



# TRAIN ORDERS

1993

*Celebrating SCRVRHS's  
20th ANNIVERSARY*

2013

Summer 2013

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## VCTC to Cancel Fillmore & Western Lease and Stop Operations on December 1st



Santa Clara River Valley Railroad Historical Society  
Post Office Box 492  
Fillmore, CA 93016

May 19, 2013

Sent to each of the 17 VCTC Commissioners  
Ventura Co. Government Center

Dear Commissioner:

Re: VCTC Plans for the SPBL Future

I am the President of the Santa Clara River Valley Railroad Historical Society, (SCRVRHS) in Fillmore, CA, at 455 Main Street. We recently celebrated our 20 year anniversary as a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation operating successfully in Ventura County. The Santa Clara River Valley Railroad Historical Society Mission Statement includes a goal statement: "...to assist in the preservation and restoration of the railroad corridor between Montalvo and Saugus California so as to maximize the economic, educational, environmental, and recreational value of this unique historic asset to the residents of the Santa Clara River Valley and surrounding area."

The SP Branch line was and is essential to the growth and the future development of Ventura County as a way of shipping products all over the world. Freight service has been replaced by the many diesel trucks pounding the asphalt on Highway 126. It is my belief that much of the motorized freight service can be recaptured with an active effort to attract, convert and maintain freight haulers to rail through lower cost factors and effective service.

SCRVRHS is a volunteer organization that operates a Railroad Visitor Center in the old firehouse in the City of Fillmore at 455 Main Street. The purpose of the Center is to educate residents and tourists about the branch line and the importance the railroad played in the development of Ventura County. The Center contains artifacts, memorabilia, photographs, citrus packing labels, a reference library, a vintage 1950's Lionel model train layout, and a 24 seat movie theatre.

On nearby property in Fillmore, SCRVRHS has developed Phase one of our planned three phase Interpretive Center. Phase one saw the purchase, restoration and installation of a 1905, 95 foot railroad turntable. The turntable is essentially a rotating bridge that can turn railroad equipment and allow equipment to be stored on tracks attached to the turntable. This turntable has been used many times to assist the F&W Rwy in handling movie shoots, freight cars, locomotive turning and demonstration purposes at our annual Railfestival... All of it completed with volunteer labor. Also, SCRVRHS owns and stores three railcars on the turntable tracks: 1) an original 1956 Union Pacific Pullman sleeping car; 2) a 1957 Pacific Fruit Express refrigerator car and; 3) an original, steel, 1949 Santa Fe caboose. Phase two plans call for a three stall roundhouse and phase three will be an adjacent interpretive center building.

### Legal Battle Brews Over Lease Fees

At a May 10th public meeting, the Ventura County Transportation Commission lamented the fact that their Santa Paula Branch Line has suffered from an eleven (11) year average annual financial loss of \$331,022.46. VCTC wants the line 'budget neutral' or break even. Commissioners felt that the public should not subsidize a for-profit company such as the Fillmore & Western Railway. The F&W leases the branch for \$769 per month or \$9,228 per year plus 5% of fees generated from movie revenue (some \$15,000/yr). Apparently the Fillmore & Western owes the commission more than \$137,000 from what the commission said was an overpayment of a maintenance allowance, according to VCTC planning and technology director Steve DeGeorge.

VCTC's hired railroad consultant Thomas Egan emphasized that the commission needs to identify more revenue streams for the line. But the F&W feels that VCTC has mismanaged the line by failing to increase lease fees on existing pipeline and agricultural leases along the right-of-way as well as failing to seek money from those who have encroached on the right-of-way. Also, the F&W feels that VCTC has failed to obtain Federal grant money for the line.

It appears the VCTC lease order changed whatever negotiation dynamic existed between the parties.

( continued on next page)

# DISPATCH BOARD

**June 5** 7:00pm Board of Directors Meeting  
Railroad Visitors Center, Fillmore

**June 12** 7:00pm General Membership Meeting  
Railroad Visitors Center, Fillmore

**June 27—July 4** **Firework Sales**  
**East Hwy 126 North — Fillmore**

**July 10** 7:00pm General Membership Meeting  
Railroad Visitors Center, Fillmore

(SCRVRHS letter to VCTC continued from p.1)

The long term lease for the Railroad Interpretive Center property from the City of Fillmore has a provision that SCRVRHS must produce a 'sustainable income' to support the property. SCRVRHS currently generates the vast majority of its income in the following ways:

- Membership dues and donations
- Two major fundraising activities:
  - Annual County Rail Festival in March of each year
  - Fourth of July fireworks sales
- Providing trained car attendants for on-train passenger safety and services:
  - Fillmore & Western Railway (year round)
  - VCTC Metrolink County Fair trains (summer)
- Operation and use of the railroad turntable:
  - Fillmore & Western Railway
  - Union Pacific Railroad Freight Cars
- "Location" use of rolling stock and property by the motion picture industry (Both the Turntable Lot and Visitor Center)

Without a full time operational railroad on the branch line, only membership dues, donations, and annual firework sales would generate revenue for SCRVRHS. With no operational railroad which attracts potential members; to allow for car attendant training; to use the turntable; and to assist in industry and educational opportunities, membership and the dues that it generates, will drop substantially. Public donations would also diminish from the lack of F&W train passengers who visit the current SCRVRHS Railroad Visitor Center either prior to or after their train ride. Movie shoot revenue would disappear. That would leave only annual fireworks sales as a revenue source. SCRVRHS could not continue to exist on this revenue source alone. SCRVRHS could be forced to liquidate its railroad rolling stock, turntable, and other assets; vacate its leases; and close its doors.

We implore you to reconsider your plans to mothball the Santa Paula Branch Line. Doing so will significantly affect our valley with many lost jobs; the end for organizations such as ours that contribute significantly to the community with historical education of our residents and visitors. VCTC Letters to us testify as to the value of our organization. Our Guest Book further testifies to the numbers of visitors from all over the world. The hundreds of children who visit us marvel at our 1950's O-Gauge Railroad, laughing, jumping up and down, learning about "Trains".

Please do not close our doors to all the visitors we serve! Maintain the line; grow the line and look forward to expanded usage with expanded freight/passenger service, motion picture production and future Metrolink Expansion, as was the original vision. I believe by working together, with effective management and supervision, the revenue issues can and will be solved to the benefit of all concerned.

Sincerely,  
Ronald D. Lewis, President  
Santa Clara River Valley Railroad Historical Society

## AROUND THE ROUNDHOUSE . . .

**PASSING SIDING** — Long time Society member Bill Victor passed away unexpectedly on April 17th. Bill most recently volunteered as part of the SCRVRHS BBQ crew serving tri-tip sandwiches at our Railfest in March as he did each of the past several years.



Bill's wife Eleanor graciously donated the large, portable BBQ pit (hand built by Bill), that was used to roast those tri-tips at the festival to the Society. He is already sorely missed.

**FIREWORK SALES COMING UP SOON -** SCRVRHS's largest fundraiser of the year will soon be upon us. We need volunteers to assist in booth set-up, firework sales, and final inventory. A series of limited work shifts will be set up throughout the week from morning to evening that members can sign up for. If you have a few hours to spend during the weekdays, evenings or weekend your participation is very much welcomed. Also plan to attend the big 4th of July celebration in Fillmore. It includes local vendors, train rides and the huge Sespe Creek Car Show sponsored by the Fillmore Chamber of Commerce. Volunteers are also needed to open the Visitor Center on the 4th of July for all those attendees. We need the money to restore water to the Visitor Center and you can help. (You might remember the water line to the Center broke sometime back). Contact President Ron Lewis if you can help.

