



Preserving "THE FEATHER RIVER ROUTE"



# The Train Sheet

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News from the Feather River Rail Society and the Portola Railroad Museum

## Donation of Western Pacific's Portola Hospital to FRRS

Earlier this year we learned there was a chance for a possible donation of the old Western Pacific hospital property to the FRRS. Once the details were worked out the donation of the property from Peggy Marquez to the FRRS was accomplished on the 17th of December. We are most grateful to this wonderful lady for allowing us to be the recipient of such a tremendous historical donation.

Serving the community, Western Pacific's hospital in Portola was first established in 1914. Building and grounds were owned by the Western Pacific and leased to the Medical Department. An addition was added a few years later and in 1950 the building was rehabilitated at a cost of \$25,000.00. A grant of \$11,300.00 from the Ford Foundation was awarded on December 13, 1955 with the first half of the grant arriving in July 1956 and the second half within a period of the following 18 months. No part of the grant could be



A cold December morning shows the hospital as it looks today. With work, grants, and effort it will be rebuilt. -Jim Murphy photo

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## FRRS and Truckee RR Days, Part 2

By Doug Morgan

Charlie Crocker had a problem. It was mid December 1866 and in the Donner Pass area it was snowing—a lot. Mr. Crocker, Superintendent of Construction for the Central Pacific Railroad and his associates (they were later to be labeled the "Big Four") were concerned about the difficulties they were to encounter in their attempt to cross the Sierra Nevada Mountains. They cast their eyes disconcertingly across the continent to the progress in miles being achieved by the Union Pacific along the

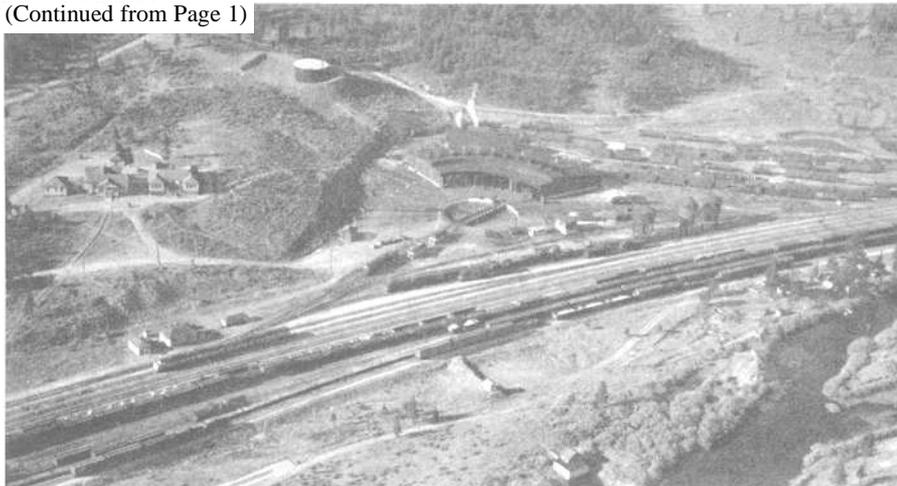
Platte River.

The Sierras are buffeted hard on the western slopes by winter storms but much of the fury is often spent by the time the storms reach the eastern slope. But in the winter of 1866 and 1867, the heavy snowstorms were hitting on a weekly basis, drifting cuts to the top. Avalanches were burying construction camps. Workers were swept to their deaths, their bodies not being discovered until the spring thaw. Progress that had gone so well in good weather was now nonexistent. Something had to be done and Charlie Crocker was about to make a momentous decision.

He ordered that 3 locomotives, (Continued on Page 11)

## Western Pacific's Portola Hospital

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In a photo taken by Eastman's Studio in the early to mid 1940's the hospital can be seen in the upper left. Notice the roundhouse is still present with two ALCo switchers on the turntable lead and a four unit set of FT's is in front of the yard office. August 1957 Mileposts equipment.

On July 21, 1956 Western Pacific indicated that interior improvements to the hospital were about to begin and the exterior would receive a complete facelift in the spring of 1957. Improvements were completed by years end at a cost of \$7000.00 including new asbestos exterior siding, general rehabilitation, and painting inside and out.

February 1957 found the formation of the Western Pacific Hospital Auxiliary, which reflected a growing interest by those in the Portola community wanting to assure the continued successful operation of the hospital. Activities undertaken by the auxiliary included reading to patients, writing letters for them, baby sit for mothers visiting the clinic, act as interpreters for non-English speaking patients, run personal errands, and make small purchases. Additionally volunteers spent many hours labeling medicine bottles, sewing torn linens, and other tasks not normally performed by the regular staff.

The Western Pacific Hospital Auxiliary undertook landscaping of the grounds including trees, a new lawn, and sprinkler system. A feature of the landscaping project was the memorial dedication of a spruce tree on the grounds in honor of Dr. J. D. Coulter who passed away August 23, 1951. Dr. Coulter had served as the division surgeon for 17 years at the hospital.

Since being built patients seeking treatment at the hospital had been split about equally between railroad employees and members of the community having other occupations and not related to employees of Western Pacific. Emergency patients were not the only ones treated at the hospital. Nearly half of the WP employees assigned for treated in Portola for long-term convalescence care and had been transferred from various points on the system between Salt Lake City and San Francisco. A Board of Directors consisting of Western Pacific management and a representative from each of the different labor organizations oversaw operation of all hospitals within the Western Pacific system.

Taken out of service in the early 1970's and declared excess the property was sold. Planning for renovation of the property and buildings is now underway.



In a Miller Photo taken on May 25, 1957 the open entrance to the right hospital building has been enclosed by this time. A new diesel house has replaced the roundhouse and the water tank in the background has been replaced.

August 1957 Mileposts

Information for this article was obtained from the following issues of Mileposts; January 1956, September 1956, August 1957, and October 1957.



This 1957 view of the hospital shows the newly installed siding and what appears to be a new roof. Exterior and nterior surfaces had also just been repainted.

# Truckee RR Days

(Continued from Page 1)



Shortly after arrival in Truckee the train was spotted in the clear while the crew took a break prior to spotting the equipment.

- photo by Norman Holmes

40 freight cars, 40 miles of track materials and workman be hauled on sleighs over the pass from Cisco, CA to an area near Donner Lake, then known as Coburn's Station. This idea made nothing but good sense because from that location, later renamed Truckee, work could be continued at the lower elevations with more favorable weather conditions. The construction crews could work west in order to build the summit tunnel and east towards Reno. Thus Truckee was born.

The Western Pacific train of odyssey spent the Labor day weekend, September 3rd, 4th, 5th and most of the 6th in the former SP yard in Sparks, parked. This had not been the plan. The former private car tracks in Sparks, which are located immediately east and north of the Sparks depot, were to be the spotting point for the train. On those tracks, cleaning and other preparatory activities were to be performed. However, when the train arrived in Sparks those tracks were occupied by the construction cars of the Union Pacific rail gang assigned the task of rebuilding the Reno branch from Reno to Parr yard. Their task was the installation of continuously welded rail (CWR) and concrete t i e s .

Therefore, the train of odyssey was relegated to the general areas of the yard on track 17. There the train waited, until the afternoon of September 6th, when the word was given, "prepare to move your train". Steve Habeck and I arrived on the scene in the early afternoon. We were told get the locomotives fired up in order to wye the train because it was pointed east. Siophan Smart arrived at about the same time with some of her friends and loaded themselves aboard the UP 105. Shortly, the 707, with Steve once again at the controls, and the 4404 were on the move with the train heading east to an area known as zone 5, where the Sparks wye was located. The train took the east leg backing down to clear Glendale Ave and then moved ahead on the west leg and proceeded back into the Sparks yard, pulling up to the extreme west end. Here we waited. From here to Truckee, the UP was going to give us a tow with 4 helper units. Around 4 PM the helpers tied onto the 707 and away the train went. I was once

again assigned to the caboose with a UP conductor. My job was to inspect the plain bearing units at Boca and again at Verdi.

April 3rd, 1868 was the official date for the completion of the last link of track on the "Hill" to Truckee. Truckee immediately assumed its importance as a helper station. Here a full 360-degree fully covered roundhouse was installed to protect early day wood burning locomotives from elements while being serviced and to keep snow from filling up the turntable pit. Here too were installed a passenger station, a freight station, car shops and a community to accommodate the growing needs of Truckee as a way station for the railroad.

In Truckee, the helper station saw more and bigger steam locomotives to push and pull the heavier and heavier trains up the hill. At first it was 4-4-0's, 2-6-0's, later 2-8-0's and still later, after the turn of the century, behemoths such as Mallets and 4-8-8-2's. With the diesel age came the SD-9's like the 4404 and today, SD-45 tunnel motors growl their way to the top of the mountains. Same challenge just different locomotives. To all of this, the traditions of railroaders and the mountain have changed little. Truckee is still Truckee and the railroad is still the railroad.

The train of odyssey rolled smoothly through Reno, past Lawton, and on to our first inspection stop at Verdi. Everything was normal.

Verdi had come into being because of the railroad and timber. In this case, there was a lot of timber suitable for railroad ties. Thousands and thousands of ties were needed to build the railroad and thousands more would be needed for future for extensions. Eventually the Verdi Lumber Company was formed and scores of miles of logging railroads were constructed all over the mountains to the north of the Truckee River.

The day of our passing through, Verdi was quiet, the mill was long gone and so were the logging railroads. Verdi is now a quiet bedroom community for Reno.

Off again, the train rolled on until we stopped in Boca,



Generations apart, both old and new EMD products shared the spotlight at Truckee. - photo by Vic Neves

## Truckee RR Days

CA for another inspection. Boca came into being again because of the railroad and some other things including ice ponds. Ice was being cultivated in season, sawn into blocks and used to ice refrigerator cars used to haul produce. Timber was also in the picture and like Verdi, a railroad was to be constructed that would eventually reach back into Smith Neck Valley, to Loyalton, and beyond to the Northern extremes of the Sierra Valley. This was the Boca & Loyalton Railroad.

Everything looked good on the equipment at Boca, so the high ball was given. Like Verdi, Boca was quiet, the southern section of the B & L had been abandoned in 1920 by its then owners, the Western Pacific Railroad.

Further on, our train approached the outskirts of Truckee. A construction company, that is building a giant overpass that will ultimately take highway 89, using a by-pass, around Truckee, had many of its off duty workers lined up with trucks flashing their headlights and blowing their horns to welcome the train to Truckee. Shortly the train entered the Truckee yards and was switched to the lumber company spur on the extreme west end. It was now dark and all agreed that we should just spot the train, cut off the helper power and allow them to proceed with their duties of pushing trains up the hill rather than to start switching. We then tied down our train and piled into Siophan's vehicle and descended I-80 to Reno where we dispersed in our own vehicles to our respective homes.

Nothing much happened on Thursday, September the 7th, but by Friday the 8th we were running out of time. In that AM, Steve Habeck and I made our way to Truckee to start setting up the train as individual displays for the weekend festival. The 707 was again fired up in preparation for switching. About the time we were to start moving the equipment, a very large and new SD-70M, UP 4167 came up the main from Roseville with the WP 2001 and an SP flanger in tow.

The odd little train turned itself on the Truckee Balloon and then cut the 2001 off. Steve then fired up 2001 but couldn't make it load so it was shut it down. It was then decided to simply switch using the 707, where needed, and the UP 4167. Back and forth the switching went until all of the equipment was spotted in just the right way for access by the general public. All this was done under the watchful eye of Truckee Railroad Days Train Coordinator, Siophan Smart. If some car or locomotive didn't look right where it was spotted, that piece was moved someplace else. It was not unlike rearranging the furniture in ones living room.

PRM Superintendent of Operations, Jim Gidley, arrived on the scene along with Dwight Wolfinger from Bend, OR. Once all the switching was completed, it was time to get to work on the equipment. Later, Vic Neves arrived. Arrangements had been made to rent a pressure washer. This machine was turned on the UP business car 105, the VIA cars, with mixed results, then onto the 925 and the 805. Late into the afternoon, worked continued setting up stairs and hitching up the power plant to the VIA cars.

As night descended on the festival site, some of us drifted away for dinner. Steve Habeck elected to persevere and continued to pressure wash. By himself he did the 501, 244, and the 2001 and would have washed one of the cabooses had he not run out of water hose.

Next Month: Coming Home!

## Information Technology System

By Frank Brehm

Over the last year, many volunteer hours have been spent putting together a plan to integrate computers and a networking system at the museum. We are seeing positive steps in this endeavor with the recent purchase of two Compaq Servers that will be the center of the new network. Envisioned in the "Information Technology" plan is the ability of volunteers to use the new system to log hours spent at the museum, track membership status, inventory control, as well as an interactive system for visitors use. We have been fortunate in receiving volunteer help from a network consultant who has agreed to evaluate our plan and make suggestions as appropriate. Site visits are planned with installation of available computer systems beginning right after the first of the year.

Although we have, the basic plan in place much more is needed, with computer systems topping the list. A minimum set of standards for individual computer workstations has been decided upon and we are working on the wiring necessary to bring the system online. This will be a networking system comprised of computers stationed in appropriate areas for volunteer use and also in areas used for the day to day business of running the society.

Computers will be installed in the following areas as availability permits. Two in the office area, two in the operations office, one in the gift shop, two in the library car, two in the planned volunteer lounge area, and two in the planned library research area.

We are also looking at having a minimum of two "touch screen" systems for visitor use which will provide historical information on our society, the museum, and the equipment preserved there.

Systems planned for use in the library will include scanners for transferring paper documents and photos to an electronic format that will be included in a database for easy retrieval by both members and visitors. This will alleviate the unnecessary handling of these documents and photos by those wishing to research historical facts concerning the Western Pacific and other railroads that we might have information on.

What we find now is a lack of funds to expand the basic system that will be in place soon after the first of the year. Two computers have already been donated which meet the minimum requirements with a third possible which includes a Compact Disk Read-Write drive for use in the library car. Software has been purchased and an inventory control system will be put in place to ensure accountability of use by our society. As you can tell by the numbers of planned installations more computers are needed. Think of us if you have an extra computer or components that we may be able to use.

### **Minimum computer requirements are;**

CPU: Pentium class 133 mhz or higher.

Memory: 32 megabytes with a target of 64 megabytes.

Hard drive: 1-gigabyte minimum, target 10-gigabyte.

Video card: 8 megabyte VGA.

NIC card: 10/100 mps.

Monitor: 17" with a 15.7" viewable area.