

SAN DIEGO ELECTRIC RAILWAY ASSOCIATION



TROLLEY LINES

San Diego Electric
Railway Association
DBA San Diego
Electric Railway Co.
PO Box 89068
San Diego, CA 92138
(619) 474-4400

June 2009

Check us out at our
web site:
www.sdera.org

Big Changes at Our Front Door!

Visitors to the National City Depot were in for a real surprise in May when National City entered the next phase of its redevelopment effort. Long time docents and members have to take special care to make sure they turn on Cleveland Ave. and then left on West 23rd St. to get to the Depot. At the end of April, National City closed off Harrison Ave. (Marina Way) where one-way access has been a way of life. Now, visitors use the newly redesignated two-way West 23rd St. for entry and exit and the old Harrison Ave. section has been restriped for parking. One of the first effects was an elimination of trucks parking in front of the Depot. Guests at the Best Western Marina Gateway Hotel will have a clear view of the Depot from many of the



A view down West 23rd from Cleveland Ave. showing its new two-way configuration and lots of holes! Chris Higgins photo



A new sign announces the end of the road at Harrison and Bay Marina Drive. This permanent change was made in late April.

Chris Higgins photo

windows. At the same time, utility crews for SDG&E, AT&T, and Cox Communications have been working to underground the overhead lines in the area. Using the impending hotel opening as a motivator, National City worked with the utilities to assure the needed services were available to the new Best

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Psst! Wanna Know a Secret?

This newsletter is available in **color** on our website! See www.sdera.org and look on our Newsletters page.

SDERA operates the historic National City Depot museum which is open Thursday through Sunday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Phone 619-474-4400.

San Diego Electric Railway Association

- David Slater, President
- George Geyer, Vice President
- Chris Higgins, Secretary / Webmaster / Newsletter Editor
- Tom Matson, Treasurer / Docent & Membership Coordinator
- Directors: Jim Price, Tom Carnes, Mitch Beauchamp, Jeff Trimble, Jim Anderson
- Gift Shop Manager: Jim Anderson

PCC Car Project Update

- Dave Slater, Project Manager

Now on the web at www.sdera.org/sdvt

As usual, this is a very busy project. The Masonite paneling and oak trim molding with all new stainless steel screws have been finished in #531. Work continues on #530 and is nearly completed. The workers on this portion of the project are: Dennis Frazier, Dan Kelly, Aaron Donovan, and Paul Burshteyn with Art Aydelotte consulting. It was discovered that the right rear window metal molding under the wood molding was rotted out. I ordered that entire metal piece removed. I called Bob Recks in for an emergency consultation and he was able to get an entire new metal piece made at a local metal shop. It is now being cut and trimmed. By the time you read this, it should be completely installed!



Car 529's pantograph as seen through the roof of the car. Ron Sutch photo

Through Tom Matson's connections, I was able to get one of the top

IBEW (International Brother/Sisterhood of Electrical Workers) Union retirees to agree to survey our project with the idea of bringing in some electricians as volunteers for our project! Thanks, Tom!

The new, special-ordered 1/4" plywood to be used as a condensation wick in the new roof has not yet arrived. Meanwhile, the cutters are hard at work removing rotted sections of the main frame of #529, up on jacks at the east end of Track 6.

The Wheel Fund has been completed! Many thanks to all the donors! We have 16 wheels in steel baskets and pallets



trackside of Track #3 in the A Shop, and thanks to LRV Supervisor Lee Summerlott, we have a complete donation of new wheels from Penn machine! Thanks, Lee!

Art Aydelotte is working his magic once again in making show card replicas of these new destination signs for the fund raising tours we bring through from time to time.

Ron Sutch, staff photographer, maintains a history of our project with captioned photos as it progresses through all of its phases. We hope to have these available on the SDERA website in the upcoming weeks. The restoration of our fare boxes continues with Sergio Lopez and Gary Johnson. Tom Carnes is also a regular Tuesday guy and pitches in on any task needed as well as being our Tabulator, transcribing daily work log sheet hours onto the end of the month Master File. Currently, we are reporting 7,400 volunteer hours! Well done!



Art Aydelotte proudly shows the new Destination Sign announcing plans to go to Balboa Park in time for the Centennial!

Ron Sutch photo

Many thanks to all of our workers for all of your hard work and dedication! On behalf of Harry Mathis, San Diego Vintage Trolley staff, and myself, your efforts are really appreciated.

In the long-term planning department, MTS has approved the concept of re-opening the Balboa Park / University Avenue streetcar lines 2 & 7 for PCC cars only in time for the Centennial of Bal-

boa Park in 2015! The concept also includes lines to the Embarcadero and Lindbergh Field.

Upcoming Work Party Dates: Work Sessions are now being held Tuesday and Thursday from 10am to 2pm. *Due to security requirements, please contact Dave Slater / 619-222-5442 for authorization to be on the Trolley grounds. Saturday Work Sessions have been temporarily suspended.*

President's Message

Dave Slater

First, let me begin by saying a big THANK YOU to the Pio Pico R.V. Park at Thousand Trails in Jamul for the donation of a 40 foot storage container! The April edition of Trolley Lines with the Wish List went up on our web site a few days before the hard copies were delivered to the members and we got the call from Pio Pico. Gary Sweetwood's business partner Mark Whillock of Whillock Construction once again took his heavy equipment to the site and delivered the container to our Yard at the Depot.

Since Harrison Avenue is now permanently closed, staff and visitors need to either get off at Civic Center Drive and come down Cleveland Avenue to West 23rd street or turn right from Bay Marina Drive onto Cleveland Avenue to West 23rd Street and straight into our location. I am in the process of arranging for temporary direction signs at both locations to aid visitors.

I am also in the process of getting costs and layout for our very first San Diego Electric Railway Co. calendar for 2010! If all goes well, they should be on the rack in our Gift Shop by this July! Also, soon to arrive are more copies of the film "San Diego & Arizona -The Impossible Railroad." This is our very own short line and I was on site when it was filmed in 1998.

Tree removal has taken place at our south lot. It looks a lot different now! The "drops" are now installed for both Cox Communications and SDG&E at both east and south locations. The demolition / installation continues. Pardon our dust!

Mike Quigg and other members will be replacing 3 or 4 oak deck boards on the east side of the Depot in the near future. I recently had 220 volt service installed for the heavy duty saw that will be used to cut this wood. This is a long overdue project that had to be put off due to rain.

June Wish List - Donations Needed

- \$5,000 to fund advertising for the Museum and Gift Shop.
- A laptop computer, preferably with Windows XP.
- Cash Donations - large and small to keep us rolling.
- Shelving for the new 40' storage unit.
- Volunteers for our many projects, staffing & cashiers for our Gift Shop.
- Street car artifacts of all kinds from our San Diego Electric Railway Co.

As always, all donations are tax deductible to the full extent provided by law. Our Tax ID is: 33-0202834.

Big Changes at Our Front Door!

(Continued from page 1)

Western Marina Gateway Hotel and that updated services were also available to nearby businesses. SDERA has decided to upgrade our high-speed data service and add Cable TV to the facility as soon as the new cables have been installed.

Across the street, current plans include a restaurant and possibly a gas station but that area may wait until the economic conditions in the area improve. Right now, they are still working to demolish the old foundations and mitigate any hazardous materials. Many of the old industrial buildings in the area contained materials now considered toxic and National City is doing the necessary cleanups.

A large sign hangs on the Hotel announcing that it and Buster's Restaurant will be opening in early Summer 2009. There will be office space also available in the complex. Once this new section opens, we're next in queue for redevelopment so watch for more big changes in the next few months! - Chris Higgins

Did you notice that the crossing on Bay Marina Drive (West 24th St.) has been removed and there are several cuts in the rails in the area? National City requested permission for these modifications the San Diego and Arizona Eastern Railway. The rails will be re-installed with new crossing signals once the Coronado Belt Line is reopened. If we want these rails back, we need to put some effort into getting something to run on those tracks! More to come as the story develops.



Car 412 inbound on the 15 route near the Point Loma Junction.
Photo taken August 18, 1940 by Harold F. Stewart from San Gabriel, CA



Car 417 equipped with both a trolley pole and a pantograph for use on the Mission Beach—La Jolla Line. This picture was taken at 3rd St. at Plaza on July 12, 1924. Photo from the Historical Collection - Title Insurance and Trust Company, San Diego



S. D. Elect R.R. Mission Beach Terminus

SDERy Car 327 at the Mission Beach Terminus May 1, 1924.

Photo from the Historical Collection - Title Insurance and Trust Company, San Diego



View west along Mission Blvd. - Mission Beach—May 30, 1940

Photo by Harold F. Stewart from San Gabriel, CA

Visitors recall “Legend of Nellie Belle”

Have you heard about the restaurant called “The Depot?” It’s not well known, but from 1973 until about 1982, the National City Depot was a 140-table restaurant. A few months ago I thought I knew all about that. What I didn’t know until Rick and Karin Duran visited the Depot a few months back on a March afternoon was that on the track just inside the Depot’s Harrison St. entrance stood an 81 foot long lounge and bar car, a tank engine and a caboose. I’d never heard that before. When the Depot was restored and reopened in 1996, in his article for the rededication history, architect M. Wayne Donaldson wrote about the alterations and additions, such as the dumbwaiter at the north end, the two boxcars added on the north and west sides, the building with the fake water tank etc. But apparently he missed some very interesting details.

Frank Rhodes, restaurant writer for the San Diego Union, announced the restaurant’s opening as July 7, 1973, saying it would have two bars and adman Jack Stodell’s private railroad car. Pacific Southwest Railway Museum’s web site says that life member Stodell and his partner Dick Ritterband bought an 80’ 6” all steel bar and lounge car, #1304, built by Pullman Car & Manufacturing Corp. in 1927. It had originally served on the Santa Fe Chicago-Los Angeles Chief runs, during the great Depression. In 1939, it was assigned to the California Limited. After many reconditionings and reassignments, Stodell and Ritterband sold the car to The Depot Restaurant owner Milt Pollard, who had it painted two-tone red with a silver roof, and parked it on the track that ran along the Depot’s east side, which is now asphalted over. The car was originally named the *Manakaja*, after a famous Chief of the northern Arizona Havasupai tribe. Apparently Pollard had more fanciful ideas he hoped would bring the customers in. He painted “California Southern Railroad” on the side of the car, and gave his customers “The Legend of Nellie Belle.”

The San Diego Central Library’s collections has a copy of his 4-page pamphlet, which speaks of the silver-mine magnate “El Jefe Grande, a big, black mustachioed gent” and his beloved Virginia City, Nevada saloon singer, Nellie Belle, who traveled about the country in the 19th century in that splendid rolling palace, until he came to an untimely, violent end. Afterward, Nellie Belle had to sell the car to the Santa Fe, in – conveniently – the year 1929. Now, the rest of the story!

Pollard obtained AT&SF cabooses #2286, and, with a tank engine locomotive, a fascinating entry-way was created, for “The Depot.” Regrettably, Rhodes’ column on February 23, 1975, announced that The Depot was closing. The Durans told me that, when they visited in the ‘70s there was an Eastern European couple who ran the restaurant, offering spaghetti and goulash, with the fascinating rail car “Nellie Belle” still fronting the place. The second restaurant operators apparently could not make a go of the enterprise, and the rail cars were donated in July 1982 to PSRMA. The *Chief Manakaja*, AT&SF #1304 is still at Campo, bereft of furnishings, needing a rebuild.

And SDERA’s library still has a menu cover showing the Depot train consist, thanks to member Harlan Hatz; “The Legend of Nellie Belle,” thanks to San Diego Library; and now an actual menu, thanks to a recent donation from Ms. Kimberly Yazzie. Now all we need are the two Nellie Belles.



THE DEPOT



Editor's Note: The following was in a pamphlet from the Depot Restaurant. There is no historical significance to it but it was amusing for patrons.

The Legend of Nellie Belle

As you relax in the restored splendour of this magnificent old railroad car, listen closely and you may hear the ghostly sounds of a bygone age and the caressing laugh of a beautiful woman.

Milt Pollard, the creator-owner of the DEPOT, spent months searching every rail yard in the west for a private saloon car with an interesting history. Finally after weeks of frustration and despair, he received a call from an old Mexican railroad worker who had heard of his quest. They met in the San Bernardino yards of the Santa Fe. The old man, his eyes gleaming with memories, recounted the history of car 1303 or as it was once known, the *NELLIE BELLE*.

"El Jefe Grande", a big, black mustachioed gent, rich in railroads and Mexican silver mines, startled the West in the late 19th century with his personal traveling palace and the beautiful woman who accompanied him.

The first time he saw Nellie Belle, she was singing in a bawdy saloon in Virginia City, Nevada where he was closing a business deal. The most sought after woman in that rough western town, Nellie Belle was a gorgeous creature with sun red hair, green eyes that shimmered in the glow of the footlights and a voice that laid men's hearts at her feet.

That night over champagne iced in snow from the Sierra Nevada, they fell in love. El Jefe swore he wanted only to live in her green eyes and breathe her laughter while Nellie Belle promised to ride with his wild spirit until death separated them.

El Jefe preferred to travel with Nellie Belle in style. He bought the finest railcar that Pullman's Calumet factory in South Chicago ever built, and called it the *NELLIE BELLE* in tribute to the most beautiful woman in the west. It was eighty-five feet of luxury. The lounge decorated with crystal chandeliers, Venetian mirrors, Persian carpets and velvet hangings was plain compared to their bedroom with its sumptuous silks and monstrous brass bed.

Nellie kept her own Guernsey cow and a few hens in a specially designed forward part of the car (now the bar area). They provided fresh cream and eggs for El Jefe's table and filled Nellie Belle's marble bath with milk.

For years the *NELLIE BELLE* traveled the country from Montreal to Mexico City. El Jefe's flair for living and his beautiful hostess kept the car filled with the famous and wealthy. Politicians, millionaires, artists, everyone who aspired to adventure and romance boarded the *NELLIE BELLE*.

Finally just across the border in Mexico their travels ended. Nellie Belle's beauty attracted a dangerous and desperate ranchero. With his men he stopped the train and tried to abduct her. El Jefe caught him and a challenge was given and accepted. While the train's engine huffed impatiently the two men faced one another across the length of the car. They drew – and fired. El Jefe collapsed mortally wounded.

As he lay in Nellie's arms she raised the fallen gun and fired it into the gloating face of the victor. A quick word from Nellie Belle and the train swept across the border before the ranchero's men could stop it.

El Jefe's empire crumbled after his death and Nellie Belle was forced to sell her namesake. The car passed through many hands until its final owner went bankrupt in 1929 and abandoned it to the Santa Fe. There it was assigned number 1303 and turned into the head-end baggage, club-library car of the CALIFORNIA LIMITED. Finally after years of service the car superintendent in Chicago decreed that 1303 had "reached the point where further shopping and repair would be unwarranted." 1303 had a few remaining years as a tool and bunk car for wrecking crews and then oblivion on a forgotten siding in southern New Mexico as a way station.

But not quite oblivion - *NELLIE BELLE*'s history was too enthralling to be forgotten - and now she lives again. Once more glass tinkles to soft music and hidden laughter stirs. Look closely in the corner booths or at the next table. Perhaps that couple just across the room from you is El Jefe and Nellie Belle once more sharing champagne iced in California snows.



San Diego Electric Railway Association
d.b.a. San Diego Electric Railway
PO Box 89068
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(619) 474-4400

SDERA is at the historic National City Depot,
off I-5 at Mile of Cars Way - take Bay Marina
Dr. west, right on Cleveland, go one block and
left on W. 23rd St and straight into the Depot

Open Thursday through Sunday, 9 AM — 5 PM.

Depot phone: call (619) 474-4400

Visit us on the Web! www.sdera.org

To submit items to the Newsletter, contact Chris Higgins
via e-mail (webmaster@sdera.org) or phone (858-521-
0895). Items need to be submitted by the 18th of the
month prior to publication.

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Attention Members: Please look carefully at the mailing label. If your membership has expired, or will expire soon, please send your dues, and your tax deductible contribution, to SDERA, PO Box 89068, San Diego, CA 92138-9068. Thank you.
Life: \$400, Regular \$25, Family \$35 (please include names), Regular \$25, Senior (60 +) \$15, and Juniors 17 and below \$15.

Upcoming Events

Monthly meetings are normally held at 7:30 PM on the 2nd Saturday night at the National City Depot. We normally have an optional no host dinner at Keith's restaurant at 3rd and National City Blvd at 5:30. (In Mar, June, and Sept we have potlucks at the depot.) Plan to arrive at 7pm to see the Gift Shop, chat, and buy raffle tickets. The raffle starts at 7:15 PM.

Saturday, June 13 - Jeff Trimble presents the Yakima 'Tourist' Trolley in the late 1980s from an insider's view including stories of rescuing two of the original Yakima trolleys from a damp woods near Seattle. This will also be our quarterly potluck dinner (no Keith's) with an Italian theme. Food assignments: last names beginning A-F Deserts, G-M Main Course, N-S Salads, T-Z Breads. Questions? Contact Tom Matson 619-275-0216

Saturday, July 11 - Tom Matson to show his PE slides and 8 mm movies from 1955 to 1961

including the Hollywood, Glendale, Watts, Bellflower, Long Beach and San Pedro lines.

Saturday, August 8 - Don Brown to show slides of the original PE Long Beach line and the current MTA Blue line to Long Beach.

Saturday, June 20 - All Gauge Train Swap Meet - La Jolla. Contact Tony Tarantino 858-569-6603 with questions or <http://www.agtta.com>.

Next Board Meetings - June 8 and July 13 at 7:00pm at the National City Depot.

NCD Docents needed: call Tom Matson at 619 275-0216 or email at TMatson@SDERA.org

Did you see us on "Wonderland" on KPBS? The May 24th episode focused on the history of National City and, naturally, the Depot! If you missed it, the show repeats on Friday, June 12 at 10:30 pm, or you can get a copy of the DVD in our gift shop in a few weeks. For more details, www.wonderlandsd.com.