



# Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo  
Railroad Museum

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Open Saturdays from 10:00 to 4:00. Other times for groups by arrangement. 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue.

## More signals along the Walk of History



Mike Burrell photo

It's great to have a truck and crane to move large and heavy items. When you don't have them, you improvise. Above, Ted Van Klaveren (red shirt) and Equipment & Restoration Superintendent Brad LaRose are doing so, using hand trucks at each end of the mast for a grade-crossing signal.

This particular signal and its twin warned drivers approaching the Camp San Luis Obispo track on Colony Drive, which is now the main entry to California Men's Colony (CMC) [Summer 2018 *Coast Mail*]. CMC donated them to the Museum about 2005.

Over several workdays in August the restoration crew prepared, painted, wired, moved, and installed the two grade-crossing signals along the walkway between the Freighthouse and the Amtrak depot.



Above, Louie's Crane Service made the job easier by lifting this signal at the south end of the Freighthouse and moving it through the parking lot.

Below, for safety we had a parade: Ted Van Klaveren in his bright red pickup leading, then the truck crane, and Greg Jackson following in his white van with temporary rooftop flashers.



At left, if the bolts embedded in concrete align with the holes on the signal's steel base plate, we get a prize. But that's not all. The crew fed wires from under the base plate so the lights can be activated.

Colorful lights aren't just for the winter holidays.

**Our Mission**

Promote California Central Coast railroad heritage through community participation, education, and historic preservation.

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**Board of Directors**

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Alan Estes                     Ken Green  
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Ted Van Klaveren

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*Model Railroad* .... Andrew Merriam  
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*Secretary, Archivist/Librarian, Newsletter Editor* ..... Glen Matteson  
([newsletter@slorrm.com](mailto:newsletter@slorrm.com))

*The museum is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, educational organization, staffed entirely by volunteers.*

**Documents Available**

Anyone may access the Museum's *Bylaws, Collections Policy, Development & Operations Plan, Code of Conduct*, and other documents at [slorrm.com](http://slorrm.com). Or request a paper copy via the contact information above.

**Museum Store**

To raise funds, the Museum offers several items for sale on-site and online: T-shirts, hats, belt buckles, mugs, enameled pins, embroidered patches, and engineer hats. On the website click on About, then Gift Shop. We also have an eBay site for a wider range of items.

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**Timetable**

**Board of Directors meetings** are scheduled for Dec. 10, 2024, and Jan. 14 and Feb. 11, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. They are held at the Museum. You can participate online. Contact [info@slorrm.com](mailto:info@slorrm.com) for help with on-line participation.

**Become a member**

Membership provides opportunities for anyone interested in today's railroads, railroad history, train travel, artifact restoration, or model railroading. Membership benefits include free Museum admission and a 10% Museum Store discount.

Annual dues: Individual \$40; Family \$65; Sustaining \$100. Life member single payment: under 62 \$1,000, 62 and over \$600. Junior memberships (ages 12-18) for model railroaders are available; contact our Model RR Superintendent.

Application forms can be downloaded from the Museum's website and mailed with payment. Or you can join online: click [Membership](#) and use PayPal.



**Santa on the Surfliner**

Santa is scheduled to arrive on Amtrak's *Pacific Surfliner* on Saturday, December 7, at about 12:30. Walk with Santa from the station to the museum, where admission will be free while Santa is there.

**SLO webcam is live**

Thanks to SouthWest RailCam:  
[youtube.com/watch?v=S2YHsgINOF8](https://youtube.com/watch?v=S2YHsgINOF8)

**More Coast Mail Online**

Pages 5 and 6: signal eyes; special blue light; RIP office work; UP imitators; solid benches; east SLO.

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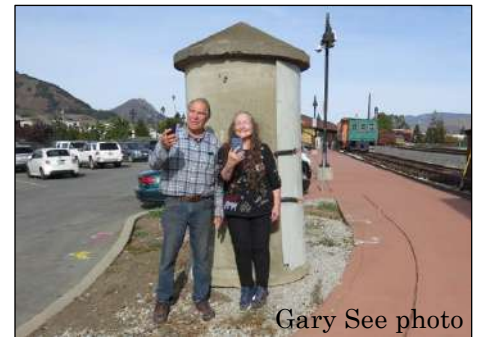
**Museum supporters**

The Museum would not exist and could not improve without the support of many. All forms of support, from membership dues to grants and donations of expertise, materials, and funds are greatly appreciated. In this edition we recognize David Swift of **Sharp & Fellows Company**, for donating a pneumatic spike driver.

**Correction**

The Fall *Coast Mail* print edition on page 3, caption lower left, called our concrete telephone booth a **photo** booth. Not even close. Your editor blames an autocomplete system too young to remember telephone booths. But do photo booths still exist?

*A railfan and his long-suffering wife at the phone/photo booth (below).*



**Loss of a member**

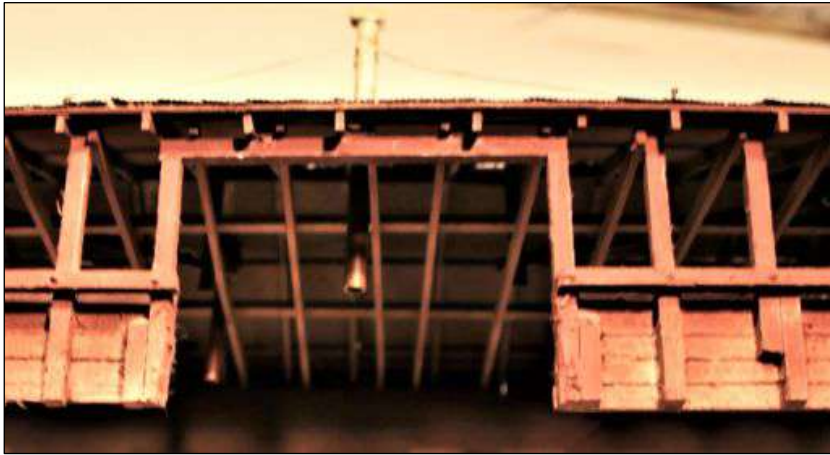
Museum volunteer Tom Grozan passed away several months ago. Tom, often in the model railroad area, was one of our most pleasant to work with members.

Recently, Tom's wife Debbie donated dozens of railroad books from his collection. The books span the railroad world, including several collector's editions focusing on narrow-gauge lines. Most are offered for sale to support Museum efforts, in memory of Mr. Grozan.

*Below, Tom Grozan at the Hollywood, Florida, Amtrak depot.*



## Modeling Southern Pacific's Engine Facilities at SLO



This 1/87<sup>th</sup> (HO scale) model of the railroad's sand house in San Luis Obispo shows why builder and photographer Andrew Merriam has earned the distinction of being a Master Model Railroader from the National Model Railroad Associations (NMRA). This view is from the west side and looking up as if there is no ground.

Editor's note: As introduced in the Fall *Coast Mail*, the Museum's modelers are reproducing in miniature many of the features, large and small, that made up the Southern Pacific Railroad's locomotive servicing facilities in San Luis Obispo. This is the second part of Andrew's explanation of that work.

by Andrew Merriam,  
Model Railroad Superintendent

The sand house model was built in 2008 from photos and Southern Pacific plans in the archives of the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento. The heavy framing wood is weathered and distressed. Many vertical framing members had rotted, so they had to be replaced by short struts driven into the ground and bolted to the existing member. The metal roof had rusted and worn over time, exposing the wood below. The new sand supply pipes required the addition of a vertical support at the northeast end of the sand house.



Excess adhesion sand, RailSystems.net image

## Central Coast Railroad Festival 2024 photo contest winners



Above: First Place, "Through the Rails" by Kathleen Bosch; from the Jennifer Street Bridge in San Luis Obispo in September 2023.

Above right: Second Place, Russell B. Sperry caught former Southern Pacific 4449 on the American Freedom Train in April 1977 on the Rio Hondo trestle northwest of Santa Barbara.

At right: Third Place, "Night Run," by Catherine Evans, in March 2019.



## Modeling SP's SLO roundhouse

Southern Pacific's roundhouse in San Luis Obispo was an essential and dominant part of the engine servicing facilities from 1894 into the 1950s. At the division point midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco steam locomotives on through trains were often changed, with those coming off duty receiving maintenance or minor repairs. Also, for several decades, locomotives for trains based out of SLO were serviced here. Those needing major work went to Los Angeles or the San Francisco Bay area.

As Bob Schrempp, a key member of the Museum's Central Coast Model Railroad group said, "Where do you start when you want to build an accurate scale model of a building that was torn down over 60 years ago?" His answer: research, research, and more research. He looked at every book on the Coast Route that he could find, as well as Google searches and consulting other fans and modelers of the SP. The modelers' goal is a structure reflecting 1950.



Bob Schrempp photo

Among the interesting features Bob found:

- The roundhouse had 17 stalls, with stalls 11 and 12 used for a while as a machine shop.
- The southern wall was wood while the northern wall was brick.
- The entire back wall was brick.

Bob used Computer Aided Drafting to draw plans for the more than 200 building elements, which he is laser cutting and 3-D printing. He made a test model to confirm the shapes and sizes of the major parts before creating and assembling them.

*Above and below, the roundhouse model being assembled. These small photos do not do justice to the details. Come see them yourself.*



## PCRY cars in Alaska



*Four of the five Pacific Coast Railway cars shown on the Port Harford pier during a 1937 excursion are still in service on the distant White Pass & Yukon Ry.*

by Karl Hovanitz

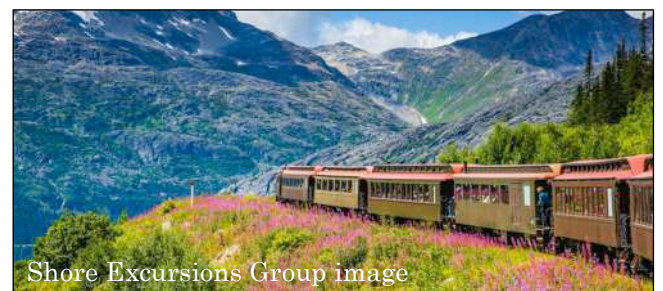
Eighty years after the last train ran on the Pacific Coast Railway, few large pieces of rolling stock exist. But in PCRY's twilight years, just after the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society's 1937 excursion, four narrow-gauge passenger cars were loaded on standard-gauge flatcars near Southern Pacific's SLO roundhouse. Their destination was nearly 3,000 miles north.

They were sold early in 1938 to the White Pass & Yukon Railway. The WP&Y, completed in 1900, connected Skagway, Alaska, with Whitehorse in the Yukon Territory of Canada, 110 miles apart. It carried metallic ores as well as passengers, including a growing number of tourists.

The three PCRY coaches and one baggage car would help meet summer travel demands. They had been built in 1893 by the J. Hammond Car Company of San Francisco, which also built many of that city's famous cable cars. On the PCRY they replaced cars destroyed in the 1892 coach shed fire at San Luis Obispo [Summer 2015 *Coast Mail*].

The WP&Y converted the baggage car to a parlor car and replaced coach-type seating in the other cars with parlor car seating. The WP&Y eventually made other changes to all the cars, including steel frames, and updated windows, brakes, and trucks (wheel assemblies). Today they operate interchangeably with over 80 similar cars. Due to their lighter wood construction they often are included in trains powered by steam locomotives.

*Below, this tourist train in Alaska may include a former Pacific Coast Railway car.*



Shore Excursions Group image

## I spy, with my little eye, more eyes



Do you sometimes feel that glassy eyes are watching you as you go along the Walk of History?

These are indicator lights on signals [See *Coast Mail* Fall 2024 and page 1 of this edition.] The image at left above shows part of the block signal. A light inside the relay-cabinet base showed that electrical power was available for the mechanism. At right above we see small port windows in the sides of the crossing signal heads, each with its own little visor. The warning lights face left and right in this image. Approaching train crews could tell if the flashers were working by watching for the flash visible ahead.

The electromagnetic relays and incandescent bulbs in signals of this vintage have been replaced by transistors and light-emitting diodes, some with wireless status reports.

## Not on the Central Coast, but oddly familiar



The cars on the right display a weathered version of Armour yellow, gray roofs, and a red base band, imitating Union Pacific Railroad's passenger colors. Maybe they're business cars recently demoted to maintenance-of-way service. But the red band is much too wide and their roofs are excessively arched, perhaps the product of a distorting lens.

Not so. We're at Perusic on a Croatian Railways line between Zagreb and Split. The scene is from a YouTube video by *Railway Relaxation*. While the line shows recent upgrading, including new bridges and ballast, one wonders how much longer such relatively lightly used, non-electrified routes will sustain passenger service. It appears that calcite, in the limestone family and used in manufacturing cement and other products, is a main source of revenue. If you like mountains and valleys, this is a great virtual ride.



## Recent history: Amtrak inspection train

During the last week in September Amtrak ran an inspection train along the coast. It spent the night at San Luis Obispo. As seen above, Brad LaRose caught it resting on the pocket track that was used by helper locomotives in previous decades.

This short train consisted of a new Siemens Charger locomotive painted to commemorate Amtrak's 50th anniversary, two coaches, and a former General Motors F-40 locomotive with its engine removed but its controls intact, to serve as a cab plus baggage space (often referred to by railfans as a cabbage).

## Focus on artifacts: You can do a lot with air

We now have on display an air compressor of the kind used by Southern Pacific (below). Compressed air can be used to drive spikes, apply and remove track bolts, compact ballast, and grind off rough spots. Hoses connected the compressor to various devices. This particular tool came from the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad ("Mainline of the Rockies"), which combined with Southern Pacific in 1988. It has three power cylinders and three compressing cylinders, arranged radially like an aircraft's propeller engine.

Brad LaRose restored and donated this artifact.

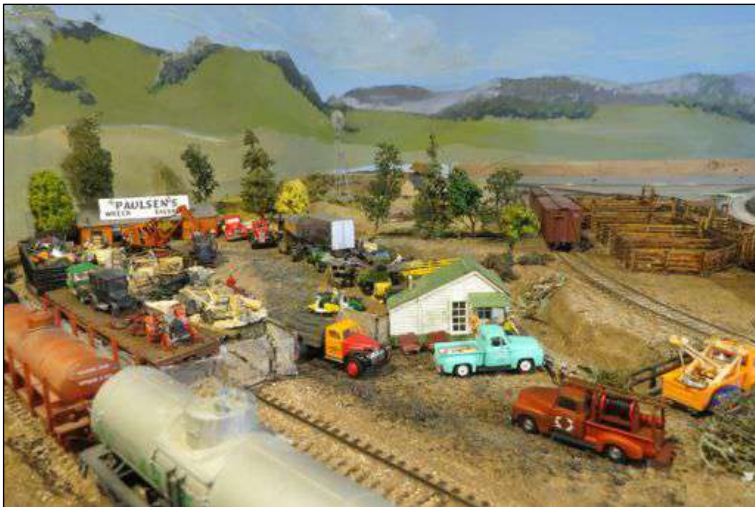




*San Luis Obispo's special blue light (white arrow) stands tall, with signals controlling exit from the Amtrak layover track and the pocket track for helper locomotives to the right, and the historic water tank and palm trees to the left.*

## Blue Light Special

Present at least since the 1980s, a blue strobe light sits atop a tall poll opposite the San Luis Obispo depot. It indicates when a train occupies the Orcutt Road grade crossing about 1.7 miles to the southeast. Some with knowledge of the light's history say its flashing warns rail workers near the depot when a train approaches. Others say that, more importantly, when it stops flashing the crew of a long north-bound train knows it no longer blocks the crossing. There are various explanations involving train speeds and sounds, and crossing distances, for why there's not a similar indicator for Foothill Blvd. or Marsh St. After being disconnected for several years, the strobe was recently reconnected.



## Messy *and* smelly?

Here's another model scene best appreciated in person. No, the stock pens in the right distance don't really smell. But the salvage yard at left won't get an Obispo Beautiful award. This is an accurate depiction of "east San Luis Obispo" in the 1950s. The location near Orcutt Road would be called "south" of the depot today. But on the model railroad, Southern Pacific timetable directions -east was away from San Francisco- prevail.

## Repair-In-Place office work

The RIP office is shaping up nicely, due to efforts by Mike Adams (in gray shirt) and Mike Burrell, shown below, Ted Van Klaveren, and others.



Brad LaRose photo

## Substantial benches

One advantage of restoration lead Brad LaRose being at the Museum so often is catching railroad work in progress. In this case, it was Amtrak removing concrete benches from the depot grounds. With help from Amtrak's contractors and Museum volunteers, two surplus benches were moved to locations near the Freighthouse. Our facility has become an informal stopping place for Flix busses, as well as neighborhood walkers. Now passengers and passersby can sit a spell (other than on steps).



Brad LaRose photo