



October 2012

NEWSLETTER FOR THE PAID & VOLUNTEER STAFF OF RAILTOWN 1897 STATE HISTORIC PARK

### Upcoming Events

#### **October 2**

Railtown Ladies Luncheon will be at the Hong Kong Chinese Restaurant in Sonora

#### **October 4**

Pumpkin gathering, at Del Osso Farms in Manteca.

#### **October 6**

Membership Day! Special Twilight Trains Entertainment by The Black Irish Band 5-8PM on the platform and Keith Keenom on-board the trains at 6PM and 7PM (\*Note: if the trains fill up, a 5PM train might be added)

#### **October Weekends**

Harvest Haunt Express trains (\*note: 'Skeleton' t-shirts will be available by October 11

#### **October 14th**

Jamestown Heritage Days- Help staff our Booth!

#### **October 18th**

TC Chamber- Harvest Trade Fair at the Fairgrounds 5-7PM- Come help sell business memberships!

#### **October 20**

Zombie Train! Climb Aboard our first ever Zombie excursion train at 6:30PM...details TBA

#### **November 23 & 24**

Santa's Starlight Express-

## **The Iconic Jamestown Water Tank- Fact and Fable Kyle Wyatt & Kim Baker**

There is no doubt that the Railtown water tank is an icon almost as familiar as the No. 3. It can be seen on the park's logo, and visitors from around the world ask for it by name. Car Hosts point it out on each excursion as 'the water tank from Petticoat Junction'. But is it? Can we separate the facts from the legend?

First, lets consider the context of our tank. Water tanks were vital to the operation of any steam-powered railroad, and the Sierra Railway was no exception. At various times during its history, water tanks were operational at Coopers-town, Warnerville, Standard, Canyon Tank, Paulsell, Jamestown, Angels Camp. Water columns were available in Oakdale, Tuolumne, and later in Jamestown. The distance between most water tanks throughout the country was 4-12 miles, depending upon the nearby grades and other factors. Functioning water tanks were so important to the operation of the railroad that employees were assigned solely to the task of checking their status and function on a regular basis, to ensure that water was always available to the locomotives. A tender is attached to the back of each steam locomotive, to hold water and fuel. When the locomotive stops for water, the fireman climbs to the rear of the tender pulls down a water spout, and then pulls on a rope to open the valve, which releases water into the tank of the tender. From there, the water is piped to the boiler where it is converted to steam to provide the propulsion for the pistons and drive the locomotive. Diesel locomotives do not require water, therefore, the demise of the steam locomotive in America also correlated with the demise of the water tank. While it is difficult to determine exact numbers, today very few water tanks survive, compared to the number in operation a century ago, and fewer still are in regular use.

The absence of construction records for the Sierra Railway make it very difficult to date structures on the Railtown 1897 State Historic Site. As a result, to determine an accurate history of the Jamestown water tanks, we are dependent upon photographic evidence and the few source documents that survive. From records and existing structures, it appears that in Jamestown, the Sierra used water tanks (at least three, over time) and a water standpipe. The water standpipe that currently exists, across the tracks from the current water tank, appears to be from the early 1920s. It was returned to service in the 1970s, but subsequently discontinued because the ditch water it delivered contained a good deal of silt and sand, which were deposited in the tank. After the State took over operation in 1982, a smaller, TUD pipe was installed to supply the tank and the water column. The reduced volume of delivery didn't impact the operation of the water tank, but the reduced capacity water main on the water column, made it inefficient for filling tenders, and its use was abandoned. *(continue next page....)*

The current water tank appears to be adjacent to the site of the original Sierra water tank, which was probably used until installation of the water standpipe. The builders of the present foundation marked the year '1938' in the concrete, which allows us to accurately date the footings. As is common, over the years, many repairs and changes were made to the structure. The concrete footings appear to be the only original elements of the 1938 water tank.

Historically, Sierra Railway water tanks built through the early 1930s had roofs over them. This added protection to the tank from weathering, and also reduced algae growth (which the direct sunlight sometimes caused without the roof). Photos taken in Jamestown through the early 1930s show the water tank with a roof. In 1938 the Sierra built a new water tank at Jamestown (date in concrete footings even today) which did not have a roof. This is the water tank that appeared in Petticoat Junction in the 1960s. In the 1970s, the Sierra replaced this tank with a cheap, two-inch thick tank (instead of a better 3 inch thick tank), and was also significantly smaller and shorter in height in diameter than the earlier tank. By 1982, the water tank clearly did not even match visually the water tank used in the early 1960s for Petticoat Junction. At the time of acquisition in 1982, the platform was rebuilt by the State (Department of General Services, Direct Construction Unit), but the 1970s-era water tank was re-used. DCU was unfamiliar with railroad construction practices, so in building the new platform they changed the existing design. For "earthquake security" they also created a collar about the base of the support posts – which captured water and led to rot. Further, they did not know how to place a water tank on a platform, so they just set it there supported by the side staves, instead of giving necessary support to the bottom. The result was that the bottom failed and leaked, leading also to the platform rotting out in several places. All of these led to the need to replace both the tank and the platform in 2001. Since interpretively most of the Railtown facility represents a period through the 1920s-30s, and because a roof on the water tank will make it last longer, the decision in 2001 was to rebuild the tank to represent the appearance of the earlier known Jamestown water tank. The numerous changes over the years made adherence to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Preservation a challenge, although photographs of water tanks along the Sierra were consulted as part of the design process.

So, what is the main message for our visitors? Over the years, the Sierra built at least three water tanks, as well as a water standpipe, at the Jamestown site to provide water for steam locomotives. The current water tank is a reconstruction, based on photographic evidence and is similar to the earliest known water tank on the site. The only original elements of the 1938 water tank (the one appearing in Petticoat Junction) are the three concrete footings, the spout and other hardware. On operating days, the water tank is used at least twice a day to water the locomotive, providing a unique opportunity for visitors to observe an activity that was once common throughout the country. In interpreting the history of the water tank to passengers, it would be most accurate to describe the tank as a reconstruction, in the same location of the Petticoat Junction tank, but emphasize how the watering process ties in to our overall theme of perpetuating the lost art of steam railroading. Photo: Early 1920s Sierra No. 28 with water tank and oil trestle, from the ICC valuation. Note hip roof, graduated sides on the water tank. The oil trestle was used to bring a tank car to the oil bunker, so the oil could drain by gravity into the large oil tank behind the water tank. If you poke around in the bushes today you can find some of the footings. Source: CSRM Library. **For more images of the water tank over time, see the Railtown blog which can be linked from [Railtown1897.org](http://Railtown1897.org)**



**Railtown’s Water Tank Chronology**

- 1897 Through early-mid 1930s** – one, and possibly two water tanks, with roof over tank
- 1920s** – water column installed
- 1938** – completely new tank and platform installed, without roof (‘Petticoat Junction tank’)
- 1970s** – new much smaller tank installed on 1938 platform
- 1982** – State constructs a new platform, reusing the 1970s tank (and mis-installing same)
- 2001** – water tank and platform constructed on 1938 footings – design follows style of pre-1938 tanks and platforms, including roof.

**Santa Trains at Railtown!!**

November and December bring cold air, and Santa! We are moving forward in planning for this year’s Santa Trains. Tickets are now on sale online, and you can pick up a current copy of the event plan in the Volunteer Coordinator’s office or the Crew Caboose. We need help in all areas— set up, clean up, car hosting, cocoa serving, ticket sales and more! The schedule is posted in the crew caboose, or give Dave a call to sign up.

**Santa Train Decorating Days**

- Interiors- 2<sup>nd</sup> Weekend of November-9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> 8:30-Noon
- Exteriors- 3<sup>rd</sup> Weekend of November- 16<sup>th</sup>- 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> 8:30-Noon
- Sunday, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 9am to 3PM ?
- Trial run with Generators November 18<sup>th</sup> @ 5:30 (Family run- no cocoa or musicians)
- Un-decorating Exteriors- Tuesday after Thanksgiving- November 27<sup>th</sup> @ 8:30
- Un-decorating Interiors- Tuesday December 18<sup>th</sup> @ 8:30

**Tuolumne County Historical Society Presents—Glen Bell Theme Park**

On Thursday, October 11 at 7PM, Mike Wunder will be the Tuolumne County Historical Society guest speaker at the County Library on Greenley Road in Sonora. Mr. Wunder will share his experiences and vast personal collection of photos he took while working as director of special projects at Glen Bell’s theme park in Tuolumne. Glen Bell, founder of Taco Bell, purchased the West Side mill site in the 1970s. The theme park was an idea of Mr. Bell’s and included such venues as paddleboats, rail lines and an amphitheatre. (\*Note: Railtown volunteers attending this presentation may log the hours as continuing education hours.)



**Depot Store Gets A New Look**  
David Deutsch posing in front of the newly remodeled space he finished behind the cash register at the Depot Store.

**Quotable Quotes:**  
*Volunteers are seldom paid; not because they are worthless, but because they are PRICELESS!*  
--author unknown

*It's easy to make a buck. It's a lot tougher to make a difference.*  
-- Tom Brokaw



**RAILTOWN 1897**  
State Historic Park

**PO Box 1250**

**Jamestown, CA 95327**

**Return Service Requested**



**TO:**



**Depot Store-** (209) 984-3953

**Volunteer Desk-** (209) 984-4408

**Docent Site-** <http://railtown.team.parks.ca.gov/volunteers>

**Railtown Blog-** [www.railtown1897.wordpress.com](http://www.railtown1897.wordpress.com)

**Crew Caboose-** (209) 984-0352



**Railtown Paid and Volunteer Staff Contact Information**

*Newsletter submissions: [RailtownNews@parks.ca.gov](mailto:RailtownNews@parks.ca.gov) or [darainwater@parks.ca.gov](mailto:darainwater@parks.ca.gov)  
(all area codes are 209)*

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