

The Dispatcher

The El Dorado Western Railroad Newsletter

JANUARY 2022



El Dorado County Train Stations

Train stations still have the power to evoke a time long gone. El Dorado County had five combination train stations during the years when the Placerville Branch was active with freight and passenger service.

The first station built in the county was in Latrobe in 1864, marking the end of line as the construction of the Placerville and Sacramento Valley Railroad headed east from Folsom.

Then, in 1865 a train station was built in Shingle Springs. It burned in 1895 and its replacement built a year later. This 1896 station is the only remaining train station in El Dorado County – now the home of Sam’s Town Cyclery. The railroad turned Shingle Springs into a bustling commercial center as freight wagons and stagecoaches met the trains, transporting people and goods to Placerville and surrounding population centers.

After a break of 23 years, funding was acquired to extend the railroad to Placerville. The Placerville and Sacramento Valley Railroad was constructed from Shingle Springs to the town of El Dorado, then on to Diamond Springs, and ending in Placerville, near what is now the intersection of Canal Street and Highway 50.

Placerville Station on Canal Street, 1938



By the time the new four-lane highway was



The Placerville Station on Mosquito Road, 1974

completed in 1955, the train station was moved to Mosquito Road, about where the current Placerville Bus Station sits. The tracks had been extended east, paralleling Upper Main Street, where the turntable was located. The Camino Placerville & Lake Tahoe Railroad brought lumber from the Camino and Pino Grande mills, and the Placerville Fruit Growers facility loaded thousands of boxes of El Dorado County fruit there. Other county lumber mills loaded their products onto the trains on the Placerville Branch. The stations did not survive. As the call for train service fell off with more diesel trucks hauling freight and automobiles on the road moving people, the Southern Pacific Railroad, owner of the railroad since 1889, reduced staffing, eventually closing them and dismantled the buildings, except for one.



The Shingle Springs Station on Mother Lode Dr.

Local businessman and railroad enthusiast Marlon Ginney purchased the Shingle Springs station building from the railroad in the 1960s, preserving it and the accompanying historic

Continued on page 4

The El Dorado Western Railroad – the County’s Railroad, by Keith Berry

In 2011, the El Dorado Western Railroad officially launched and its been going strong ever since! The first test and training run was with the historic Kalamazoo Car (now in the County Museum Yard) which was trailered to the railroad and stored during the week in my yard. We ran from El Dorado to Blanchard Rd, and our first riders were Bob Smart and his wife. Bob was trail developer and Parks and Rec commissioner. A volunteer made some aprons and things, ran a gift table in the wind and dust, and people came and rode! We asked to expand east to end of track, and west to the El Dorado “Y” and later we were authorized to run on the track to Shingle Station.

We immediately looked to buy vintage Inspection cars: the first was from Richmond Pacific Railroad in Maintenance of Way service daily and we brought it to El Dorado and quickly worked it over and then hooked up the Kalamazoo Car.



Another Inspection car came from Las Vegas, and two came from Moscow, Idaho. All four cars were fixed up and painted and went operational in only a few months, with work done at Bob McCormick’s shop in the old California Door Company mill yard area, almost under the old mill water tank.

The “El Dorado Western Railroad” name derives from the non profit organization formed in 1996 by a group of passionate railroad historians and enthusiasts. This group kept focused on the goal of an operating history-based railroad.

We expanded operation to two sets of two, and evolved running Shingle Springs and El Dorado, two Sundays each per month.

This reflects a very fast program start up. As a program of the El Dorado County Historical Museum, we sought and were given approval from the County Board of Supervisors to have a public program, take responsibility for the historic Southern Pacific tracks, and plan for a full-size train. We ran a regular schedule and its only in the past couple of years that the COVID Pandemic disrupted a very successful program. We are now following history, preparing the full size train,

Teamwork!



Digging post holes for the security fencing in El Dorado interestingly, on the same original section of railroad east to Diamond Springs. It's been a ride out of the past, into the future.

The volunteers of the EDWR are thankful for the support of our county supervisors, admin staff, Museum volunteers, and community supporters. We are thankful to the SPTC-JPA and the preservation of the rail corridor and tracks that were saved instead of scrapped..

The supervisors supported multi recreational venues on the corridor. We decided to use Inspection cars to expedite an affordable passenger program in a matter of months. A timely and generous donation was the Shingle Springs Depot, and more recently the El Dorado Station building. EDWR has been provided with donations of track equipment to support volunteers handling rail and tie work. Volunteers have accomplished many projects, restoration, repair, fire fuel removal, track re-installation, signage, and operation. The County has developed bathrooms, crossing protection, rail crossing repair, and vehicle parking. Volunteers have developed operations, learned railroad procedure, operated store and ticket sales, and pursued public relations. Volunteers have succeeded in using their approach: clever, simple, quick, cost effective.

The EDWR exists - a miracle* and truly unique, existing in a time and space of competing recreational venues, existing because it runs with volunteers, volunteers who work to see others smile! Thank you all, it's been the ride of a lifetime, a ride out of history into the future.

Thanks for riding along!

*(*also known as a great deal of hard work, dedication, persistence, and vision!)*

Our Master Mechanic

The trains of our youth were wonderful, small mechanical devices, all too soon to incur a broken coupler, missing parts, and mysterious shorted electrical circuits. The bubbling water tower or oil derrick light burned out, the aircraft beacon stopped turning, the cows stopped going up the loading chute, and the locomotives ran away at full speed or not at all!

A Museum based excursion rail program has a similar nature. Historic locomotives, rolling stock, track equipment, and tools arrive as "Diamonds in the Rough". Nobody donates a new locomotive, you must deal with the "Rough".

The key to the excursion railroad is ridership and a stable operating schedule. Enter the volunteer Master Mechanic, a master of the industrial crafts, a magician of the repair, a parts locating detective, and behind the scenes junk recycler. The Master Mechanic brings life to the RIP Track, that place meaning "Rusting in Piles", or "Repair in Place", reflecting the mechanics talent. The Museum rail excursion program reaches maturity when the equipment reaches maximum operation and minimal RIP Track occupancy.

The year 2022 represents a milestone for the El Dorado Western Railroad. All EDWR locomotives, rolling stock, track equipment, and track inspection cars/ Hi-Rail trucks are operational- they start, run, move, and stand ready to do their assigned work.

The development of the EDWR reflects the dedication and mechanical artistry of our "Master Mechanic". Our mechanic has labored independently and with crews to complete extensive repair and restoration, many times a part appears to note his passing, unseen but not unappreciated.

The El Dorado Western train set runs, the parts are in place, and public service is assured. If the EDWR had a bubbling water tower, a whistling billboard, a log loader, or a vibrating cattle loading chute, everything would work, those vibrating cattle would hoof it right up the chute into each waiting cattle car!

The EDWR, like any railroad, rides on the rails, but the EDWR operates because our "Mechanic" came by one day and stayed, to make

sure the trains ran, and the passengers enjoyed their experience.

Ken Asmus, our Master Mechanic, has been keeping the El Dorado Western Railroad rolling for many years. He has decided to retire and we want to say "thank you Ken" for being our mechanic, our magician, our Train Master of the RIP Track! Thank you for giving our ridership a trip through the gold rush hills on vintage rail equipment. Thanks for making all of us smile!

By Keith Berry



*Ken Asmus,
EDWR's Master
Mechanic
(emeritus)*



*Ken receiving a
special EDWR
award in 2021*



Steve, Dwight, Keith, Ken and Nancy in 2018



*Nancy, Ken and
Mary in 2016*

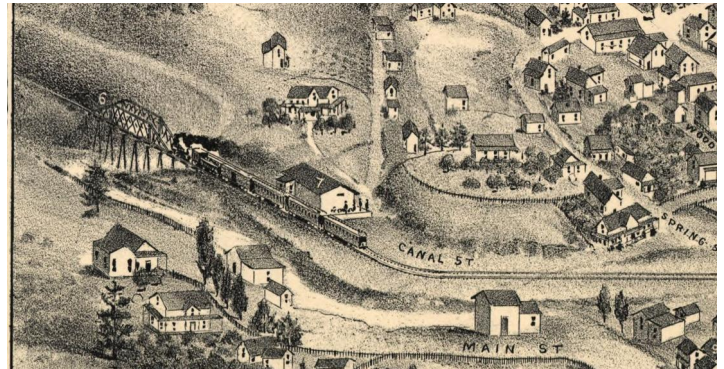
continued from page 1

railroad staff and crew buildings located within the Shingle Springs railroad yard area. Marlon and Chick Ginney donated the station to the El Dorado Western Railway Foundation in 2015 and it is now leased to Sam's Town Cyclery. Ed Hagen saw a need for a railroad facility in El Dorado and generously donated the lumber he milled and organized the volunteers to build a station for the El Dorado Western Railroad, in the style of historic Southern Pacific railroad stations. Ed and Cheryl Hagen have since donated the station to the Railway Foundation.

The evidence of the stations no longer there remains in the layout of the railroad corridor, now the SPTC (Sacramento Placerville Transportation Corridor,) a trail with rail. Where the stations were or where there were loading platforms, the corridor is wider to accommodate the historic sidings. For instance, at Old Depot Road, the Diamond Springs station and accompanying track as well as spur track leading to the old Diamond Mill, shows on the ground where the tracks were when it was an active freight and passenger station. In Placerville, the original railroad station was near the intersection of Canal and Highway 50, but was moved to Mosquito Road after Highway 50 was built. More recently, Highway 50 was widened, paving the old railroad right of way to make three lanes.

The old photos, newspaper articles, oral histories, and artifacts from the county's railroading days help us to remember what used to be. And, of course the El Dorado Western Railroad gives us a chance to see the county from the historical track's perspective!

Detail of 1888 Birdseye View of Placerville with the newly constructed RR station, and a train steaming out of town



General Manager's Report by Mary Cory, County Museum Administrator

Have you thought about volunteering with the El Dorado Western Railroad?

Please email eldoradowesternrailroad@gmail.com and we'll find a place for you! The Railroad needs specialists, generalists, experienced and novices. We will provide training, and there are county requirements to be completed. Join us! Its a great group of community-minded people with a common interest in helping the El Dorado Western Railroad succeed!

For the latest EDWR Schedule, check the County Museum website at www.edcgv.us/government/museum

The Dispatcher is published quarterly by the El Dorado County Historical Museum. Articles contributed by Keith Berry, the editor is Mary Cory. Comments can be directed to mary.cory@edcgv.us



The Diamond Springs Station (upper left)

The Latrobe Station (upper right)



The El Dorado Station (left)



Currently the EDWR is following CA Public Health es requirements for face coverings inside

STARTING MARCH, 2022: 1st and 3rd Sundays boarding in El Dorado, at 10AM, 11AM, 12PM, 1PM.

Tickets are sold on a first come, first served basis.

Tickets go on sale at 9:30am. For more information,

call (530) 663-3581 Like us at

www.facebook.com/ElDoradoWesternRailroad/