

To: FRRS Board of Directors
From: Paul Finnegan, Webmaster
Re: Museum Web Page
Date: May 12, 2020

COVID-19 Update

The website has been kept up to date with all the new museum information regarding the COVID-19 health emergency. The home page, the Latest Museum News column, the calendars, etc. have been updated.

RAL Page

The [RAL page](#) was updated with the new rates and levels. It also has COVID-19 information on it.

Helping our Remote Learners

Once in a while, I get an insight into how our website is used by the public. On 4/17/20, I got an email from a mother whose daughter was using our Historical Dept web page for research for her remote learning project on transportation. Hannah had found our site and it was useful for her project. Additionally Hannah had found another site and thought it should be also on our website as a link. I have added the link and thanked Hannah for her suggestion. It is good to know our audience extends beyond the traditional rail fan and this is an example of how our society is achieving our mission statement.

Webcam Issue

On Friday April 10, I was working on improving the live webcams on the website. In working on the project, I discovered it was not updating. After a long investigation (details at the end of this report), I was able to put an improved webcam system online that should essentially eliminate the race problem that had the same camera more than once in a row as the image was refreshed.

General Items

- 4/8/20 – Posted *Train Sheet* #180 – Jan/Feb/Mar 2019 to Train Sheet Archive
- 4/8/20 – Posted April Board Meeting Preliminary Agenda on the [Minutes & Reports](#) webpage.
- 4/8/20 – Updated pre-release RAL page for Eugene Vicknair & board to review before going live.
- 4/11/20 – Posted April Board Meeting Agenda, Reports and Financials to the [Minutes & Reports](#) webpage.
- 4/11/20 – Posted COVID-19 Closure notice from Kerry Cochran on home page, Latest Museum News.
- 4/12/20 – Updated FRRS Calendars based on new revision sent by Eugene Vicknair.
- 4/12/20 – Posted 2020 Crew Training procedure and re-enabled the crew training signup tool.
- 4/17/20 – Added [suggested link](#) to our [WP History Links](#) webpage.
- 4/22/20 – Changed Members Dinner, Annual Membership Meeting and WP 1503 Dedication Celebration from "CANCELLED" to "(will be rescheduled – date TBD)" in online calendar for June events per request from Eugene Vicknair.
- 4/22/20 – Posted Approved March 2020 Board Meeting minutes, Preliminary April 2020 Board Meeting Minutes to the [Minutes & Reports](#) webpage.
- 4/24/20 – Corrected typo in banner on top of home page pointed out by KC Dunn (“Active” → “Active”)
- 4/30/20 – Added material to [Memories from the 2018 WP Historic Convention webpage](#) from Eugene Vicknair.
- 5/2/20 – Updated code for PayPal Button to Pay for Shipping of 2020 Convention Car per request from Eugene Vicknair.
- 5/8/20 – Posted a new photo from Greg Elems in the [Around the Museum 2020 gallery](#).
- 5/9/20 – Posted seven new photos from Greg Elems in the [Around the Museum 2020 gallery](#).

Webcam Issue - Another Hostmonster Problem

– more than you probably want to know about it

On Friday April 10, I was working on improving the live webcams on the website. In working on the project, I changed one of the cron jobs that maintain our website. In UNIX a “cron job” is a scheduled program that runs automatically. We make use of cron jobs to do the daily and weekly reports; daily, weekly and monthly webpage updates; and a few other maintenance tasks. The use of cron jobs is critical to keeping the website up to date. If we relied on a human to manually perform the updates the website would constantly be out of date.

After making my changes, the modified cron job would not start. I tried several different things and finally wrote the world’s simplest cron job that just created an empty file in the account’s root directory. It also failed. So about 5 p.m. I contacted Hostmonster and worked with front-line support for about half an hour to convince them they had a problem. Initially the response was this was a scripting problem and they do not support customer scripts. After pointing out I had 25 years experience as a UNIX system administrator, they agreed to escalate the problem to their level-2 sysadmin team. They opened ticket #21659062. About three hours later all of sudden I started getting emails from the test jobs I had created. I logged in and everything was working fine. What should have been a five-minute edit turned into almost 5 hours of work.

However, this was not the end of the job. The next day it started failing again. I reopened the ticket and got another sysadmin at Hostmonster to work with me. She (I think) explained they monitor system load and when the system load gets high, it automatically turns off cron and that was why my jobs were intermittently failing. With that understanding, I will have to consider what to do.

I decided to put additional performance logging information and created a daily report so I could track what was happening. For a couple days the job would run in the morning and evening but fail during the middle of the day. I started to redesign the software so the real work would happen on the webcam server at the museum rather than at Hostmonster so I could eliminate the cron job at Hostmonster. Before I could finish the new software design my logging information showed the old approach was working fine at Hostmonster. It has now been running without problems for about two weeks, so I went ahead and just left the improved old system online. I still get a daily report so I will continue to monitor it.