

Rail History Kicked Out of Santa Fe Depot

In these days of increased interest in historic preservation, how can a library full of San Diego's rarest railroad paper artifacts, get tossed out of a 1915 railroad station? It seems that our neighbors across the street, the Museum of Contemporary Art, (MOCA) got a really fat donation of many millions of dollars about this time a year ago. Looking to expand their modern sculpture exhibit space they found the high ceilings in the baggage room of the old depot just right for their use. The next step was to design a really awful looking modern addition to one end of the baggage room and float the idea through the City and local politicians. As soon as the idea was made public it was attacked in the press as the dumbest reuse of a historic building anyone had ever seen. No matter. The design was approved and every effort was made to see that all those millions stayed downtown. The existing tenants in the depot who were in the way of MOCA's plans were soon given notice that they had a year to move.

After nearly 15 years in the baggage room our railroad library had filled up about 3000 square feet full of the rarest rail history artifacts in existence in Southern California. From the very first San Diego railroad survey map dated 1858, to the corporate records of every railroad that ever operated in San Diego spanning nearly a century, we have it all. We have just about every map of a rail line ever made in San Diego. Not just copies, the originals! The National City and Otay Railway R.O.W. map alone is more than forty feet long and is dated 1882. These are priceless treasures that had the rug pulled from under them without a second thought.

The Museum's Library Committee, consisting mainly of **H.C. "Chop" Kerr, Bruce Semelsberger, Roy Pickering** and **Bob Underhill** looked everywhere for a suitable home for the collection. Finding 3000 square feet of affordable and secure space in San Diego's red-hot real estate market proved an impossible task. Chop and the group looked everywhere and struck out every time. A year went by and dozens of presentations were made and possibilities explored that might lead to a suitable home.

Board member **Larry Rose** contacted San Diego State University's library staff thanks to an approach by Campo regular **Dr. Frank Stites** and, after an inspection, an offer was made to take the collection off our hands in part. They didn't want the corporate records, periodicals and most of the hard bound books and would have disposed of most of them. Too much

sweat equity would go down the drain. The entire corporate history would be lost after surviving intact for a century. Thanks, but no thanks.

Larry also made contact with local Union Tribune columnist, **Neil Morgan**, who suggested the SD Historical Society as a possible way out for us. Larry told him that the historical society was the source of the railroad corporate records after they had already passed through the hands of the University of California at San Diego. UCSD got them originally from Southern Pacific at about the time they sold the local railroads to the San Diego Trolley parent, MTDB. Another dead end.

The deadline fell on the newly seated Board in February with still no place to go. A wild scramble happened then to secure transportation and storage at our Campo property. Several metal cargo shipping containers were secured thanks to the efforts of Board member **Steve Bovee** and local contractors.

Joel Cloud and **Dave DiGiorgio** provided the large trucks to do the hauling. **Bruce Semelsberger** and **Bob Underhill** led the packing up effort and worked in the library nearly every night for weeks. They were assisted by **Ed Duling, Larry Rose, Randy Houk, Jim Lundquist, Ron and Diana Hyatt, Katherine and Ted Kornwiebel, Nels Solderberg, Dick Ruppert** and **Scott Thompson**. MOCA even loaned us two young guys from their professional staff to help us pack. Gee, thanks! A kiss with a stab in the back is better than just a stab in the back!

Among the items kept in the library was a fully restored speeder that had been stashed away in the storeroom for 15 years and buried under surplus furniture. This heavy item was hauled to Campo by **Larry Heishetter** on his special speeder trailer and is now in the display building. Other heavy items like the library furniture and shelving were hauled to Campo by **Jim Baker**. The unloading was done by the folks mentioned above along with **Ken Hanson, Rich Warner** and **Dave Houk**.

The 1940 vintage ATSF speeder was restored by **Larry Rose, Ken Helm** and **Joel Cox** so long ago that they had lost track of it and had no idea where it was all these years. It's in mint condition and has taken a place indoors in the museum's core collection. Several hundred heavy duty packing boxes were donated by **Larry Rose** and duly filled up with the contents of the library. Most of the collection is now housed in a truck trailer and two large shipping containers on the ground at Campo near the car shop. Nothing is accessible as the material is stacked to the rafters and is massively heavy. Most of the library furniture and shelving is stored in the ACY wooden boxcar now on track 14 in the car barn.