

SAGEBRUSH

HEADLIGHT

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THE NEVADA STATE RAILROAD MUSEUM
An Agency of the Division of Museums and History
Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs

Summer 2007

THE LAST AMERICAN: A Personal Odyssey

Connections

By Dan Markoff

Some years ago a man named James Burke made and hosted a documentary program. It was fascinating, because he followed the various threads through history that led up to a contemporary event, invention or occurrence. Appropriately, he called the series "Connections."

When I look back on how the project with *Eureka* happened, and how it all came together, there was much more to it than simply stumbling upon the locomotive. There was a series of happenings in the past that, like Burke's historical threads, allowed *Eureka* to fall into my hands and be resurrected. It was by no means my doing. It was as if some hidden force was guiding the entire project. Now, don't think that I'm going to go metaphysical here. It is just that the whole thing was able to come to fruition through a strange series of events.

Earlier I recounted my parents meeting at the Last Frontier Hotel back in 1946. Outside sat the *Eureka* & Palisade equipment that Doby Doc had put on display. I described how my father used to bring me, as a young boy, to the Last Frontier Village next to the Last Frontier Hotel, to climb on and dream about the old E&P rolling stock and how the memory of that followed me through the years. Several others were mentioned, but those were not the only connections. Not by a long shot.

When I think back on all the events leading up to bringing *Eureka* back to life, as opposed to the events that actually led up to acquiring it, I think that if it had not been for the Wright Brothers, the restoration would never have happened, at least for me doing it.

We all know that the Wright Brothers were the first to fly a powered, controlled aircraft. Others had flown before, but mostly in balloons. Except for the fact that it goes up in the air, a balloon is damn near impossible to control and direct in any particular direction. A leaf can go up in the air, but it has about the same directional control as a balloon.

As a young boy in the 1930s, my father Mike Markoff was fascinated by flight. He would draw airplanes and, like so many young people, dream of flight. Eventually, he earned his pilot's license. As WW II drew near, he was drafted into the Army. Yes, the draft was in place before Pearl Harbor. However, Dad was stuck in the Medical Corps. After Pearl Harbor, he wanted out of the Medical Corps and to fly instead. It was his passion. Eventually, through a series of improbable events, he got transferred to flying-cadet school. He was happy as could be to be doing what he wanted. After his transfer, the group he had been in was deployed to the Pacific. Many of the men in that group wound up on the Bataan Death March.

My father was a pilot of the legendary B-17, and flew 26 bombing missions. After the war, he returned home, got married, and – surprise – I was born. Dad kept flying, except in civilian life he was flying a Beech 18 in nonscheduled charter service. As a baby, I often was taken with him, strapped into the right-hand seat in the cockpit. To say the least, I was hooked on flying at a very early age. Like my father, I dreamed of the

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Open Daily 8:30 to 4:30

Except Nov. 23, Dec. 25 and Jan. 1

Admission: Adult \$4, Senior \$3

Children younger than 18 FREE

NEVADA STATE RAILROAD MUSEUM

STEAM-UPS

**Saturday/Sunday June 30 & July 1, July 14 & 15,
July 28 & 29: August 11 & 12, 25 & 26.**

Labor Day Weekend

Saturday/Sunday/Monday September 1, 2 & 3.

Trains depart daily from the historic Wabuska Depot,
10:00 am till 4:00 pm

Steam Train Fares:

Adults- \$5.00, seniors (65 and above)-\$4.00,

Children 6-11- \$3.00, Five and under FREE

FNSRM Members ride half-fare with a membership card

Schedules Subject to Change

**Motor Car No. 401 will operate
Wednesday, July 4, Independence Day.**

**Reminder: Submissions for the Fall issue of the
Sagebrush Headlight are due Monday, September 3, 2007.**

The 36th annual Nevada Railroad History Symposium **Innovations on the Railroads of Nevada** will take place Friday through Sunday, October 19-21 at the Nevada Legislative Building and the Museum grounds. A pre-Symposium field trip will take place Thursday, October 18. Bruce Blackadar, Stephen Drew, Dave Garcia, John Maky, Larry Mullaly, Stathi Pappas, Mark Reutter and Joe Strapac will cover air brakes, McKeen cars, fuel oil on SP and V&T, WP's USRA mikados, the Reno trench and other topics. At the banquet Art Lloyd will reminisce about WP operation of RDCs.

Sunday will feature a Shop tour, train rides and **the 2007 annual outing of V&T No. 22, the Inyo** with period rolling stock.



Brochures with registration information will be available in late July. Registration is also available via www.nstrm-friends.org

The Friends of the Nevada State Railroad Museum collect railroad periodicals from 1950 or earlier, as well as railroad books, for resale in support of our mission. To donate these items, please contact:

Ann or John North at (775)786-4303

OR: jsnorth@sbcglobal.net

Receipts available on request. Donated publications that are needed for the museum's reference library will be conveyed to the museum.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The summer season is well underway and things are happening at a faster pace. The season is hot and it is certainly warming up with the tourist season in full bloom.

I am happy to report that Stan Cronwall and his Membership committee are doing a great job for the Friends of the Nevada State Railroad Museum. Our membership is approximately 1100 and is still growing. Stan has made sure that every major activity at the museum—or off-campus at other selected events—is covered with volunteers who “sell” our membership benefits. Again, thank you, Stan. Remember that we all can assist in increasing membership if each and every one of us bring in one new member. It is a small step for each of us, but a huge leap for the overall benefit to the Friends and to the museum.

Along the same lines, the Membership committee is working on a new enhanced Corporate Membership package, which promises to be an important segment of our funding sources. Categories are to include extended benefits for those who contribute amounts of \$ 2,500.00, \$ 5,000.00 and \$ 10,000.00. This program will certainly help us to raise much larger sums to support the efforts and activities of the Museum. Once the details are worked out, we will be releasing the new program and seeking everyone's input and support to make it a real success.

Well, the train is about to leave, so I must board. See you at the next stop.

—Ronald J. Allen

SPOTLIGHT ON JERRY BARTH

Volunteer Jerry Barth was born and raised in Southern California and enjoyed hiking and camping as a boy. Later, he moved to Oregon and joined the Astoria Police Department. Jerry became a detective at an early age due to his ability to understand and predict people's behaviors. He spent 18 years of law enforcement in Oregon, mostly in Lincoln City. He found himself soaking up the history of that old logging and fishing community. After moving to Nevada and retiring from the Douglas County Sheriff's Office, he worked in the gambling industry. He also learned to ski both downhill and cross-country, and backpacked the Sierras in

search of adventure. Researching Gold Rush history, he sought out ghost towns and railroad sites in our area. He earned his pilot's license and explored Nevada and the west coast from the skies. He also enjoys riding his motorcycle.

Moving next into outside sales, Jerry serviced many of the mines in Nevada. This work continued to feed his interest in Nevada history, especially the railroads so instrumental to the growth of the Silver State. He currently works as an outside salesman for NAPA, with construction and fleet accounts among his customers.

Jerry is a true history buff who prowls V&T rights-of-way between Carson City and Reno whenever possible. He continues to learn firsthand about our area from the many “Nevada old-timers” he counts as friends.

He began as a museum volunteer in February 2005 and took the Motorman class in May 2005. He was asked to be an instructor for the 2007 class, which he considers an honor. At the close of his second year with NSRM he had exceeded 1000 hours of volunteer work including being part of the Handcar, Motorcar and Steam crews. Last fall he was elected to the FNSRM Board of Trustees. Jerry says he feels fortunate for the opportunity to be a docent in the annex and to work as a *recruiter* for the museum, sharing his love and knowledge of the bygone days of the Iron Horse.

—John Frink



Continued from page 1

day I could fly. My first job as a teenager was to take airplanes apart as a mechanic's helper at what is now the North Las Vegas Airport. In those days it was Thunderbird Field.

Eventually, after completing my schooling, I was able to earn my pilot's license. It was one of the happiest days of my life, because I now had the freedom to go wherever I wanted, whenever I wanted. Flying gave me a freedom that was dizzying. Eventually I purchased my own airplane and flew whenever I got the chance. The entire west became my backyard.

Well now, the thought must have crossed your mind that I have gone completely off-topic, and am wandering aimlessly about events that have nothing to do with restoring *Eureka*. However, the fact of the matter is that it has EVERYTHING to do with it. At the time *Eureka* was acquired, I was Federal Public Defender for Nevada. I had offices in Las Vegas and Reno, and had to travel constantly between the two. Every time I went to Reno, after I finished work I would race down to Carson City and visit with Chris de Witt. I constantly asked him questions, gathered information and then would race back to Las Vegas in my plane. This became a regular event. As time went on, I discovered that there were many places I had to go to get various things made, do research, gather parts, transport patterns to foundries and so on. I traveled not only all over Nevada, but California and Colorado as well in search of information or lugging something somewhere in furtherance of the project. My log book is full of such trips.

If it had not been for the Wright Brothers inventing the airplane, I could have done none of this. There were too many places to go and people to talk to for me to just drive somewhere. The investment of time and travel would have been too great without the airplane. In a very real and positive way, the Wright Brothers made a substantial contribution to my ability to see *Eureka's* restoration to completion.

Not only was the ability to fly a major contributing factor to restoring *Eureka*, but the fact that I had worked on airplanes for so many years also gave me the confidence to tackle the job. To many, there is a certain mystique that goes to working on aircraft. But when you get into them you find that they are very straightforward machines. The machinery rules that apply to airplanes translate to locomotives. They are different machines to be sure, but they have more in common than meets the eye.

So, the next time *Eureka* is out and you take a look at it, you now know that, had it not been for the

Wright Brothers inventing the airplane, my father's interest in them, and his strapping my little fanny into them at an early age and thus developing my interest, I would have never completed the restoration of *Eureka*. If the airplane helped restore the locomotive, there were yet other connections that made it possible as well.

Law school is about as unlikely a place to be connected with locomotives as one can imagine. The only thing I ever saw that connected law school with railroads was the study of the development of the law of negligence and causation. Or so I thought.

I attended the University of San Diego, School of Law from 1970 through 1973. During those years there were times, as I have mentioned, when my mental circuit breakers would pop and I would have to look at something other than law books. As will be recalled one of the things I would look at in the library to regain my sanity was a book on pattern-making for steam engines. That has a direct enough relation with *Eureka's* eventual restoration, but an indirect connection developed that I would not discover until almost twenty years later.

When I first got involved with the *Eureka*, I had no idea about how to restore a locomotive boiler. Chris de Witt would certainly be my guiding light in that regard, but there were other considerations. I was pretty well left up to my devices to figure out where I was going to get the tools, tubes, tube sheet, rivets, certified boiler-plate and so on. Somehow I wound up with a copy of the video of the making of the *Jupiter* and No. 119 of Promontory. I was fascinated that those locomotives were built from scratch. In a way, that video gave me some inspiration. But it also gave me the name of Dixon Boiler Works in Los Angeles.

Dixon Boiler Works built the boilers for both locomotives at Promontory. I figured this would be a good place to call to gather information about what might be needed in the way of tools, tubes, and whatever else I might need and where I could get them.

When I first called Dixon Boiler and told them what I was into, the person I was talking to said that I had to talk with Richard Dixon, who owned the company. I left my telephone number. Some time later, Mr. Dixon called back. His first question to me was what in the world was a lawyer doing with a locomotive? I explained what I was up to. He asked a bunch of questions as to what the problem was, what I needed to do, what repairs had to be made and the like. I told him about the need to make a new front tube sheet, re-tube the boiler, and that I

could not find any certified boiler rivets. As we went through this, Mr. Dixon asked me where I went to law school. I told him USD. He mentioned that his son also went to the University of San Diego. The conversation turned to legal stuff and what his son was doing. All in all, it was a very pleasant and informative conversation. At the end of it Mr. Dixon finally told me what kind of tools I would need to repair the boiler. These included 90-lb. rivet guns, rams, snaps, and all manner of other things. Then, without my asking him anything further, he said for me to come to his shop in Los Angeles and he would loan me everything I needed. I could not believe my ears. Here was a man I had never met, telling me he was loaning me many of the tools necessary to restore *Eureka's* boiler. All I had to do was pick them up, and return them whenever I was through. That was not all. Mr. Dixon arranged for the making of the tube-sheet blank, which would include both the certified boiler steel and flanging the blank. That project would have normally cost many thousands of dollars. But, thanks to Mr. Dixon and his contacts, the new tube sheet cost a grand total of \$209.00.

Mr. Dixon was a most generous man. And I believe that if I had not gone to law school where his son attended, he would probably not have felt a sense of connection with me.

The steam locomotive has long been known as the Iron Horse. For the 19th Century this was an appropriate-enough name to be given to the locomotive, which was slowly replacing the horse itself that had up to then been the main source of power and transportation. Little did I know that 47 years ago, a horse would play an important role in restoring the Iron Horse *Eureka*.

Back in 1960 I was living on a horse ranch outside of Tucson, Arizona. My father had sold a neighboring ranch to a family from Colorado. After the new owners of the neighboring ranch moved in, Dad kept telling me that there they had a daughter that I should meet. At 12 years old, frankly, I could not have cared less about girls.

One Saturday morning some months later, I was sleeping peacefully when my father burst into my room and told me to get my butt out of the sack and come out to meet the girl from the neighboring ranch. She rode over on her horse and was waiting outside our home. Reluctantly, I got dressed, and wandered outside. There she was astride her pinto, and asked if I wanted to go riding. As I looked up, I was instantly smitten. We were introduced. Her name was Ditty. I could not wait to go get my horse, Pappoose, saddled and go out riding. In those days

in the rural area where we lived the Old West was still very much alive. The countryside was open and free with no houses, condos, cars or crowds. It was a perfect place for a young boy to meet the Becky Thatcher of his life and partake in adventures of youth. From that point on, I could not think of anyone else except her.

As fate would have it though, in 1963 my family moved back to Nevada. More than twenty years had passed and I had not seen Ditty, although my father had kept in touch with her parents. One late night in 1984 I was over at the home of my investigator Jack Ruggles drinking Jack Daniels. We were getting rolling-in-the-grass, baying-at-the-moon drunk, talking about things guys talk about when getting sauced. At about 1:00 AM Jack asked me if there was ever anyone in my life that I really liked that I had lost touch with. I told him about Ditty. He told me about some gal he knew in the 1940s. In the questionable wisdom brought on by booze, he said, "Let's give them a call!" That made perfect sense to me!

We called Ditty first. She was still living in Tucson, and was a flight attendant for TWA. When we called it was actually 2:00 AM in Tucson, and she was not at all pleased to hear from us inebriated lunatics. I could instantly see that this was a bad diplomatic move, after telling her why we called. Jack took the telephone and tried to smooth things over. I told Ditty that I had a legal conference coming up in six months in Tucson, and I would look her up take her to dinner and talk over old time. She agreed. But, boy – did I feel like a jerk. I really thought I would never see or hear from her again.

About three weeks later, to my utter astonishment, Ditty called me from St. Louis. She was on a layover, and said she got to thinking about why I had called her. She said she thought it was very sweet that of all the people to call, I would call her. We talked for a couple of hours.

Six months passed. I went to Tucson for the conference and Ditty and I met again. From that point to this we have not been apart. Indeed, it was Ditty who was with me when I first saw *Eureka* in 1986 in its burned-up, dilapidated condition out at Old Vegas. As I stood there looking at the mess and musing about *Eureka's* fate, she softly said to me, "If it is a dream of yours to restore it, go ahead."

Ditty gave me the highball to go forward with *Eureka*. And it all began more than forty years ago when she rode over on her horse.

Next time: *Putting Eureka together.*

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Railroad Museum Retrofitted to Improve Accessibility

It's much easier to get around at museum than it used to be. Recent improvements that brought our facilities into compliance with current accessibility standards are gradient changes and new walks throughout the museum, an access ramp for the depot, new restroom fixtures and additional accessible parking. The most noticeable change: concrete-and-rubber walkway crossings at each railroad track. The uneven wooden planks are gone. These improvements, which permit visitors with disabilities to move throughout the museum unassisted, make getting around easier for everyone. This summer, restrooms at the Jacobsen Interpretive Center will be enlarged for full accessibility.



Major Donation Benefits Educational Program



SP 4-8-2 No. 4101.

Kel Aiken's models include passenger and freight cars and steam and diesel locomotives of Southern Pacific, Union Pacific and Western Pacific; from every decade of the 20th Century. The Museum already had HO-scale models of some Virginia & Truckee equipment, including locomotive Nos. 22 and 25.

During the past year volunteers from the Carson City Railroad Association have built an HO-scale (1/87th actual size) model railroad at the museum. This exhibit depicts Nevada railroads in the 20th Century. It succeeds the museum's popular "Chinese and Nevada Railroads" temporary exhibit. Volunteers operate model trains on weekends and group-tour days. At other times visitors use a push-button to operate a train on demand. At first, volunteers operated locomotives and railroad cars of their own. That changed when the museum accepted a major donation of models from the estate of Kel Aiken, longtime member of the Friends of the Nevada State Railroad Museum and the Carson City Railroad Association.



V&T No. 25 beside SP 4-8-2 No. 4376 (above); UP passenger diesels and WP road-switchers (left).

Photos by Mike Dunn.

After identifying the actual locomotives with their models, visitors can use the models to compare sizes of the V&T locomotives with later ones.

The Aiken models equip the museum to portray the changing traffic of 20th Century Nevada railroads—from ore, livestock or ice-cooled California produce to 1990s container shipments—with locomotives to match.

—Frank Ackerman



SELECTIONS FROM THE MUSEUM STORE . . .

Our Museum Store specializes in railroad books for adults and children, Nevada history books, train videos, audio recordings, toys, train models, hats and apparel, railroad pins and jewelry, train novelties and souvenirs, note cards, artwork and calendars.

As always, we invite and encourage you to visit the store in person for your shopping convenience. But, if you don't have the opportunity to visit anytime soon, we offer a few of our interesting merchandise selections on this page, available by mail order.

Your telephone or written inquiries about any railroad merchandise you may be looking for are always welcome. Please direct your requests to store manager Rich Reitnauer, (775) 687-8292. And remember, Friends of NSRM members are entitled to a 15% discount off all museum store purchases. Proceeds from sales are used by NSRM to fund a variety of museum projects and public interpretive programs.

NEW ITEMS FROM OUR STORE SHELVES:

NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY (Spring 2007 Issue, Volume 50, #1), (Huffman. Pitter, et. al.), 116 pp., \$10.00. ITEM #101717

In conjunction with the Nevada Historical Society's exhibition, *The Central Pacific Railroad and the Comstock*, currently on public display in Reno through December 14, 2007 (see the last **Sagebrush Headlight** issue, Spring 2007), two important Nevada railroading articles appear in this volume of the **NEVADA HISTORICAL SOCIETY QUARTERLY**. The lead article, by Nevada State Railroad Museum Curator of History, Wendell Huffman, is titled "SILVER AND IRON: How the Comstock Determined the Course of the Central Pacific Railroad". The second article by NSRM member and former museum volunteer Richard Pitter is titled "Building the Virginia and Truckee Railroad". Both pieces are scholarly and detailed written histories based on extensive original research by their respective authors.

Special advance notice of an important forthcoming book:

The long-anticipated final volume of the complete history of Nevada and Eastern California railroads, by noted author and railroad historian David Myrick, is now at its publisher, scheduled for release in October 2007. Since so many people have been waiting for this work for so long, we have chosen to give you early warning of its pending availability. Please hold your orders until September, at the earliest, for this new title.

(THE FOLLOWING NEW VOLUME No. III IS NOT YET AVAILABLE, BUT DUE IN OCTOBER 2007)

RAILROADS OF NEVADA AND EASTERN CALIFORNIA, Volume III: More on the Northern Roads. 376 pp., \$65.00. ITEM #101684

This is the final volume in the complete history of Nevada and Eastern California railroads by David Myrick. The new book contains additional information about the northern roads, including some not covered in previous volumes, and about developments since the publication of the first two volumes of the railroads of the region. **SET: includes Volumes I, II & III**, \$175.00. ITEM #101696

(The first two volumes of Myrick's Nevada railroad histories were originally published in 1962 and 1963. They have long been in print, most recently reissued in their current format by the University of Nevada Press in 1992. Profusely illustrated and authoritatively researched.

The initial two volumes of this series currently are available:

RAILROADS OF NEVADA AND EASTERN CALIFORNIA, Volumes I & II (Myrick) Available individually and in sets: **Volume I, The Northern Roads**, 472 pp., \$75.00. ITEM #101992

Volume II, The Southern Roads, 496 pp., \$75.00. ITEM #101993

Set of Volumes I & II, \$140.00. ITEM #101991

TO ORDER BY TELEPHONE OR MAIL

To place phone orders, please call (775) 687-6953 (9:00am-4:00pm daily).

Address mail orders to Nevada State Railroad Museum, 2180 S. Carson Street, Carson City, NV 89701.

Please include your name, street address, city/state/zip code, and your daytime telephone number. Members of the Friends of NSRM are entitled to a 15 percent discount off all merchandise. Please add \$3.50 for shipping charges. If paying by either Visa or MasterCard, include your credit card number and expiration date.

Orders are shipped via FedEx.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Now through December 14 at the Nevada Historical Society, Reno
The Central Pacific Railroad and the Comstock
Exhibition Presented by
the Nevada State Railroad Museum and the Nevada Historical Society

Wednesday Evening Programs

July and August **Summer Break**—*no programs*

September *Southern Pacific Mail Trains*
in Nevada, 1947—1967 Presented by Randall Cape

Evening programs are held at the Museum's Interpretive Center on the second Wednesday of each month except as noted. Programs begin promptly at 7:00 PM (or as noted) and are free to the public.