

2015 Western Pacific Historic Convention Report

By Eugene Vicknair, Convention Chair

The 2015 Historic Convention was held April 24-25, 2015 in Elko, Nevada, with a special charter trip to the Nevada Northern Railway Museum in Ely, NV on Sunday, April 26. This was our first convention to be held east of Reno, NV and we attracted a lot of folks from Elko and Salt Lake City, including several former Western Pacific and Southern Pacific employees. Some current Union Pacific folks also dropped in as Elko is a crew terminal and we offered special admission to crews on layover for the clinics.

The shows this year drew a lot of positive comment for their depth of information and level of presentation. They included two shows by Nevada Northern museum personnel on Friday, with former Western Pacific engineer Harry Baynes sharing his stories of working for the railroad and NNRy Executive Director Mark Bassett giving a talk on the Nevada Northern and its relationship with the WP.

Jeff Moore gave a great look at the McCloud River Railway and its importance to the WP and the Highline, with an in depth look at the history and traffic between the two roads. Wayne Monger started things off on Friday with a look at the WP's operations in Nevada and Utah and also had a detailed look at the difficult work involved in building through Flowery Lake Pass in Nevada.

We had two newly scanned, high resolution films from the Virgil Staff collection, one showing a ride on the *California Zephyr* in 1967-68 starting in Fremont, California and ending in Oroville. The other was, appropriately enough, a look at the east end of the WP starting just west of Salt Lake City and ending in Portola. For modelers, there was a clinic on car weathering by Bill Meeker and a modeling segment on the WP's SW1500 switchers. The SW1500 show was a group effort that covered the WP's efforts to order new switchers starting in the late 1960s, the delivery and use of the 1500s through their WP and UP days and finishing with their eventual retirement and the preservation of the 1503 by the FRRS. Contributors to the SW1500 included Al Fonseca, Dave Stanley, Rod McClure, Frank Brehm, Mike Muckin, Greg Elems, Ted Benson and many more.

Saturday's presentations closed out with a show by Eugene Vicknair on WP's obscure subsidiary the Deep Creek Railroad, which ran from Wendover, Utah to Gold Hill, Utah and a great look at the last days of Sacramento Northern's electric operations on the 50th anniversary of their end by Matthew Vurek and Edward F. Graham.

On Friday afternoon, Rod McClure and Steve Habeck, both Union Pacific employees, gave driving tours of the UP's Elko Yard and some historic WP locations around town. Thank you to Rod and Steve for donating their time and to Rod for donating the rental of a large van for the tours. Everyone seemed to enjoy the tours a great deal and we are going to look for opportunities to do similar events at future conventions.

The Saturday banquet speaker was former WP employee Michael Kessler who also brought a large amount of his railroad memorabilia collection. His stories of working for the WP were very informative

and entertaining and he stayed around after the banquet to answer questions and show off his collection. Thank you, Mike for being a great speaker!

The vendor room included the Museum Store, staffed by Gail McClure, and Brad Lomazzi, dealer in railroad collectibles. Brad made several donations to our archives from his photo collections. We also had specially retouched prints from the FRRS archives for sale and an exhibit of archives materials. About 10 new members signed up as part of the convention. Welcome to you all!

The raffle drew a lot of prize donations this year and raised several hundred dollars for the archives. Donations came from Peter Arnold, Kadee Quality Products, Broadway Limited, Kalmbach Publishing, railroad artist Marc Desobeau, Woodland Scenics, Signature Press, Shade Tree Press, the FRRS Museum Store and others. Thank you to all our raffle donors and we ask our members to remember these fine individuals and companies.

The finale to the entire event was a spectacular charter trip to Ely, Nevada via motor coach where we were treated to a catered lunch by Silver State Restaurant (1204 Aultman Street, Ely, NV; be sure to visit and say hi when you are in Ely!). The group had some time to look around the historic depot and its upstairs museum before boarding a special FRRS only train heading toward Ruth and pulled by classic 4-6-0 steamer #94. Two photo run-bys were held just west of the East Ely yard during the 2-1/2 hour trip. The train then returned to the yard and dropped us near the shops and enginehouse for a guided tour by NNRy Executive Director Mark Bassett. The tour explored every inch of the massive shop and house building, and then moved to the Repair In Place building which held even more treasures. The bus ride back included a quick stop at the NN station site of Currie and an inspection of the still standing depot there. Thank you to the entire Nevada Northern staff for giving our convention guests a great day on the railroad!

Planning for the 2016 convention is already in full swing. We are looking at either Lodi or Modesto in the Central Valley of California. Either way, we have some special events that will go along with these locations. The preliminary schedule is for April of 2016, so mark your calendar. We should be announcing details soon.

Thank you to everyone who joined us in Elko! And thank you to all the presenters and volunteers who made it happen.