

## 2009 WPRRHS CONVENTION

- text and photos by Mike Mucklin

After 12 years of successful annual events, the 13th annual Western Pacific Historical Society convention returned to the town where it all started: Oroville, California. The original convention was held April 18th and 19th, 1997 in what was then the Depot Restaurant, which is located inside the former Western Pacific Oroville depot. Today that location is home to the Western Pacific Brewing & Dining restaurant but with the growth in popularity of the convention over the last 12 years, the restaurant simply didn't have the space required to accommodate a contemporary WPRRHS event.

This year's "Centennial" convention chairman, and WPRRHS Administrator, Thom Anderson scouted locations and booked the Feather Falls Casino and Lodge, which provided an excellent facility as well as convenient overnight accommodations for convention staff and guests.

The 13th annual convention kicked off on Friday at noon with the first of five Oroville Dam tours which were graciously provided over the course of the two-day convention by John Ford of the California Department of Water Resources (DWR). These fascinating tours focused on the relationship between the railroads and the construction of the dam and the tour included visits to the Oro Dam Constructors railroad tunnel (originally first WP tunnel No. 4), the site of a horrific head-on collision in 1965 that claimed the lives of four Oro Dam Constructors trainmen, as well as the site of the Oro Dam Constructors rotary dumper at the dam site.

John's tours were limited to 10 guests at a time which provided an excellent, personalized experience for each individual. Local points of interest were pointed out along the way to the various sites and John also provided excellent historical visual aids at each location to help guests relate the appearance of the location in the present to what the railroad there looked like in the past.

Meanwhile on Friday, a number of sellers converged on the display room to set-up their tables full of WP related wares while the convention staff got the raffle table populated

with goodies for the Saturday raffle. Among the sellers present were Brad Lomazzi of Railroad Americana, who also set-up a beautiful display of Western Pacific Scenic Limited memorabilia. Across the aisle from Brad was Bill Burg of Super Art Media, along with Tom VanHorn from Tom's Trackside Trains, and Jim Wagner and Bryan Elliott who were selling a brass collection. Rounding out the sellers was David Epling with the Western Pacific Railroad Museum gift shop, Steve Hayes was there to promote his excellent new book, *Western Pacific Depots and Stations*, and Mike Mucklin announced two forthcoming books from his new publishing venture, Highline Press; the first being a Sacramento Northern book written by Norman Holmes and the other a self-authored title, *Western Pacific Caboose Cars*.

The raffle table was well supplied this year with a number of outstanding donations. Among the sponsors of this year's raffle were Athearn Trains, Cannon & Company, Microscale Industries, Kadee Quality Products, ExactRail, InterMountain Railway Company, The Western Depot, Tom's Trackside Trains, Micro-Trains Line, Wm. K.



Exploring the wreck site  
in old WP tunnel 4

Walters, Hobbies Unlimited, The Western Pacific Railroad Museum, Jim Dias, Tom Lawler, and Clarence Shipman. The WPRRHS is very grateful for the support these companies and individuals have shown for the convention through the donation of raffle prizes.

Friday guests also enjoyed a wealth of on-site multimedia presentations including *World War II and the WP* by Jeff Asay, *The Oroville Dam* by John Ford of the California DWR, *The Final Decade of the WP* by Dale Sanders, *Last 10 Years of SN's Chico Branch* by Wayne Monger, Tom Messer, and Vic Neves, *Moving the Golden Gate Railroad Museum* by Rod McClure and WP Freight Car slides by Robert Forren. Finally, no convention would be complete without a couple of Virgil Staff's outstanding vintage 16mm films, which were presented by Thom Anderson and the WPRRHS.

Saturday's activities got started early with an excellent presentation by Joe Strapac on WP's Diesel Fleet, which contained a lot of information that he wasn't able to include in his new book, *Diesel Locomotives of the Western Pacific*. Other presentation on Saturday included *Oro Dam Railroads* by Dale Sanders, *25 Years of the FRRS* by Vic Neves and Wayne Monger, *WP 2-8-8-2 Steam Locomotives* by Eugene Vicknair, and, of course, more 16mm Virgil Staff films. John Ford continued to host his popular Oro Dam tours throughout the day.

Saturday evening the traditional banquet got underway with an outstanding dinner and dessert spread provided by the Feather Falls Casino kitchen staff. This year the banquet was extremely well attended and the room was packed. As dinner wound down, special guest and banquet speaker Al Evans took the podium.

Al was a WP employee for an amazing 41-years (1937-1978) and his positions included 39 different jobs in six different departments within the Western Pacific. It was a true honor to have him and many of his family and friends there, and to hear some of his great stories from his time on the WP. Al and many of his family members traveled all the way from Washington, Oregon, and Montana to attend the convention, a deeply touching gesture to all who enjoyed his amazing and humorous stories.

Capping off the evening, a kind donation of several boxes of genuine Western Pacific golf

balls was provided by former WP employee, Clarence Shipman, which Scott McAllister and Thom Anderson awarded to the winning raffle ticket holders. Also, the Western Pacific Railroad Museum donated a Plan B Rent-A-Locomotive certificate which was won by Robert Aton. Finally, Thom thanked Robert and Wendy Forren for their generous donation of the large UP heritage banner featuring the Western Pacific which we placed behind the podium in the banquet room. Robert had recently purchased the banner for donation the historical society. Thanks, Robert!



WPRRHS Admin Thom Anderson and the UP Heritage Banner donated by Robert and Wendy Forren.

After the goodies were handed out, David Epling reminded everyone about the new WP Centennial merchandise and commemorative box cars that were available through the WPRM gift shop. Then FRRS board member Wayne Monger announced that they would be presenting awards to Dave McClain, Bob Sims, and James Mason (who were all in absentia) for their significant contributions to the 2009-10 WPRR Centennial Locomotive Repainting Fund.

This year's convention had the second highest attendance ever with 140 registered guests. After all the bills were paid, the WPRRHS was able to net just over \$2,500.00, which will go towards funding next year's event in Stockton as well as provide much needed funds to the Arthur W.

Keddie Railroad Library and Archives. Thanks to all who attended and supported the event as this will insure the continuation of future conventions as well as help us formalize policies, procedures, and provide infrastructure for the preservation of the vast collection of historic Western Pacific materials in our archive.

Special thanks to John Ford for conducting the dam tours, to the California Department of Water Resources, and to FRRS board member Wayne Monger for making the arrangements with John and the DWR on behalf of the WPRRHS.

Special thanks also goes to Al Evans for making the trip to Oroville to entertain the banquet crowd with lots of memorable stories from his distinguished career on the Western Pacific.

Thanks also to all the presenters, exhibitors, and raffle sponsors listed above. Finally, thanks to Thom Anderson for taking on the task of convention chairman this year, to Tom Campbell and Scott McAllister for their invaluable assistance with the event, to Robert and Wendy Forren for donating the WP banner, and to Lyn Eaves of the Feather Falls Casino for all her help with the event. Thanks to Eugene Vicknair for his assistance in locating and evaluating the convention site. Thanks also to Vic Neves for handling all the A/V needs again this year.

Mark your calendars for April 16th and 17th, 2010 when the 14th annual WPRRHS Convention will be held at the Clarion Hotel & Suites in Stockton, California. Co-chairs Tom Carter and David Epling are recruiting content and presenters now so please contact them if you have something to share. Information on the 2010 Convention will be posted on the WPRRHS website as it becomes available.



Guest speaker and 41 year WP veteran Al Evans

