion: Circle the Wagons Report, By Norman Holmes

Allen Wiebe set up his Yogurt stand and slush machines; all income, over \$600, was donated to us. Jim Druckmiller contacted a number of railroad model manufacturers and other organizations asking them to donate items to a raffle. A raffle booth was set up which generated additional income.

Our small, but well stocked Gift Shop could not accommodate the large crowd expected so a Gift Shop Annex was set up in one end of the UP baggage car. The interior of the car was painted, carpet installed and shelves erected. A set of stairs was constructed and a display case and place for the cash register was borrowed. Jack Hathaway was in charge of the Annex which took some of the load from the Gift Shop. It really turned out nice. A number of railroad museums use baggage cars as their only Gift Shop.

Publicity for the event started with Pentrex arranging for a flyer to be designed and this was then published in several of their railroad magazines at no cost to us. This same flyer was sent to all model railroad shops in the west and to our membership. Ads were run in local papers and in Reno. A nice program was printed which included ads from local merchants to help offset the cost. D&L Distributing company, in addition to supplying our drink stand, made up a banner announcing our event. The banner was erected across the Gulling Street bridge by Sierra Pacific Power Co.

A final accounting is not yet available, but with ticket sales, food sales and profits from the Gift Shop, we probably came out about even. There were a lot of expenses and a lot of work put in by a lot of people, all of which made our first really big event a success. Without the volunteers this celebration would not have happened. We are very grateful.

On the "Thank You People" page elsewhere in this issue, we have listed all of those who helped with this event as best we can recall. If you've been left out, our apologies, it was not intentional.

Conclusion: The Canadian ALCos at Portola, By Kent Stephens

Most remained in service until the big cutback in VIA routes several years ago. The majority were stored serviceable five years ago and put up for sale by Canac International. 6776 was last used March 3, 1989, 6860 was last used on March 25, 1989. (As most fans know, both Canadian National and VIA are owned by the Canadian government. Canac International is owned by Canadian National and functions as a business under CN, handling purchases, sales, consulting, bidding and contracting.)

Just over a dozen FPA-4's had been sold by Canac by June 1994 in three years - our 6776 was the fourteenth to be sold. All have been sold to museums, tourist railroads and several private individuals in the U.S., including Napa Valley's four units and one on the Grand Canyon Railway. (See TRAINS August 1994 issue p. 29 for color photos of two FPA-4 units.)

The B units haven't been as fortunate in escaping the cutting torch. Only two of the 12 B units have been sold, class engine 6860 to Portola and 6863 to a group on the East Coast, which according to reports, may scrap it for parts for their ex-Long Island FA-2. Portola's FPB-4 may be the only survivor.

Reading these numbers you may think Canac still has a number of units for sale at Montreal. Not so. When Norm Holmes inspected them in late May, Canac International had only six A units and four B units left, including the two we bought. (Two additional A's were there that had been sold to the scrapper but hadn't been moved.) The remainder - nearly half the A units and most of the B units have been sold for scrap. The scrapper in late May had two FPA-4's, one mostly scrapped and one fairly intact, and stacks of trucks from scrapped units.

The museum's major reason for buying FPA-4 6776 is to place it in Portola's famed locomotive rental program, which has become a major source of income for the museum. Western Pacific F7A 921D is the only unit available in the combo part of the rental program's second hour, and is receiving excessive wear in constant use in the very popular combo program. It is planned to retire 921D from the rental program after 6776 becomes serviceable.

As has been announced, one of the highlights of the 9th Annual FRRS Railfan Photographer's Day (Saturday, September 17, 1994) is to have FPA-4 6776 and FPB-4 6860 in operation powering a matched VIA passenger train of two coaches and a sleeper. See you at Portola on the Saturday. (Sources: The Second Diesel Spotters' Guide; The Diesel Builders, Vol. 2; American Locomotive Company and Montreal Locomotive Works, By John F. Kirkland. Thanks also to Doug Cummings of X2200 South and Norm Holmes for assistance in the article.)

to a raffle. A raffle booth was set up which generated