

Association of Railway Museums 1999 Convention Report

The 1999 ARM convention was hosted by the West Coast Railway Museum and held in Vancouver, British Columbia. All seminars were held in various meeting rooms of the Renaissance Hotel in the heart of city and overlooking the inner harbor. Two delegates from your Society attended this convention: Director Morgan and your Treasurer, Dan Brady. This was my second ARM convention and I was really impressed. West Coast assembled a fine cast of members that acted in the capacity of docents and guides. Virtually every activity was on time and flawlessly executed.

Since 4 seminars were offered simultaneously every 90 minutes, Dan and I selected the talks that were, in our opinion, of greatest value to the museum.

I attended a seminar on the preservation of heritage buildings, such as railroad stations and so forth. The presenter, a PHD and President of the Commonwealth Historic Resource Management, posed a way to evaluate an historical structure. From the presenters' viewpoint, most historical structures are not owned by museums but by everyone else. Many times a building receives an evaluation that may or may not help the owner, either to renovate the building or to upgrade it for other usage. It does help to at least raise public awareness.

For a railroad museum, a system of evaluation helps to access the potential historical significance of a railroad structure. The presenter offered 3 potential levels of interpretation, i.e. the maximum, moderate, and limited respect for historic fabric. Each level is dictated by the individual conditions surrounding the status of a structure, such as condition, ownership, and projected usage.

I also attended a seminar on "Retaining & Growing memberships", presented by Howard Bunte and Terry Shaw from the Friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad. I found this seminar particularly interesting because it mostly dealt with volunteerism. Memberships are important but memberships that produce volunteerism are even more valuable. The gist of their message concerned encouraging more recognition through awards, facilitation, and sensitivity to each volunteers needs. What this means in more specific detail is that each volunteer/member needs to feel a sense of job satisfaction. They need to feel they are accomplishing something in a personally fulfilling fashion. The facilitator (project manager) needs to understand a persons needs and talents and place them in the proper job. Placing a volunteer in the wrong job only leads to their frustration, disenchantment, complaining, and ultimately, estrangement.

Chama, New Mexico, the home of the Cumbres & Toltec Railroad, is one of the most remote places in the United States. It can be compared with Ely, NV for remoteness. One of the things I noticed with the Cumbres presenters was the lacking of membership support

facilities. I asked where their volunteers stayed and their reply was "in campgrounds and motels". This hit home for me because I personally believe in membership support facilities, such as our Silver Shower car and the sleeping car.

Where Cumbres and other museums have one up on Portola is in awards. They offer many more awards in many other classifications. We offer only one in all classes. I gleaned from this talk that we need more awards and more recognition in The Train Sheet of membership participation and achievement.

Paul Hammond of our neighbor CSRM presented another very interesting seminar on "Reaching In, Reaching Out: Publications for Your Museum and its Audiences. This addresses a broad spectrum of nuances dealing with communications with membership newsletters (The Train Sheet), staff newsletters, Web sites (wplives.com), guide books and catalogues. This was a lengthy dissertation but as a brief synopsis, it deals with what an organization puts in its publications. It must be aware of its audience and must understand what it is trying to achieve. For example, The Train Sheet is a newspaper. Its news must be of a timely fashion. It must, as noted in a previous seminar, recognize members and volunteers for the services rendered and it must put on, as best it can, a happy face.

Staff newsletters, which we do not publish at this time, convey different activities of staff movements, schedules, updates of events, and more "Attaboys". They provide specific and general information on housekeeping reminders, etc. It provides a bulletin board for assignments and deals with information not appropriate for general membership consumption or of little interest to them. It leaves the membership newsletter to concentrate on other things. This organization has not yet arrived at a point where such a newsletter will be needed, but it is nice to know what it can do when the time comes.

A web site can also be a newspaper, but it also conveys a broader theme of general information and an easily updated bulletin board. The ability to manipulate this information virtually on an hour by hour basis makes the web site a powerful tool. Most of its realize this but the big message is how to control this tool. I learned the importance of a webmaster (web page manager). I also learned the importance of registering as a "Unique Domain Name" and the importance of providing proper funding for web site maintenance.

Lastly, the Guidebooks, Collections and Exhibit Catalogues. What I got from this was a clear idea as to the importance of guidebooks, especially at Portola where we have little information signage describing each piece of equipment. Until the day comes when we do have proper signs with sufficient information to engage the enthusiasm of the reader, a current guidebook would be a most useful tool. The other catalogs both collections and exhibits, focus on the way in which the archives people deal with dis-

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semination of scholarly information and that which concerns artifacts. This also deals with the marketability of such information.

All seminars were held in the mornings. In the afternoons, field trips to various railroad locations or sites consistent with the theme of the convention took place. The first trip was on Thursday, September 30 to Drake Street Roundhouse, a former Canadian Pacific facility in Vancouver where lunch was served. This is a restored roundhouse, which had been threatened with destruction by the redevelopment of the neighborhood for Expo 86. This was probably the West Coast Railway Museum's first project that galvanized their organizational talents to achieve a major objective. From this, I believe, it established the machinery to move forward with other museum related projects with greater skills and confidence. The buildings are beautifully done. One particular thing, which impressed me, was the brick floors which were adorned with names of the contributors to the restoration of the roundhouse. Outside was a CP 4-4-0 steam locomotive gently steaming. Later, we were bused to the B.C. Rail steam shops in North Vancouver.

At this site, we reviewed the layout of the steam locomotive shops, listened to a dissertation on the woes of running a steam locomotive and the challenges involved to maintaining such locomotives.

On Wednesday evening, we had the privilege of riding the Pacific Starlight Dinner Train between North Vancouver and Porteau Cove. I had the opportunity and the distinct pleasure of riding in the dome section of former WP CZ dome coach, "Silver Feather". The ride was smooth and the experience very nostalgic. One could almost see Paxton, Blaisden, or a dozen other canyon towns slipping by in the night.

Early Friday afternoon, we visited the B.C. Maritime Museum and listened to speakers' talk about how their museum has had to constantly reinvent itself in order to keep it fresh and new. This is a subject that has been very near to my heart because this is the trick to keeping both member/volunteers and the general public coming back to our museum in Portola.

Late Friday afternoon found us at the VIA/Amtrak Station for an open house. This was exciting. Our West Coast Railway hosts had lined up a portion of the VIA stainless steel BUDD equipment used on the "Canadian" including an observation dome car, sleeping car, and dining car. There was a reception and I was dazzled with the condition of the equipment. It was like being on the CZ again including the lighted curved glass railings for the dome steps. The cars were just perfect. If this wasn't enough, we next had a tour of the newest Amtrak Talgo Train. The train, named the Cascade, had barely been in service a few weeks between Seattle and Vancouver, BC. We were then ushered aboard the

Rocky Mountaineer, a custom-built scenic cruise train that operates between Vancouver, Jasper and Banff. High in the full-length domes, we were the guests of the Rocky Mountaineer with yet another reception.

On Saturday, I drove to North Vancouver. Once there, I met up with our group, which had been bused from the Hotel to the BC Rail terminal where we boarded the Royal Hudson Train to the West Coast Railway Museum at Heritage Park in Squamish, BC. The ride behind the Royal Hudson was exciting in a different way than the dinner train of two nights previous. For one thing, one could hear the sounds of the steam coaches as the train snaked around the numerous curves that wind along Horseshoe Bay. The day was perfect, as had been the weather the entire time we were in BC. At Squamish, another train pulled by ex CP FP-7A #4069, freshly restored and pulling several BC Rail Coaches met us. The shuttle train moved us from the steam train unloading area through the gates of the museum around a loop, similar to Portola and to an as yet uncompleted railroad station in the heart of the museum. There we unloaded and proceeded with personal tours of the museum. I spent the rest of the afternoon exploring as much of the museum as possible, taking careful notes and burning up film.

Late in the afternoon, we re-boarded the Royal Hudson train for the return trip to North Vancouver. There, Dan Brady and I drove back to the Hotel. Later in the evening, I met Dan and we attended the ARM convention banquet held at the Renaissance Hotel Harborside Ballroom. We listened to an excellent presentation and slide show of the history of the BC Electric Railway.

Earlier in the convention, I had approached Peter Gagnon of the Orange Empire Railroad Museum with the idea of forming a regional ARM. The purpose of a regional ARM is to create a dialog and communication system, both to break down walls of mistrust and to build a bridge of understanding between railroad museums in the west. Peter thought it a good idea and after receiving the approval of Scott Becker, President of ARM, Peter and I started to talk the idea around with the other western rail museum representatives. Sunday morning found us attending the annual meeting where ARM's directors were elected. It was during that meeting that Peter announced the formation of the western regional ARM, or WestARM.

As stated previously, this was my second ARM convention. Many kudos must be given to West Coast for their organization, coordination and execution of all of the seminars and field trips. From this convention, I came away with the feeling that as a problem-solving tool for all railroad museums in North America, ARM is one of our biggest assets. I was privileged to attend.

- Doug Morgan