



The Santa Maria Valley Railway Historical Museum

P.O. Box 264, Santa Maria, CA 93456-0264; (805) 714-4927
The Museum: Santa Maria Town Center Mall, Sat./Sun. 1-4:30pm
<http://www.smvrhm.org/> School/Club groups by appointment.

History of Caboose No. 180

As best we have been able to find out, Caboose No. 180 was built in the Springfield shops of the Saint Louis & San Francisco Railroad, (the Frisco) in 1936 or 1937. The Huntoon Trucks, which hold the wheels, are dated 1936 and are marked with "STL-SFRY." Pictures of surviving Frisco Cabooses show an identical caboose to No. 180.

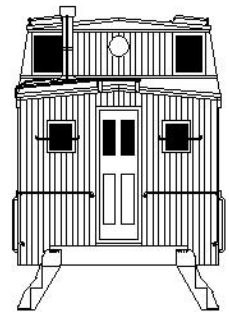
The Caboose shown below is presently on display in Pauls Valley OK. Its configuration identifies it was up to the late 1940s when the Frisco railroad changed the style of the end ladders to a "low rise" style.

Caboose No. 180 was apparently purchased by the Santa Maria Valley Railroad from the Frisco in the mid 1950s along with a sister caboose, No. 190.

Pictures surviving in the archives of the California State Railroad Museum show one of these cabooses (the number cannot be made out) being pulled by a SMVRR steam engine in March 1956, implying that the SMVRR had purchased it prior to that time.

The Santa Maria Valley Railroad used No. 180 as a mobile office and "day room" for its crews in its operations between Guadalupe and Santa Maria. Along the way, No. 180 lost its roof walks and ladders. In the early 1980s, No. 180 and its sister, No. 190, were retired. No. 190 was eventually scrapped but Mr. Milo Ferini, who kept it stored west of town, at Rancho Harvest, purchased No. 180.

The Santa Maria Valley Railway Historical Museum received Mr. Ferini's kind donation of No. 180 in 2000. The Museum undertook its restoration which you see today.





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Technology Overtakes the Caboose

The Beginning of Obsolescence

Caboose became a uniquely American tradition. Overseas, their use had always been rare, or was eliminated many years ago. Even in the United States, technological change began eliminating the need for cabooses before the turn of the century.

The spread in the 1880s of the automatic air brake system invented by George Westinghouse eliminated the need for brakemen to manually set brakes. The air brakes were soon followed by the use of electric track circuits to activate signals, providing protection for trains and eliminating the need for flagmen. Friction bearings were replaced by roller bearings, reducing overheated journals and making visual detection by smoke an unlikely event.

Trains became longer, making it difficult for the conductor to see the entire train from the caboose, and freight cars became so high that they blocked the view from the traditional cupola. The increasing heaviness and speed of the trains made on-board cooking hazardous and unnecessary. New labor agreements reduced the hours of service required for train crews and eliminated the need for cabooses as lodging. Cabooses, when used at all, were drawn from "pools" and no longer assigned to individual conduc-

tors.

Eventually, electronic "hotbox" and dragging equipment detectors, which would check moving trains more efficiently and reliably than men in cabooses, were installed along main lines, and computers eliminated the conductors' need to store and track paperwork.

The Caboose's Replacement

Today, the ends of freight trains are monitored by remote radio devices called "End of Train" devices, or EOTs. The small boxes fit over the rear coupler and are coupled into the train's air brake line.

The EOT radios information to the engineer regarding the brake pressure at the rear of the train, whether or not the last car is moving, and whether or not the flashing red light is working (activated at night by a sensor). The EOT also allows the engineer to set the air brakes from the rear of the train in case the train breaks in two, thus, in an emergency, setting brakes on both halves of the train. The UPRR began using EOT devices in 1984.





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2,000 volunteer hours later... Caboose No. 180 is done!

On Thursday, September 2, 2004 historic Santa Maria Valley Railroad (SMVRR) Caboose No. 180 was moved by railroad crews back to its old home in front of the depot building at the corner of Jones and S. McClelland streets. Several members of the Santa Maria Valley Railway Historical Museum (SMVRHM) went along for a ride in the car they spent several years restoring. This was the first "rail fan trip" over the local railroad since 1958. David Jennings, general manager of the SMVRR had the line's two yellow GE 70-ton locomotives hooked up back-to-back as they traditionally ran when the railroad was in the sugar beet hauling business, handling some nine to ten thousand carloads of beets a year. The sugar refinery, a long time landmark industry of the valley shut down in 1993, ending the beet hauling on the rail line.

The car has spent the last two years on the Larrabee Brother's spur where volunteers from the railway museum, led by "Ca-Boss" Phil Goble, have completely restored it to the way it appeared when it was in use by the local railroad company.

The caboose was one of two purchased by the SMVRR in 1956 from (it is believed) the St. Louis & San Francisco RR (Frisco), and put into service joining a third caboose, the 170 which is now located at the Oceano Depot. In 1962, the railroad acquired two modern steel cabooses and the wooden cars were retired and disposed of except for the 180, which was used when one of the steel cars was in the

shop. No. 180 served the SMVRR until 1983 when it was retired.

The car was then purchased by Betteravia Farms and spent many years on the end of a spur track off S. Blosser road, where it had fallen into disrepair. The caboose attracted the attention of the railroad museum in 1999, and when asked, Milo Ferini, owner, donated the caboose to the museum. 



September 2, 2004. SMVRR Caboose No. 180 is placed at the depot by back-to-back SMVRR 70-tonners.



The core restoration crew (left to right): Ed Couch, Kevin O'Roark, Phil Goble, and Dr. Marcus.



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The Caboose

A strange word for a strange railroad car that somehow survived for more than a hundred years, from the days of oil burning lamps into the computer age.

The Origin of the Caboose

The origins of both the car and the word are surrounded as much by legend as by fact. One popular version dates the word back to a derivation of the Dutch word “kabuis,” which referred to a ship’s galley. Use of cabooses began in the 1830s, when railroads housed trainmen in shanties built onto boxcars or flatcars.

The Cupola

The addition of the cupola—the look-out post atop the car—is attributed to a conductor who discovered in 1863 that he could see his train much better if he sat atop boxes and peered through the hole in the roof of his boxcar.

Uses for the Caboose

The caboose served several functions, one of which was as an office for the conductor. A printed “waybill” followed every freight car from its origin to destination. The conductor kept the paperwork in the caboose.

The caboose also carried a brakeman and a flagman. In the days before automatic air brakes the engineer signaled the caboose with his whistle when he wanted to slow down or stop. The

brakeman would then climb out and make his way forward, twisting the brakewheels atop the cars with a stout club. Another brakeman riding the engine would work his way toward the rear. Once the train was stopped, the flagman would descend from the caboose and walk back to a safe distance with lanterns, flags, and other warning devices to stop any approaching trains.

Once underway, the trainmen would sit up in the cupola and watch for smoke from overheated wheel journals (called hotboxes) or other signs of trouble.

The Conductor’s Home Away From Home

It was common for railroads to assign a caboose to a conductor for his exclusive use. Conductors took great pride in their cars, despite the caboose’s many derogatory nicknames, including “crummy,” “doghouse,” “bone-breaker,” “snake wagon,” and “hearse.” The men decorated their car interiors with many homey touches, including curtains and family photos. Some of the most important additions were ingredients for cooking meals that became a part of American folklore. Augmented with such comforting features, the caboose served as a home away from the trainmen’s home terminals. 🚂