



# Coast Mail

News from the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum

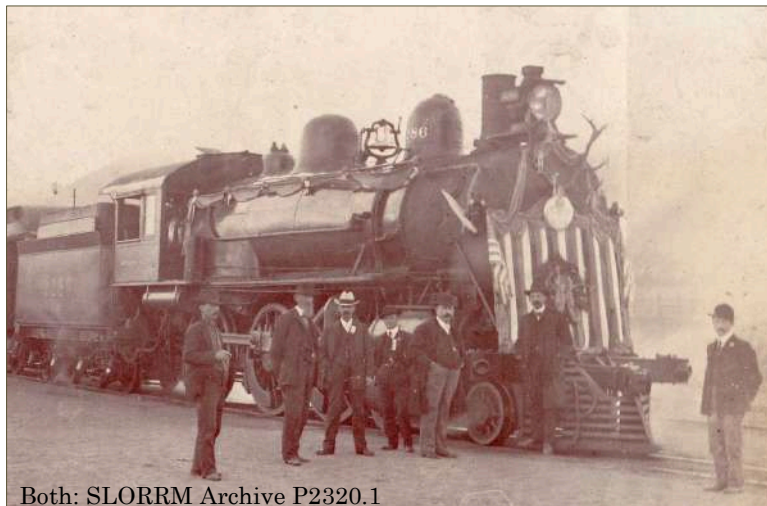
Issue Number 68 – Summer 2019 San Luis Obispo, California slorrm.com

*The Museum is open every Saturday from 10 am to 4 pm. It opens other times for groups by arrangement. Contact media@slorrm.com.*



## “I want to charter a train, and make sure it has flags *and* antlers.”

From about 1900 to 1950, whole trains were chartered for special occasions, such as fraternal lodge conventions, product promotions, and political campaigns. This one was southbound (timetable eastbound) at San Luis Obispo, about 1910. It stands on Southern Pacific standard-gauge tracks, next to the original 1894 depot, with Pacific Coast Railway narrow-gauge tracks in the foreground. A digital image of a fragile, mounted print was recently donated by area resident Tim Wilson. Does anyone recognize the specific event?



Both: SLORRM Archive P2320.1

## Restoration Progress Display track extended

Sparks fly in March as Brad LaRose cuts a rail to complete, for now, southward extension of the display track. Bob Wilson and others helped with this task.

That rail, raised by a rail jack, is also supported by blocks to make sure it won't fall on Brad's foot.

*Gary See photo*



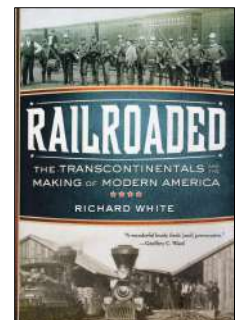
## Neighborhood work

The City of San Luis Obispo's plan for the Railroad Historic District called for plank sidewalks, which were common during the late 1800s but which were not actually used locally. Over the years, those installed along Santa Barbara Avenue have deteriorated. This past winter city contractors began replacing them with the new standard using bricks, which will mark the district character while being more durable.



## Happy Birthday

If it's not your birthday, a friend's or relative's is probably coming soon. New or gently used books from the Museum Store make great gifts. And we have quite a range. The example at left: a self-published, softcover, 170-page, first-person account of a young bride learning to live in a 1940s outfit car while her husband worked on Southern Pacific's Sierra crossing. At right: a scholarly but readable, 500-page, hardcover going deep into the financial and political activities that made 19<sup>th</sup> Century Western railroads history-driving combinations of failure and success. Most Museum used books are priced one-quarter to one-third their original cost.



**Preserving California's  
Central Coast Railroad History**

The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum is a non-profit educational institution. Founded to preserve and present California Central Coast railroad history by collecting, restoring, displaying, and operating relevant railroad artifacts, photographs, models, and documents, its goal is to facilitate a better understanding of railroads' impact on our area's social, cultural, and economic history.

**Contact**

Telephone (message) 805 548-1894  
 e-mail: [info@slorrm.com](mailto:info@slorrm.com)  
 Website: [www.slorrm.com](http://www.slorrm.com)  
 Mail: 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue  
 San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

**Become a member**

Membership provides opportunities for anyone interested in today's railroads, railroad history, train travel, or model railroading.

Individual members pay \$36 per year, a family \$60, and a sustaining member \$100. Contact the Museum for information on Life Memberships.

Junior memberships (ages 12-18) for the model railroaders are available (see our Model Railroad Superintendent for details).

Application forms can be downloaded from the Museum's website and mailed with payment, or you can join online by clicking Membership and using PayPal. (Mailing and web addresses are in left-hand column.)

Membership benefits include free admission to the Museum and access to Members Only features of the website, including full current issues of *Coast Mail*.

**Museum Store**

To raise funds, the Museum offers several items for sale. T-shirts, baseball caps, belt buckles, mugs, enameled pins, embroidered patches, engineer hats, and videos are available through the Museum website, [www.slorrm.com](http://www.slorrm.com).

Click on **Company Store**.

*Coast Mail* is published quarterly by the San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum.  
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**TIMETABLE**

**Board of Directors meetings** are held at 6:00 p.m., at 1940 Santa Barbara Avenue, San Luis Obispo, on the second Tuesday of each month: June 11; July 9; August 13.

For **committee meetings**, use the contact information at left.

**Upcoming events:**

**Fundraising dinner, miniature train rides, and auction, near Arroyo Grande – Saturday, June 29.**

Art After Dark at the Freight-house – Friday, August 2 (free!).

**Wine-Rail Excursions**

~~June 21~~ (sold out), July 19, August 16, ~~September 20~~ (sold out), and October 18.

**Beer Train Excursions**

June 1. More will be schedule if sufficient interest –your group?

For details on all events and excursions, visit [slorrm.com](http://slorrm.com), call 805 548-1894, or email [info@slorrm.com](mailto:info@slorrm.com).

**Online content**

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*Long, lean, and quiet. New Charger locomotives began appearing with the midday Surfliner to and from San Luis Obispo near the end of 2018. Unlike previous Amtrak/Caltrans locomotives produced by General Motors and by General Electric, these come from the Germany-based Siemens' factory in Sacramento, and use alternating-current rather than direct-current traction motors.*

**Recent History: Charge!**

The California Department of Transportation has acquired 16 new Charger diesel-electric locomotives for use on the Amtrak-operated *Pacific Surfliners*. The 4,400-horsepower units are compliant with the latest air quality requirements, and will replace P-42 and F59 locomotives that are about 20 years old. The Chargers were built by Siemens at a plant near Sacramento that's about nine miles southeast of the former Southern Pacific shops, where locomotives were built, rebuilt, or modified from the 1870s into the 1990s. Railfans have various opinions on the esthetics of the new locomotives, and operating crews appear to not be unanimous on their running characteristics.

**DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE**

Anyone may access the Museum's *Bylaws, Collections Policy, Development & Operations Plan, Code of Conduct*, and other governing documents at [slorrm.com](http://slorrm.com).

Or request a paper copy via [info@slorrm.com](mailto:info@slorrm.com).

**Coast Rail opportunities**

Planning is underway for a major gathering of rail fans, historians, vendors, and photographers and other artists, to be held in San Luis Obispo in Spring 2020. If you can help in advance arranging details or with hands-on tasks the weekend of the event, or if you want to present material or offer items for sale, contact [info@slorrm.com](mailto:info@slorrm.com).



**Board of Directors**

Charles A. Jordan.....*President*  
 Stephanie Hovanitz .....*Vice-president*  
 Norma Dengler Brad LaRose  
 Glen Matteson Andrew Merriam  
 Dave Rohr Feride Schroeder

Duane Powell has stepped down from the Board. We thank him for serving.

**Crew List**

*Museum Manager* ..... Diane Marchetti  
*Assistant Manager* ..... Stephanie Hovanitz  
*Curator* ..... Brad LaRose  
*Treasurer* ..... Dave Rohr  
*Librarian* ..... Chris Hurd  
*Webmaster* ..... Jamie Foster  
*Operations Manager* ..... Stephanie Hovanitz  
*Events Coordinator* ..... vacant  
*Model RR Superintendent* ... Andrew Merriam  
*Membership Chairman* ..... vacant  
*Fundraising Chair* ..... Feride Schroeder  
*Secretary, Archivist, Newsletter Editor* .....  
 Glen Matteson (newsletter@slorrm.com)

**Do you know your time tables?**



The day had to come eventually. The Museum’s collection of about 140 Southern Pacific employee timetables had been cataloged as one set and stored in boxes, grouped by geographic area. Each time more timetables were donated, to determine if they were duplicates the boxes had to be dug through. To avoid this, your resolute archivist went through them all and cataloged them individually. This will also help find specific ones to answer questions.

What kind of questions? In previous years, we’ve been contacted by a writer of historical fiction wanting authentic details and by a person trying to retrace a grandparent’s trip.

We have only one timetable covering the Coast Route during the Union Pacific (post-1996) era. Can you help fill the gap?

**From the Archives Sugar beets and questions**



**Map 23. MARSHALL TO GRAY, A SPUR TO UNION SUGAR COMPANY**  
 (Copied and reduced from a map held by the Surveyors Office, County of Santa Barbara.)

Regular readers may remember discussions of Southern Pacific’s Camp San Luis Obispo “branch,” several miles of track that ran from north of Cal Poly into the army base, but that never appeared in employee timetables (which cover physical features in more detail than public timetables). A few months ago the Museum’s archives were called on to help research facilities that may have existed at Narlon, a siding on the Coast Route between Casmalia and Surf, and now encompassed by Vandenberg Air Force Base.

A researcher working for the base had found reference to a 1938 Interstate Commerce Commission approval to abandon the “Narlon branch, between Narlon and Gray, a distance of 0.983 miles,” which your archivist was not aware ever existed. Some digging confirmed that the actual timetables in the Museum’s collection did not refer to it, but a stylized 1922 map on the back of the May 1931 timetable shows it extending to Graham, clearly several miles farther from Narlon than Gray (inset map).

The drawing found online is in the format of railroad engineering plans or property records, having angled squares with leader lines to mark mileposts (in this case, from San Francisco) as well as 1000-foot surveyor’s stations, not to be confused with timetable stations, which are not to be confused with buildings where passengers wait for trains. But the July 1919 employee timetable did indicate that Narlon was a flag stop for the *Seashore Express* and for the *Sunset Express*, meaning they’d stop on a clearly expressed request for travelers between certain points. The few important travelers must have been employees of Union Sugar Company, more widely known for its facilities at Betteravia. The online source went into detail on several proposals for narrow- and standard-gauge rail connections between beet growing plots and SP’s Coast Route, with business prospects heavily dependent on transportation more economical than wagons with teams of horses (Defense Technical Information Center item AD-A146 598).

We’re still trying to find origins for the names Narlon and Tangair. Can you help?



More From the Archives

Railroad as landlord

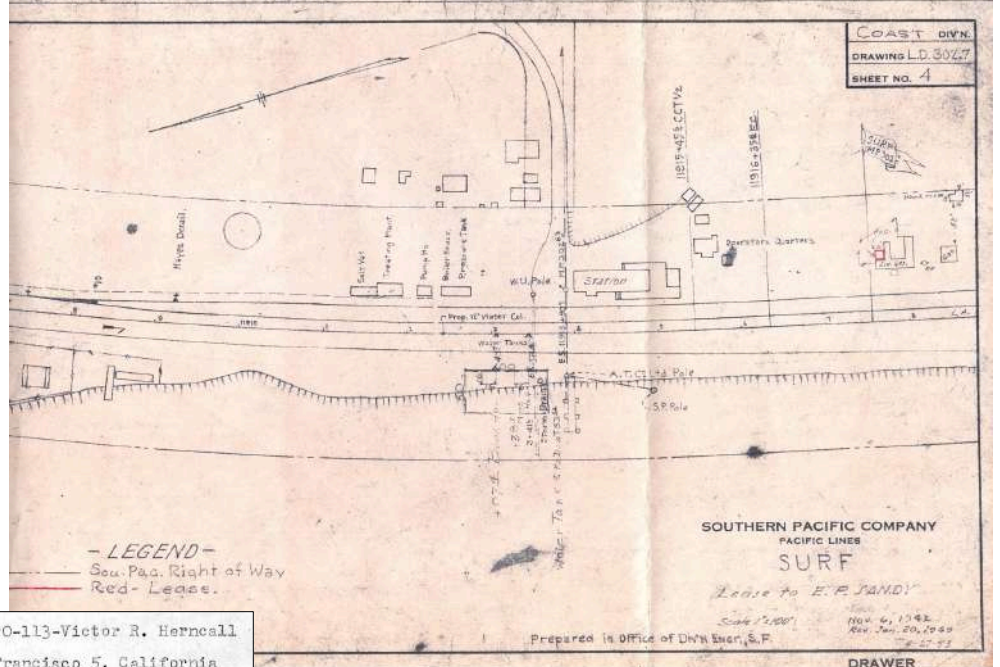
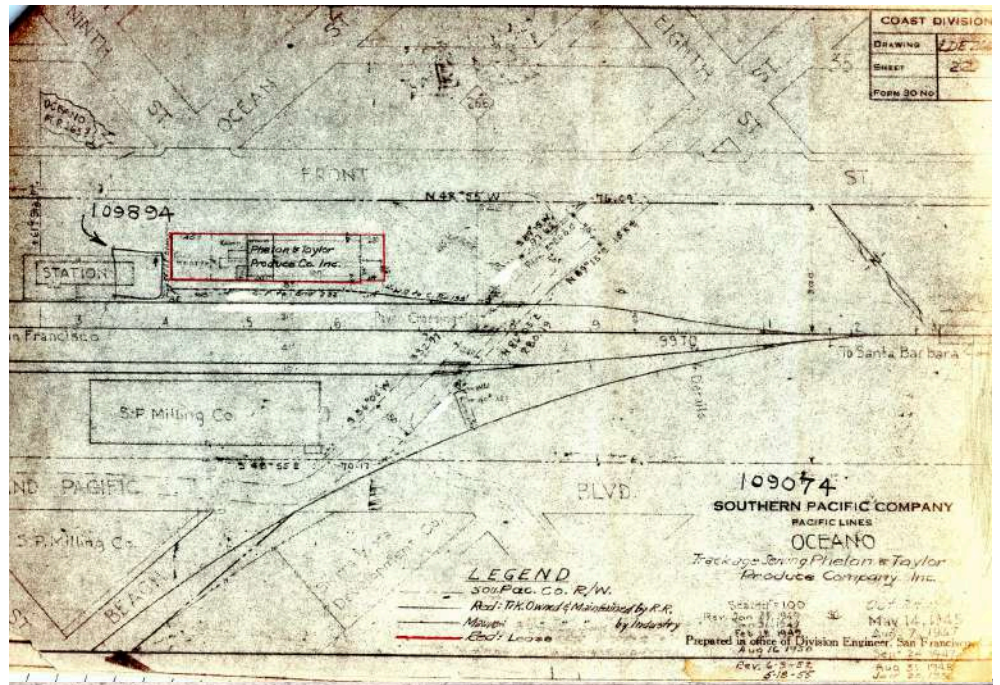
Into the 1950s, railroads were essential connectors between producing and consuming regions, and among communities large and small. Their vast landholdings and physical facilities also sometimes cast them in the role of landlord. Here are some local examples.

At right is a mid-1950s Southern Pacific property lease exhibit for Phelan & Taylor Produce Company in Oceano, encompassing about 12,500 square feet. The image is cropped, so the whole name of the street southwest of the main line does not show; it was "Grand Pacific Blvd."

Lower right is a more modest lease, also from the 1950s, of 120 square-feet (tiny red square) at Surf, so E. P. Sandy could have a garage next to his SP-owned living quarters.

The letter below shows that Mr. Victor R. Herncall, a 1950s agent at Oceano, had a similar lease, for one dollar a year. When he retired and moved to Santa Margarita, as revealed in other correspondence, he held onto the garage, hoping to sell it to someone who would move it. Throughout, Superintendent Jordan in San Francisco was kept advised and prodded the process along.

Railroads are still dealing with the question of how far down the organization chart responsibility for decisions should be pushed.



EB-220-113-Victor R. Herncall  
San Francisco 5, California

MAY 17 1949

Mr. C. H. Munro, Freight Agent  
Oceano, California

We have outstanding in our accounts bill collectible No. 376862 amount \$1.00 rendered against Victor R. Herncall for occupancy of premises at Oceano, California, in accordance with terms of lease No. 70496, for period one year from December 1, 1948.

Will you please contact debtor with view to collecting amount owing, advising Superintendent Jordan and all concerned result of your efforts. In the event lessee declines to make payment of amount owing, your report should include advice as to why settlement has been refused.

GEO. JOHNSON  
By *[Signature]*

cc: Mr. M. Johnson

cc: Mr. J. J. Jordan  
Superintendent  
San Francisco, California

Other documents received with this collection reflect the railroad's need to respond to requests for leases, trackage changes, and road and utility-line crossings in a wide range of situations. Behind the workers visible to most people were, and are, many who deal with these matters. The railroads' engineering departments, often in consultation with real estate sections, were and are custodians of the rights-of-way and all that they contained.

Thinking of becoming a civil engineer and laying out alignments for new high-speed passenger systems? Your first assignment may be finding out who's been dumping tree trimmings along the towpath and what measures would prevent that (article on page 6).

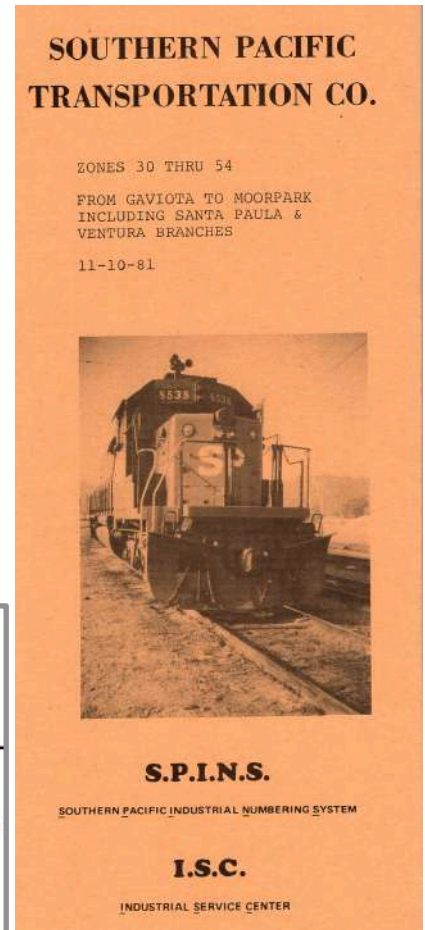
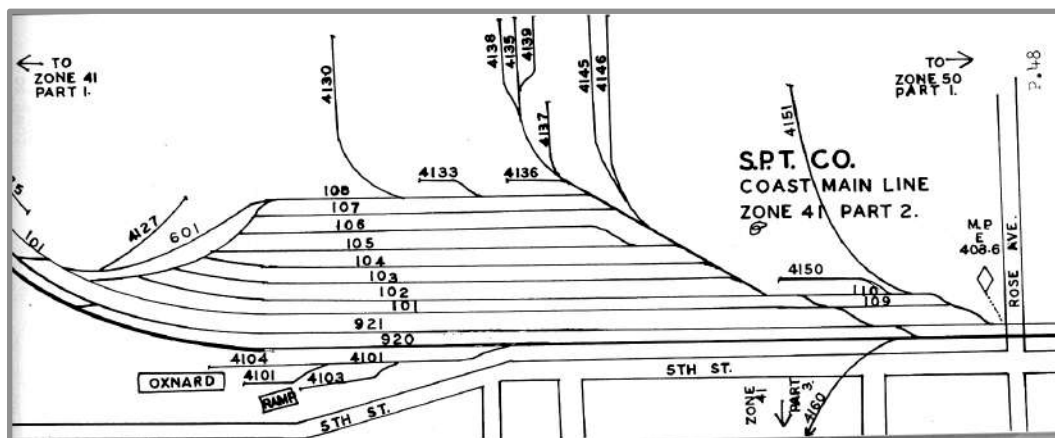
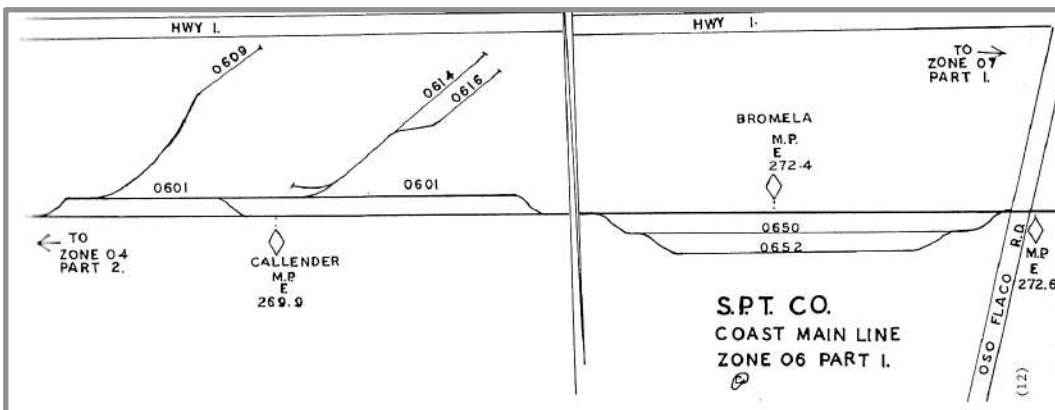
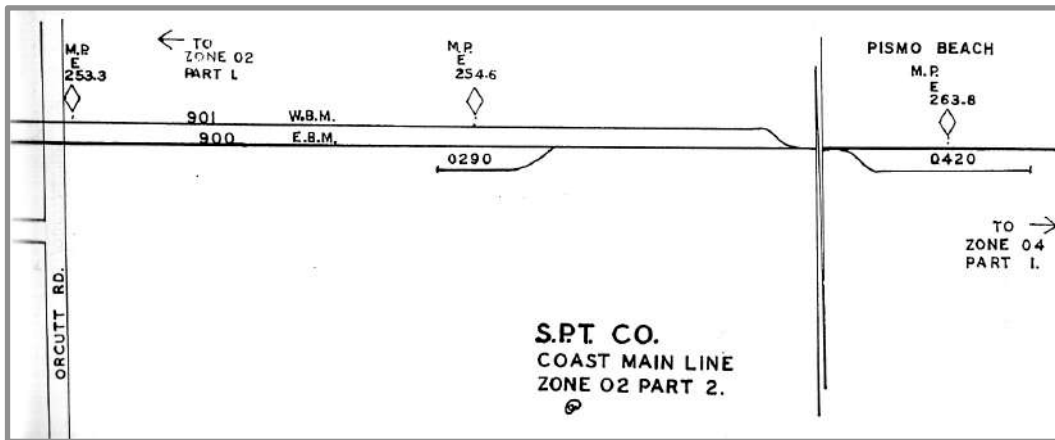


# As the World SPINS

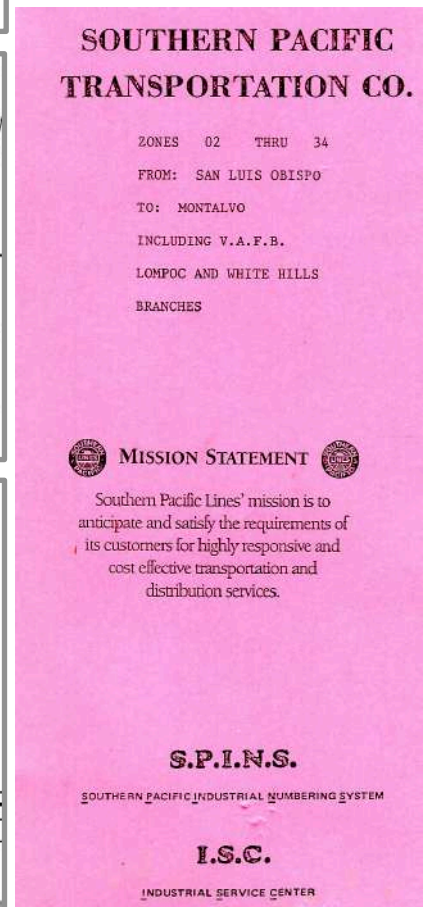
A freight conductor is responsible for getting each car in his train to the proper place, and for adding to his train certain cars along the way that are ready to start their trips to their next destinations. Cars may start or end their trips at a team track, where a load will be transferred to or from a truck, at a siding next to a factory or warehouse door, a lumberyard, on a storage track, or at a repair facility. Buildings along streets have addresses. What identifies the hundreds or thousands of locations on a railroad's trackage?

On the Southern Pacific, from the mid-1960s into the 1990s, it was the Southern Pacific Industrial Numbering System, or S.P.I.N.S. These were a collection of books with schematic maps, location code numbers, and notes on setting out and picking up cars for specific customers. The one with the goldenrod cover is from 1981 and features an SP locomotive. By 1991, the railroad was in touch with its pink side and had a trendy mission statement.

On the maps, vertical lines that look like seismograph tracings in a major quake are the draftsman's cut lines, indicating an intervening distance is not shown. The top frame shows south (east) San Luis Obispo, then Pismo Beach. The middle one includes the refinery at Callender. The bottom is Oxnard.



All images from SLORRM Archives set 2530.40



## Another benefit of membership

Your editor found an unexpected benefit of active Museum membership as a result of a Cal Poly instructor approaching the organization, looking for someone to teach an Introduction to Railway Engineering. There may have been others more prepared, but none as willing or available. Likely recruitment set off a scramble to fill in some knowledge gaps and to prepare engaging course material. A revised class schedule created an opportunity to rehearse, by providing a condensed version of the class as a series of public lectures at the Museum in Fall 2017.

The first Cal Poly offering went well, with enrollment by 15 civil engineering majors, two majoring in mechanical engineering, and one city and regional planning student, nearly all seniors or graduate students. Your editor certainly learned by doing, mainly the techniques of teaching in an environment that has changed a lot since student days decades ago. And now a second class with 34 students is nearly completed.

Here are the Spring 2018 student project teams.



The group below designed a rail system to store intermittent wind energy in San Geronio (Beaumont) Pass, by having vehicles run uphill during excess production, then downhill, using regenerative braking to feed power to the grid as needed. A prior Cal Poly graduate and Museum member works for a firm designing such a system to be located in Nevada.



Those above examined the feasibility of light rail service connecting San Luis Obispo and northern San Barbara County. In part, they drew on a study of using a former Southern Pacific Railroad branch in the Santa Cruz area.

Finding images of railroad elements to illustrate the lectures was a fun part of the job. Your editor's most important lesson from this experience, and as a volunteer at the local high school: if you have a chance to work with today's students, at any level on any subject, do it!

The team at left created a coordinated passenger schedule resulting from adding a station and track to a challenging mountain route, all patterned on the Swiss Railways theme of a garden railway in one student's hometown. They hoped to continue their effort in a future course, creating a computer program and an electronic/mechanical interface to operate the model railroad. Real metro systems can use people with those abilities.



These students proposed a bridge to avoid the sharp, speed-reducing curve at Refugio Beach in Santa Barbara County, a location on the Coast Route where Southern Pacific did not build one of its impressive trestles.