

The Dispatcher

The El Dorado Western Railroad Newsletter
October 2021



Railway Express Agency – *Anything, Any Size, Any Place*

By Mary Cory

Recently, the County Museum accepted the donation of an artifact from Placerville's railroading history. Garn Woodall, the son of Sacramento's Railway Express Agency District representative, returned a Railway Express Agency (REA) cabinet used in the Placerville Railroad Station, along with an iron safe, office stamps and other items, and a notebook full of his father's history with the REA.



The Railway Express Agency was the railroad equivalent of today's modern express shipping companies, such as UPS and FEDEX. Many high-priority passenger trains carried baggage cars operated by the REA. They carried high-priority time-sensitive parcels from city to city and were a major source of revenue for passenger trains. Prior to REA, the domestic express business was dominated by companies familiar to us during the Gold Rush: Adams & Company (founded 1842,) American Express Company (founded 1850,) and Wells, Fargo & Company (founded 1852.)

In 1917 President Woodrow Wilson nationalized all domestic train service – passenger and freight – under the control of the U.S. Railroad Administration in order to move federal troops, supplies and coal more efficiently. The American Railway Express Agency was formed to take custody of all the pooled equipment and property of existing express companies. After the end of World War I, the railroads were eventually returned to private ownership and management in 1920. It wasn't until 1928 when several railroads got together to set up the Railway Express Agency and proceeded to operate the express business, returning to private ownership. The Southern Pacific Railroad, owner of our Placerville Branch, was one of them. The REA was a successful and lucrative business for the railroads for 40 years.

However, by the early 1970s the REA was struggling. Finally in 1975 REA declared bankruptcy.

During its heyday, any town with a railroad station had a Railway Express Agency office, with the



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Placerville's American Express Office on Main Street, prior to the founding of the Railway Express Agency

In Placerville, the Railway Express Agency was located at 364 Main Street, a couple of doors up from the Blue Bell Cafe. Later it moved to 200 N. Washington, close to the second Placerville Train Station on Mosquito, where today's bus transfer station is. (The first train station, located near Canal and Main, was demolished when 4-lane Highway 50 was constructed in the early 1950s, but that's another story.)

Garn Woodall, Jr. (below) reminisced with Keith Berry and me about his summers working for REA in Tahoe City, and the many unusual items that were shipped by rail, including horses. The Railway Express Agency green delivery truck was an American institution for decades, synonymous with today's UPS delivery trucks.

The Railway Express Agency cabinet is a great reminder of another piece of our Railroading history.



TRACK UPDATE

By Peter Schulze, EDWR Roadmaster

Wish List for EDWR Maintenance - Peter Schulze is looking for the following:

The EDWR has need of steel pipe and/or rebar for retaining wall construction along our track shoulders

We'll pick up from your site (or you can deliver to the MOW container at El Dorado)

Steel water pipe 1" diameter to 2 ½" diameter, minimum 4' long to 20'.

Steel concrete reinforcement rod ("rebar") 1" to 2" diameter, minimum 4' long to 20' long.

"Tee" section fence posts as used for cattle fencing, would be very helpful, too!

Each should be mostly straight, without any attachments. Old or rusty but solid steel is GREAT!

Call Peter Schulze (cell) at 925 200-2907 or e-mail:

peter@trackservicesinc.com

THANK YOU in advance for your assistance and support !!!



Weight Loss Program on the EDWR

The El Dorado Western is a great volunteer experience: enjoy being outside in the cool air, share some time with those who love trains, obtain exercise without having to dress for the gym experience, and best of all, lose some weight while still being able to eat a donut or a lunchtime hamburger!

YES, the EDWR weight reduction program is a highly refined programmed series of exercises, all providing a high calorie burn off while avoiding the boredom of the stationary bike and gasping on the incline treadmill.

The following exercise routine is our favorite, the Universal Railroad Tie Replacement circuit training sequence:

- 1) Warm up getting dressed in heavy- pants, socks, boots, shirt, safety vest, cap.
- 2) Report to the tool container, search for track tools, all heavy, all in a pile- dig out a hoe, a does foot (spike remover), a crow bar, a narrow shovel, a mattox (no, not the pick!), tie tongs, and a large rail jack .
- 3) Carry all tools to your truck or rail car depending on where work is located on railroad. Of course, truck is always parked up hill from tool pile. After loading truck, check tire pressure and correct as needed, starting air compressor- locate air hose.
- 4) Drive to EDWR, meet others crazy enough to turn out in the heat of a summer morning, locate bottles of water, discuss meaningless topics and tell stories, putting off work as long as possible.
- 5) Determine the railroad tie to be replaced, always chose the one furthest from where you park so you have to lump all the tools clear down the track. No sense being close.
- 6) Use the mattox and hoe, dig out ballast and sand from old tie, dig out both sides and ends, keep looking for the last rock jamming the tie from being removed!
- 7) Use the track tongs, attempt to pull tie out, jack up track to finally pull out tie.
- 8) Clean out tie bed. Oh, go locate new tie which you forgot, the tie your looking for is the heaviest tie in the pile of ties - drag tie to work site, shove and heave tie under track, heave is term for pushing/pulling, other heave occurs later.

9) Now that tie is under rail, realize you forgot the tie plates under the rail, now repeat step 8 to lower tie, and get everything back under track.

10) Drive three wood tie plugs into old spike holes, then drive spikes with last energy you possess. Hand spike if feeling buff, use air jack if your experienced. Sometimes, spiking will come later as larger project.

11) Jam ballast , called tamping, under and around tie, admire your work, all one lonely tie worth! Attempt to walk away from the work site, sit down.

12) Locate next tie to be replaced, that's right, its the tie furthest from where your tools are now scattered all over the place, and are now well baked from the blazing sun.

13) Decide if your finished for the day, or in need of medical attention, make trips to carry all tools to back to your truck.

Remember, your the one who wanted to lose some pounds, and get in shape. Don't worry if you weigh the same once you get home, its just the dirt, ballast dust, rust, oil, and small rocks in your clothes.

See you next time on the EDWR- that is EL DORADO WEIGHT REDUCTION!

By Keith Berry



Funding a project by Frequent Drinking

The El Dorado Western Railway Foundation is very appreciative of the fact that both the Shingle Springs and EL Dorado railroad stations, our locomotives, and both Southern Pacific Cabooses have been donated to serve the community enjoyment!

A diverse number of track tools, machine tools, mechanic's tools, and vintage railroad operational items have also been donated to assist in presenting a living history of rail-based operation in El Dorado County. Individuals and organizations have donated monetary funding for restoration projects. Our riders support the operations thru their ticket purchase.

However, a lesser known program of donation involves drinking- a lot of drinking! Over the years, we have benefited by the donation of recycle aluminum cans, plastic water bottles, and anything else carrying the CRV deposit paid upon purchase.

Some of us appear to be quite the CRV drunkards! Certain families generate huge volumes of materials, reflecting a continuous consumption of various flavors of soda and water! Huge poundage (recycle poundage) has resulted by soda dependency along with good hydration. Other individuals, office workmates, and volunteer collectors at summer camp and special events contribute. As with natural watercourses, small streams join, rivers are formed, and all sources flow to the SEA or to the SEE, that is to See how much redemption income the EWDRF receives to fund restoration.

The SP Caboose 1094 restoration project has required purchase of wood products, paints, and metal to build back the car to 1940 condition. The recycle income has proven productive in providing funding for this worthy project.

SO, drink up, raise those bottles, enjoy a cold soda or bottled water, every bottle counts. The EDWRF appreciates your insatiable thirst, you are restoring Caboose 1094 a swallow at a time. Thank You!



The No. 83 leaving Placerville with baggage car

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

The history of railroads in El Dorado County continues to be a fascinating topic for me, and learning about the express freight business opens up another facet of the economic and cultural significance of the railroads in El Dorado County.

The El Dorado County Historical Museum's mission is to preserve, collect and interpret the county's history. It's with the help of volunteers, donors, and the public that we're able to do this. Come out and support the El Dorado Western Railroad! It's an opportunity to learn about our local history, and an opportunity to make a difference in preserving part of the past!

Garn Woodall, Jr. and Keith Berry admiring the Placerville Station's Railway Express Agency cabinet preserved by his father, the REA's district rep. Thank you Garn, for this great donation!



For the latest EDWR Schedule, check the County Museum website at www.edcgov.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@edcgov.us



Currently railroad operations are following Public Health guidelines. Face coverings are required inside for non-vaccinated visitors and volunteers
Schedule: 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

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