



TRAIN ORDERS

Volume 2004, Number 3

May 2004

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.

4th Annual Choo Chew Saturday May 1, 2004

It couldn't have been more fun!

A couple hundred train lovers showed up at the Bitter Creek Western Railroad (BCWRR) on the Nipomo Mesa to enjoy train rides and BBQ from 10am until 4pm. And the trains were running full practically all day long!




Boarding at the BCWRR depot. At left is Karl's Pacific live steam locomotive, and at right is a Southern Pacific X-1 (battery powered).

Meetings

General: first Thursday of the month, 6:00pm, at the Santa Maria Inn.

Museum Development: Thursdays (except first Thursday of the month) at the Museum, 6:00pm

HO Modelers: Fridays at the Museum, 7:00pm.


Caboose Crew: Saturdays at the caboose, 8-11am. 

Rail Bosses

Gary Van Aken, President, gary.vanaken@verizon.net

Dick Mininger, Vice President, BoothR8@aol.com

Phil Goble, Treasurer, "CaBoss", Phil.Pam@Prodigy.net

Jamie Foster, Secretary, "Train Orders" Editor, Webman, jamie@jf2.com 


Many thanks to Karl Hovanitz and all his good friends at the BCWRR for donating the use of the railroad and the operation of all the trains to this SMVRHM event!



At left, the station manager (standing, in uniform) directs loading and unloading at the depot.


Below, the 1.6" scale model of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad's No. 1801 rounds a far turn with a full contingent of passengers.

For more about the BCWRR, visit their web site: www.bittercreekwesternrr.org

Pictures on the following pages are from this Choo Chew Saturday event. 



BCWRR Founder, Doug Chancey, passed away on April 29

The Santa Maria Valley Railway Historical Museum members and friends extend their heartfelt sympathies to the family and friends of Doug Chancey, founder of the Bitter Creek Western Railroad back in the early 1980s, who passed away this past April 29th. He was clearly one of model railroading's greatest friends. Memorial gifts in Doug's name may be sent to the Church of Christ, 202 S. 8th, Grover Beach, CA 93433. 

Railroad Memories

by Hal Madson

Ever since my book *Railroads of the Santa Maria Valley* came out, I have been asked; "Have you always been interested in trains?" I guess I have to say yes, for about as long as I can remember. What is weird is that I honestly don't remember ever wanting to be a locomotive engineer, at least not until I took a ride on the Silverton about twenty years ago and the engineer was this kid in his twenties.

My first recollection of a Santa Maria Valley train was when I was about five years old when Mom took my sister and me up into the cab of the steam engine (No. 205) that was at the fair grounds. I remember she told us that it was the engine that we saw in all the cowboy movies and I was convinced that it was the only one, the engine that had won the west!

I have some vivid memories coming of age in close proximity to the tracks of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad. We never did anything like what John Page and his buddies did to the Pennsey, (remember the outhouse story?) but there were some moments. Like the time we tried to drop a rock down the stack of the 21 when it passed beneath the US 101 bridges being constructed over the right of way.

Dad moved our family into a new house on the east edge of town near the tracks during the summer of 1958. It was in a neighborhood of custom homes and there were no houses to block the view of the main line of the SMVRR I had from my bedroom window. At least not till the Oliver's house was built.

The first job of the day left the yards about 7 a.m. and often would first travel east to Rosemary, Gates or Battles before coming back through Santa Maria and finally ending up in Guadalupe. The train would blow its horn for the Bradley Road crossing just before coming into the view I had from my window. I watched the first few times and was rewarded by the sight of either a pair of green or yellow 70-ton diesel locomotives and a car or two. I soon bored of this and would try to sleep through the sounds of the Hancock Air Horn; (which sounded like a steam whistle) the shaking and dull rumble the ground took on even from the small locomotives.

One morning I was jolted from slumber by the loud whistle of a steam locomotive. I thought they were extinct and had to see if it were really so. I anxiously waited and sure enough, a silver-faced smoke belching steam locomotive chuffed past. I went running into the kitchen to tell my parents whereupon my dad said that I had to have been dreaming, there were no more steam engines. I went back to my room to wait for its return. About a half hour later I heard the whistle and sure enough, I confirmed my discovery as I saw the locomotive chuff past running tender first and pulling a gondola.

Soon after that my friends and I were going down to the yards to watch the trains. The entire perspective of

this story was gained from those times we hung out in the railroad yard. We didn't have a lot of trains in Santa Maria, but the eleven o'clock job often spent time switching reefers at the packing sheds and making up a train for drops west of Broadway. This would keep us entertained for about an hour or two.

Believe it or not, at first, I didn't know what SMVRR stood for. I was standing on the depot platform looking at this old dilapidated side door caboose, (No. 171). It was painted caboose red (brown, right?) and had arch-bar trucks. They kept it at the end of the team track where it sat in disuse. There were three other cabooses that were yellow. That was another thing; I always thought cabooses were supposed to be red. Well, I hadn't developed an interest in trains beyond watching them and had never thought much about railroad names till then. So there I was staring at the faded white letters "SMVRR" on this caboose when it dawned on me that they stood for Santa Maria Valley Railroad! So at the age of eleven I was doing my first research and learning things about the SMVRR never thinking one day I would write a book about what I was staring at.

There always seemed to be a little action at the roundhouse, which is really a rectangle. At that time there were two steam locomotives and five diesels. One of the steamers, No. 100 was stored on a short spur (the rip track) next to the roundhouse. The cab was open and we would climb up into it and play engineer. One of the kids would ring the bell and I remember that I was afraid someone would hear us and we all would get into trouble. That never happened. So we would play on the old 100 until some other kids set a fire in her cab and the railroad boarded her up. Too bad some have to spoil it for others.

They were in the process of painting the green locomotives yellow and did the painting in the shop. They kept the doors open to let the paint fumes out, and you should have seen the yellow cloud! There is no way they

(continued next page)



A train-full of passengers crosses a bridge on the BCWRR during Choo Chew Saturday (see front page story).

could do something like that today, what with the air quality standards we now have. They did all kinds of repair in the shop. Once one of the diesels had been in a mishap and the front end was bashed in pretty good. Well, they got it all straightened out. One other time they completely rebuilt one of the diesels removing the hood and taking the prime mover down to the block.

The one thing that really excited us was when they used No. 21. I can remember seeing her run at night. That was cool, seeing the fire flashing in the firebox under the cab. You couldn't see that during the day. The 21 was in the regular schedule sharing duty with two other two locomotive sets during beet season. There were three jobs per day and so one crew headed out at 7a.m., the next at 11a.m. and a third at 4 p.m.. When the 21 was assigned to the 4 p.m. job (this is the one that moved the reefers out to Guadalupe by 7 p.m.) she would fill the sky over the yard with smoke as the crew switched the reefers in the packing shed complex. This huge cloud would form over the yard; which was about four blocks from our house.

About 1960 apartments were constructed between our house and the tracks. Now these apartments were right across Jones Street from the tracks and when old 21 was making a Saturday 7 a.m. run out to Rosemary I swear the engineer held her whistle down from where those apartments started all the way to Bradley Road. I guess the engineer figured if he had to be up that early those apartment dwellers might as well be up too.

Captain Hancock had a Cadillac limousine. Not a stretch like you see today, just a standard factory made limousine. He had a chauffeur. He provided housing for his employees, in some cases gratis. Well, the old chauffeur's house was right in the railroad yard about where the packing shed tracks converged with the main line. He had a fenced yard you couldn't see into and all kinds of pigeon hutches. I can only imagine how much rest the poor man and his birds got during train time. It often took a good three hours to switch the packing sheds, ice house and assemble the night train for Guadalupe.



Karl's Southern Pacific Lines No. 4409 travels through a shady area of the BCWRR on Choo Chew Saturday (see front page story).

In May of 1959 the Santa Maria Times announced that the railroad got a new diesel engine. We all got on our bikes and rode down to the roundhouse to get a look at it. We didn't get to see anything since they had it inside the roundhouse. It was a few days later we saw it on a run from the roundhouse out to just past the College Drive crossing, (called Airport Avenue back then) where it paused, blew its horn and went back to the roundhouse. Musta been a test drive. That was the only time I saw No. 60 operated as a single unit. The crews didn't like the cut down export cab, so it was always MU'ed with another unit.

After the 60 joined the roster the railroad had three sets of double units and the 21 went into semi-retirement working only Saturdays. I have always thought the Captain might have done it this way so kids could see a real steam engine operating on a Saturday afternoon and not be fettered by school or church. We sure liked watching her work the yard and would put pennies on the track to be flattened. I still have one somewhere.

One day a couple of buddies and me were watching the new locomotive and its partner, (No. 40 I think) switch railway express reefers on the Suey siding. They always stored about sixty express cars per season to ship strawberries. The crew was picking certain cars out of the cut to be moved into the yard. Well, there was a lull in the activity and Jerry and I looked up and saw Micky in the cab alongside a crewman. We asked if we could come up and were invited into the cab. That was the first time any of us had been in the cab of an operating locomotive. As Clint Eastwood would say, it made our day.

It was rumored that Capt. Hancock would give kids rides in the locomotives and Micky did get to go for the day with 21 and her crew. His mother played the organ at the church the Captain attended, so he had a leg up on the rest of us kids.

On February 24, 1962 No. 21 was retired. It was a memorable occasion as none other than Walt Disney (who was a rail-fan and close friend of Captain Hancock's) rode in the cab as a guest engineer. Of course we went down to the depot to watch the train and see Walt Disney. There was a brass band and lots of people, some dressed up as people did back in the "old days." I suppose my children would tell me that the days I now write about were the old days.

As soon as she rounded the curve west of Blosser Road we saw the headlight. She pulled five commuter cars all loaded with Hancock family members and guests, some four hundred people. There were four generations of the Hancock family on the train and they claimed that this was a first anywhere, four generations riding the same train with the family patriarch at the throttle.

We all crowded around the cab when the train came to a stop to get autographs and snap photos. They put out a book commemorating the last run and there is a photo of me in it, standing on the running board of the locomotive and snapping a photo of the cab. It was kind of sad when they rolled her into her stall, RH1, in the roundhouse. We all realized that we would never see her under

steam again. (Maybe some day I will. The 21 is now being restored in Astoria Oregon for operation as a tourist attraction).

Another big event was the time Richard Nixon's 1962 gubernatorial campaign train came to town. Two SMVRR and two SP locomotives pulled the long consist of passenger cars into the yard. The train blocked Miller Street for about a half hour as he gave his speech from the rear of a private car. After the speech, two more SMVRR locomotives coupled to the private car to pull out as the SP locomotives pushed from behind. I remember Nixon reaching out to the people as the train pulled out and shaking hands. I managed to grasp his little finger and that's the closest I have come to shaking the hand of any president.

I guess I was in my junior year when I was walking home from school and taking my regular route through the yard. I saw what looked like a boxcar in the distance at an odd angle and at first I thought they were putting the old wooden boxcar used for storage back on the rails. I then remembered that it was a narrow gauge car and there must be something else going on. When I got closer I saw that there had been a derailment, and a boxcar had gone right through the ties and buried itself up to the sill on one end. The rails were twisted like a ribbon that had been run along a scissors blade.

They didn't have a crane to get the cars back on the track so they re-railed the ones they could and then cribbed the boxcar up with ties and dug under it and laid temporary track under the car. They then used an express reefer for an idler car and tied onto the boxcar with a cable and pulled it up and onto newly repaired track. The temporary track was then removed, the hole filled in and permanent track re-laid.

When I was a senior in high school I took a photography class. The railroad became one of my favorite photo subjects. I remember one time I set the tripod up on a flatcar to photograph two sets of locomotives (see page 61 of my book) and took some time doing so. Just after I folded things up and it was plain that I was finished, they moved the locomotives to the right in the photo into the roundhouse. On another occasion I was allowed to photograph the inside of the roundhouse. My connection there was the fact that my teacher, Merve Slawson was the Captain's photographer and took most of the photos in the red book about Captain Hancock's life, (available at the Santa Maria Valley Historical Society) and the green book about the Captain's ocean explorations.

They ran stock trains to Rosemary until about 1967 or 68. Most of the time these were short trains that the locomotives were able to run around on the short pass at Rosemary. We used to run out to the tracks when we heard a train coming and when we saw the cattle cars, that was a new experience, especially the smell as the train passed. I didn't realize that the cabooses had horns until the time I was on my bike watching a stock train cross Bradley Road. The locomotives were pushing the train and the brakeman (whom I knew) signaled the crossing with the horn and waved to a motorist he knew and me. (Most of the time SMV crews put cabooses in first

position in consists). Another time I was driving my car over the Miller crossing when I saw what I believe to be one of the last stock trains to travel SMV rails. It was about 11:30 a.m. and this was an unusual time for an eastbound, so I took notice. Pulling a dozen stock cars and three boxcars, the train dropped one boxcar at the E.C.Loomis spur and continued to Rosemary. I had never seen what went on at Rosemary when a stock train went out there, so I chased it. I observed the cars being unloaded, the stock immediately being transferred to trucks. The train was then backed into Santa Maria. I remember the 4 p.m. job to Guadalupe having 35 cars that night.

As I got older, my social life crowded out my time for trains. One of the last things I remember doing in my youth was driving on the tracks. Yep, I discovered that a '66 Mustang is in fact standard gauge! Found this out going north on Rosemary Road one afternoon when I got on the rails in the middle of the street and took the left curve right across the field to Jones Street. One night not too long afterward I was driving a friend home from a college beer party and we took the north spur from Cook Street out to West Main. Didn't fall off the rails once either. And I want you to know that I properly signaled every grade crossing we came to.

Well, those are some of the memories I have of growing up next to the SMVRR. I have always liked short lines, maybe not as exciting and fast paced as the first class lines but like one man said, "They have personality." 🚂

