

# The Dispatcher

*The El Dorado Western Railroad Newsletter*

DECEMBER 2022



## **Dreaming of a railroad Christmas...**by Keith Berry

Trains are in our memories: the stories of trains, the train under the tree, the sound of a train in the winter night, trains bringing packages and family home for the holidays. Train whistles, bells, lights, and smells. Trains are in our history, our storytelling, and most of all our dreams.

Many a toy train found itself chugging around a Christmas Tree, bell ringing, smoke emitting, rolling down the mainline even if it came right back around again! Most trains lived in the box except at Christmas, unless you could conjure up a bit of space, a sheet of plywood, and the approval to keep the train set up all year.

Usually, no matter what track plan you attempted, you ended up one switch or section of track short, you might have a siding but then you were short the buildings, unless Santa brought you a working log loader, a bubbling oil derrick, a station, the revolving aircraft beacon, or the working semaphore man or cattle loading pen!

That first small train has taken each of us on quite a journey! Some train trips, some train adventures of "jumping" a freight up the valley, purchasing trains in all sizes hoping to have a larger railroad, and to some employment or volunteer opportunity. We all have been smitten to follow those rails past the green signal or red flashing crossing into the distant horizon.

However, who would dare to think they would be given a full-size railroad, a railroad with a place in history, a country railroad with scenery, a railroad with stations, and buildings, crossing lights, and trestles. A railroad with track on the ground waiting for a train, locomotives and cars waiting in the box to run again, stations waiting to come to life, and riders on the station platform yearning to hear that distant whistle!

Christmas presents come in all kinds of boxes with all sizes of trains. But a full-size railroad comes only



once in a lifetime and arrives in the biggest box you will ever open. The present of a railroad is the gift of a dream, if you dream big!

We have been given that gift to not just dream but to actually live! We have many presents to open, a box labeled Determination, a box called Hard Work, a package labeled Repairs, and the best wrapped container called "Share with Others".

Merry Christmas to all of you railroad dreamers. Your presents are out there, many of them, all shapes and size, waiting for you to make the railroad run. You see, you're the most important present. Sure, you get the present of hands-on opportunity, but in doing so you are giving yourself to all of us, you are the real present! We are each other's present, every workday, every run day, every day we dream together.

Thank you for being present in the dream called the *El Dorado Western Railroad!*



*A selection of Keith's American Flyer trains at the Placerville Library in December*

**DOWN IN THE SHINGLE YARDS**

The El Dorado Western railroad currently operates public rail excursion runs two Sundays per month from El Dorado Station. While Covid restriction allowed limited operation east from El Dorado, the railroad to Shingle Springs Station has remained out of public service. However, Shingle Springs Station is so important as a historical division point, connecting the railroad to stations and industry sidings west to the county line.

Shingle Springs was the railroad's eastern terminal station from 1865 to 1888. The business supported a station with a passenger waiting room, and a freight room with loading deck. Locomotives turned on a wooden turntable, watered from a stand- pipe at the station, freight cars were spotted along the freight house siding track, and empty cars placed into the "down" train heading back to Folsom and Sacramento. Railroad operation warranted houses for the Station Agent, Paymaster, and track Roadmaster. Other support buildings for an office, a shower/bathroom, and a Crew breakroom were built. The Station Master grew a rose garden patio next to the crew buildings, shade trees were planted, grapevines improved the shade.

Then, the railroad stopped running in 1986, the passenger waiting room was gone, the track grew rusty, the railroad support buildings and rose garden patio were in disarray. The Shingle railyard was silent, no trains were scheduled. Then, in 2010, the El Dorado Western Railroad came to Shingle Springs. Sunday train rides were scheduled, the Station Building and Caboose were donated, various merchants occupied the Freight Room, and plans were made to save the historic railroad support buildings. Then the Covid years suspended the rail operations, the railyard was silent again.

Sometimes, progress is measured in small steps, you redirect expansive leaps into specific objectives until you can again take the mainline toward program development. Down in the Shingle railyards, the El Dorado Western crews continued to preserve and develop, to build support infrastructure, and to make a determined effort to manage encroaching fire fuels which threatened buildings and rail equipment.

The station historic freight room has now been leased, a gourmet sandwich, salad, and dessert emporium will

*Now Open!  
R. Newman's  
at 4241  
Mother Lode  
Drive*



open in the next few weeks. Dining on the deck will be offered in season. A future project being considered is to rebuild the passenger ticket office/waiting room/ restrooms, supporting the return of passenger rail excursion and meeting/event space, perhaps a wedding! The Shingle railyard area as a whole, and the historic railroad support buildings have been cleared of fire fuel. Approximately 24 trailer loads have been removed, the fire defensive space extended, public trash and junk removed, and the areas prepared for weed management procedures. The railroad buildings are scheduled to be prepped and painted upon the return of dry Spring weather.

The primary operating center cab diesel locomotive has new paint, it is being used for air brake training with the Southern Pacific Caboose 1188. A second vintage operating center cab locomotive is arriving soon, this locomotive will serve as a road engine for reserve, service replacement, and expanding the full- size excursion experience potential from Shingle Station. A small Plymouth locomotive is at Shingle Springs to be used for switching and track ballast work. Key track work equipment has been donated and prepared for track work on the railroad. A

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*Shingle Springs Station with the SP Motor Car #39 on the Main Line, c.1940*



## A Child's Life in Pino Grande

The County Museum recently received a transcription of an Oral History tape collected in 1993. Thelma Boromini Gomes was born in Placerville in 1927. Her father, Pete Boromini, worked as a fireman on the railroad for Michigan California Lumber Company. Thelma said: *When he was 21, he lost his leg on the railroad while working for Michigan-Cal. He came back from that, played baseball, danced, and did anything he wanted to do...and lived to be 96 years old!*

Thelma's father continued to work for Michigan-Cal, and she remembered: *Daddy would never have given up working on the railroad. He loved building the trains. He loved taking them apart. He loved putting them together. He loved boring out the boilers. He would work on holidays and any day. I don't know if he ever had a vacation. The Railroad was his life. That was fine...he was happy.*

Thelma grew up in Camino, living in one of the old company houses on the old Highway 50 (now Carson Road.) She remembered that her father would not let her have a bicycle because he was afraid she and her sister would get killed. Instead, they tried to roller skate on rocks and on the sidewalk up in front of the company houses. She remembers the heavy snows in Camino and the fun of building snow tunnels to the front doors.

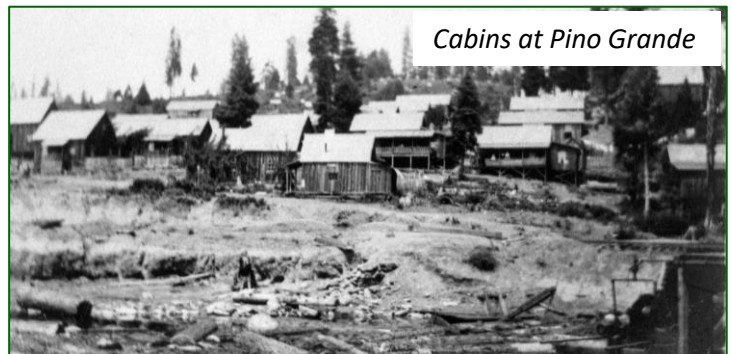
Thelma remembers: *Every year after school was out for the summer, we moved to the logging camps near Pino. Daddy worked up there all year and of course, we had to go to school until June. When we moved to the camps, we thought it was a big holiday. We did lots of fun things that kids do. Bill [Cola] and I had a chipmunk-squirrel trap that was a little bit bigger than a shoe box. Daddy and Big Joe built us a big screen-like aviary enclosure with plain old water bars in it. We would do acrobatics on them, and the chipmunks would play on them too. We had swings in there too.*

Thelma describes the fun they had playing around the camp, and the hazards they took in their stride, such as playing around the building that held the boiler for the men's showers, chasing down rattle snakes, and hanging out at the pig pens. She said: *we were warned not to go near the pig pens. There was big old sow down there and she was a mean son-of-a-gun. We would get the little pigs, they were so cute, and they would squeal and holler and the big old sow would raise holy cane [sic].*

Thelma relates how *we would go up across the railroad tracks and walk the rails a lot. We weren't allowed to, of*



Camino in the snow



Cabins at Pino Grande

*course. We were careful and listen to the rails with our ears, and made sure that nobody got us. Daddy warned us of the dangers of the railroad, but he told us how to protect ourselves.*

*On Fourth of July Joe [Cola] and Daddy would go to town and get what they called "a keg of nails" which was big haul of ice cream or cherries or whatever. They would bring that up to camp. We would have a big party or picnic. Everybody would be there.*

Thelma describes other adventures in the lumber camps, at Pino Grande, and what it was like to be a teenager in Placerville. Her oral history is a wonderful window into what life was like for children in the old lumber camps. Another great book is *One Kid's Pino Grande* by Robert Ramsey



*Pete Boromini, engineer of the Shay #6 on the Michigan-California Railroad, in 1940*



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second service container is planned to be located near the first container to permit a weather protected service track befitting of a Division Point station.

The Covid period has been unkind to the previous Shingle Springs Station rail excursion schedule, yet has presented an opportunity to revisit the Shingle Railyard from a program development view, pursue an overall plan to bring the railyard back to life with stronger public presentation, and create community opportunity to come and sit where historic trains once fought their way up the grade from Latrobe, pulled into a thriving railroad division point station and community center of attention, a vital connection with other stations along the Placerville Branch railroad line, and a first daily connection with the outside world.

Anyone for some dessert and a historic railroad experience? Things are happening "Down in the Shingle Yards".



*Working in the Shingle Springs yard on maintenance of way – thank you!*

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

This year, the El Dorado Western Railroad and the El Dorado Community Hall are teaming up for a new program called "ENTERTRAINMENT!" scheduled for Saturday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 9AM – 2PM, rain or shine. Check it out on the EDWR's Facebook page.

Thanks to Sara Pagano, Jill Kearney and all the volunteers who are helping to make this free event the first of what we hope will become a holiday tradition.

Best wishes to you all for a fun and safe holiday, and a happy and healthy 2023!

**Spotlight on RAILROAD VOLUNTEERS**



*Russ Elmore, Sara Pagano and Jeanne Amos excited about joining the 2022 Placerville Christmas Parade on Dec. 4, 2022!*

*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.org](mailto:mary.cory@edcgv.org)*



**In December, the EL DORADO WESTERN RAILROAD will be at the Placerville Christmas Parade on December 4th and operating out of El Dorado on December 18 (weather permitting) The Volunteers will take a break to concentrate on training and maintenance, resuming operations on March 19, 2023.**

For more information, visit the website at [www.edcgv.us/government/museum](http://www.edcgv.us/government/museum). Like us at [www.facebook.com/ElDoradoWesternRailroad](https://www.facebook.com/ElDoradoWesternRailroad)



*Jill Kearney, driving her Model T Truck with Mark Bruto waving to the crowds*