

A Track Planning Party

On May 14, 2011, a number of members travelled to The Dalles, Oregon and met at John, Carol and Robert Westhafer's home. John is the pastor at the Faith Lutheran Church and the parsonage is on church grounds. The hosts provided a barbecue and the member's pot luck food was good and plentiful. It was a nice day and the rain held off until evening.

Their son, Robert, wants to build a small railroad and the RCGRS members were asked to provide ideas on the site and design. Two parameters are: 1) the railroad can be disassembled and moved if necessary, and 2) the railroad design and construction must align with a young man's limited budget.



Robert talks with Ed Foley about placement and design.

Three or four areas on the grounds were investigated for the site, but the most popular suggested site was a raised road bed on the north side of the parsonage. A "folded dog bone" design with expansion possibilities was one of the suggestions.

Robert brought out some of his track and a dummy layout was projected. Most of Robert's track is from a "starter kit" where the curves have a 2-ft radius. It was suggested that 4-ft minimum radius curves be part of the design.

Jan Zweerts has a layout on a small barge and is familiar with design issues in a small space. His 200-ft surveyor's tape was most useful in showing a series of concepts.



Jan Zweerts, Robert, Ed Foley and Johnathan Reiterman size up a turn around as a possibility for the design.



Penny Walker makes notes of the suggestions.



Bill Dippert, Dave Kookan, Margaret Kookan, Carol Westhafer, Nick Kelsey, Jan Zweerts, Ed Foley, and Tom Gaps confer on a possible railroad site.



Jan Zweerts and Robert Westhafer check on the possible grade while Bob and Johnathan Reiterman look on.

At the end of the day, the attendees entered their notes, comments and recommendations for the future railroad. There can be a future day when construction will be needed to convert these plans into a reality.

Editor’s Note: The following article also records a dark side to railroad history in the Northwest. You may find some of this history rather painful to read.

Columbia Basin Railroads (Columbia River History—John Harrison for the Northwest Power and Conservation Council)

The first railroad in the Columbia River Basin was built along the river in 1851. Little more than a cart on rails, it was a portage tramway on the Washington side of the Columbia River Gorge around The Cascades rapids. With a mule and one cart, Hardin Chenoweth moved freight and passengers around the rapids for a fee of 75 cents per 100 pounds. In 1894, the little railroad was damaged by flooding and sold to a cannery, which used it to haul salmon from its fish wheels to its production building.

By 1862 railroad portages were operating on both shores of the Columbia at The Cascades rapids, making passage much easier for settlers arriving from the East. In this year, the **Oregon Steam Navigation Company** gained control of portage roads and equipment on the Oregon side, securing its mo-

nopoly on river transportation. The following year, 1863, work was completed on a portage railroad around The Dalles and Celilo Falls about 40 miles upstream of The Cascades. Called the Dalles and Celilo Railroad, its first locomotive was named after John C. Ainsworth of the Oregon Steam Navigation Company, which owned the railroad. From these beginnings as portage conveyances, railroads quickly were built to connect steamboat landings to cities and cities to the rest of the country.



Portage Railroad around Celilo Falls, 1867
There were no air brakes at this time. Can you see the brakemen on top of each of the cars?

Emigrants were pouring into the Northwest, lured by the promise of donation land claims or the prospect of riches from the mines. It was also a time that America sought to increase its foreign trade. In 1845, Asa Whitney, a New York businessman, had proposed to Congress that a transcontinental railroad be built from Lake Superior to Puget Sound to facilitate the growing trade with China. The reaction in Congress was cool initially, but Whitney was skilled at building popular support for seemingly far-fetched ideas, and the transcontinental railroad gradually took hold in the imagination of the American public. Railroads at the time were mostly experimental, and few were longer than 150 miles.

In 1853, just two years after Chenoweth completed his portage railroad, Congress approved funding for the Topographical Corps to survey possible railroad routes from the eastern states to the Pacific Ocean. Isaac I. Stevens, the new governor of Washington Territory, was appointed to lead the northern survey. Five routes were surveyed; the resulting reports were published 1856 and 1861, and Congress deadlocked on whether to authorize a northern or southern route. The Civil War broke the deadlock, and in 1864 Congress chartered the Northern Pacific Railroad.

Because of the high cost of the Civil War, the government was not able to provide a cash subsidy for each mile of track laid. Instead, Congress provided the Northern Pacific the largest land grant in American history — 60 million acres from Lake Superior to the Pacific, a vast checkerboard of alternating one-mile squares of land along the route of the railroad. Congress also required the railroad to be completed by July 4, 1876, which proved impossible. Ultimately, the Northern Pacific had to give back some of the land for noncompliance with the terms of the grant, but the company still ended up with nearly 40 million acres, more than twice as much land as any other railroad received. The Northern Pacific line passed through the Columbia Basin region of Eastern Washington and was completed between Spokane and Pasco in 1881.

Meanwhile, the first railroad built in the Interior Columbia Basin was completed in 1875, a 28-mile narrow-gauge line that connected Walla Walla with the Columbia River near the mouth of the Walla Walla River. It was built by a Walla Walla businessman, Dr. Dorsey Baker, to connect Walla Walla with the Columbia River and riverboat traffic to Portland. The western terminus was at Wallula, at the mouth of the Walla Walla River.



A westbound train rounds a bend on the Oregon shore of the Columbia River east of Celilo Falls, probably around 1900. Historic Archive, Portland.

Theodor Kirchhoff, a German immigrant, essayist, poet and shopkeeper who operated a store at The Dalles during the gold rush of 1863–65, was a passenger on the first run of Dr. Baker’s railroad, in October 1875. Kirchhoff, who by then had settled in San Francisco, was a talented travel writer. He wrote in German about the Walla Walla and Columbia River Railroad in his book, **Reisebilder und Skizzen aus Amerika** (Stories and Sketches of Travel in America), probably published that same year:

“The locomotive looked like an old-fashioned teapot. The passenger car — yes, only one on this line! — bore painful resemblance to a cattle car. The locomotive chugged bravely along badly laid rails, twisting and crooked though they were. But when the locomotive stalled, as it often did, nobody knew how to get it in motion once more. . . . Don’t be surprised at travel-time

for this Promethean express between Wallula and Walla Walla: twenty-eight miles: seven hours.”

The region was growing, its economy was expanding, and soon the Northwest would be linked to the rest of the nation by railroads. The Northern Pacific was the first to link Portland with the Midwest and East. The ceremonial completion of the railroad was on September 8, 1883, when Northern Pacific President Henry Villard drove a golden spike at Gold Creek, later known as Independence Creek, 60 miles west of Helena, Montana. Other transcontinental lines soon followed. In 1884, the Oregon Short Line completed its track from the Union Pacific junction at Granger, Wyoming, through the Snake River Valley to a junction with the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company tracks at Huntington, Oregon, opening another transcontinental route to Portland. In 1885 the Canadian Pacific

transcontinental line was completed at Craigellachie, British Columbia, a few miles west of Revelstoke, thus linking Montreal to the Pacific coast at Vancouver through the Columbia River communities of Golden (where the river flows north) and Revelstoke (west across the Selkirk Mountains where the river flows south). The Southern Pacific was completed at Ashland, Oregon in 1887, linking Portland with San Francisco and other cities as far away as New Orleans. In 1891, a line was completed between Vancouver and Seattle. James J. Hill completed his Great Northern Railway track between St. Paul, Minnesota, and Everett, Washington, in 1893. Finally, in 1909 the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul was completed, linking Chicago with Tacoma and Seattle.

Promotions spur immigration

Transcontinental railroads, like the wagon trains of the Oregon Trail, brought waves of population to the Pacific Northwest and helped shape whole communities in the Columbia River Basin, both in the United States and in British Columbia. Almost immediately upon completion, the railroads began recruiting emigrants to the Northwest. Railroads were expensive to build and operate. They needed passengers, freight and income, and their publicity staffs worked hard to entice people to travel to the Northwest and settle in cities and on farms — and, of course, rely on the railroads for goods and services. The journey to the promised land that took months by covered wagon in the 1840s could be completed in a week or so by the last decade of the 19th century. Largely as a result of the completion of the transcontinental lines, population in Idaho, Washington and Oregon jumped from about 251,000 in 1880 to 705,000 in 1890.

Railroad promoters praised the virtues of the Northwest and recruited settlers in the northeastern United States and in northern Europe. In its 1882 annual report, the Northern Pacific Railroad told shareholders its agents in Europe were working “to secure a good class of settlers for the country tributary to the Northern Pacific Road.” In 1910, the Milwaukee Road advised that “the ideal settler for Montana and the one we are trying to reach is the

man who has made a moderate success in the East, but who is too ambitious to be satisfied with slow progress and too wise to overlook great opportunities in the West.” According to an article in “Pacific Monthly” magazine the same year, “The average colonist today is not the ‘undesirable,’ but the best type, middle class sturdy American.”

The lure of the West was strong around the turn of the 20th century, as it had been in the wagon-train era of the 1840s. A “Pacific Monthly” article published in 1910 provided a fictional account of an Illinois farmer who, with his family, studied promotional brochures issued by a railroad and decided to seek a better life in the Northwest: “The family sat up an hour late that night reading the pamphlets and looking at the colored pictures.” It could not have been lost on the railway promoters that precisely the same type of brochures and books were issued by real estate speculators to lure Midwest farmers west on the Oregon Trail in the 1840s. “Here perpetual summer is in the midst of unceasing winter; perennial spring and never failing autumn stand side by side, and towering snow clad mountains forever look down upon eternal verdure,” Lansford Hastings wrote — about California — in his 1845 book entitled, “*The Emigrants’ Guide to Oregon and California.*” Just 50 years later, the journey was remarkably faster and made all the easier by promotional fares offered to settlers by the railroads, fares that often were subsidized by new-formed communities seeking residents. The Milwaukee Road advised farmers in (or about) 1908: “*The land is there. It is excellent for general or mixed farming, and Uncle Sam gives you a cordial invitation to go out and help yourself to a 160-acre farm. No drawing is necessary; first come, first serve.*” According to the Great Northern in a 1900 pamphlet, one should not spend one’s life “renting high-priced eastern land” when there were free homesteads for the taking — conveniently located, of course, near the railroad tracks. In 1889, the Union Pacific extolled the Columbia River in a brochure entitled *Western Resorts for Health and Pleasure*: “...along the River Rhine, or Rhone, or the Hudson, there is nothing that will compare with the stately palisades of the Columbia, with their cool

recesses, kept sunless by the overhanging rocks, and watered by the melting snows of their own summits.”

The railroads emphasized that emigrants would find themselves among like-minded people in the Northwest. A promotional brochure published in 1904 by the Oregon Railroad & Navigation Company commented that “the Pacific Northwest has for citizens the best class of settlers from the oldest sections of the East and Middle West. The foreign immigrant received is of the highest standard.” In 1911, Louis Hill, who succeeded his father, James J. Hill, as president of the Great Northern Railway, told members of the Northwest Development League, which formed that year to unite promotional efforts of state and local organizations, “It is largely people from the northern part of Europe that settled the middle west, and they are among the best and most prosperous citizens of the country . . . we want only the best class of immigrants. We don’t want to go all over Europe.”

There was a certain xenophobia and racism in the railroad promotions, too. Railroad agents would meet European immigrants as they got off ships in east coast cities and transport them to communities in the West that the railroads reserved for people from specific countries. Chinese were regarded with suspicion, even though Chinese labor was critical to building the railroads. In 1887, Oregon’s new governor, Sylvester Pennoyer, advised legislators in his inaugural address that if the “curse of Chinese labor” were removed from the state, then “the hardy immigrants of our own race will flock here without invitation and help build up our free institutions and enlarge the glories of our state.” The Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company assured potential emigrants that “Oregon, Washington and Idaho are all well-protected from any large movement of Orientals.”

Northwest Indians also were viewed with suspicion and, in some cases, outright derision. The Northern Pacific reported to its shareholders in 1884 that the

Coeur d’Alene, Yakama and Puyallup Indian reservations were embarrassments to the company and prevented settlement of nearby lands. In 1907, a pamphlet prepared by the Milwaukee Road declared that “one by one, the Indian reservations are being turned over to the settlers who can till the ground intelligently.” The company published “homeseekers’ round-trip fares” to Missoula, Spokane and Coeur d’Alene for the purpose of settling on Indian reservations.

The railroads also lied about the Northwest, at times, to encourage immigration and settlement. In 1889, the Union Pacific bragged that employment opportunities in Washington (it was the year Washington became a state, coincidentally) and Oregon were “so extensive that the wage-earner has never been driven to seek relief or protection in the ‘strike’ nor the capitalist, to preserve or augment his power, ever resorted to the ‘lockout,’— even though there had been a coal miners’ strike in Washington the same year. Labor leaders in Oregon at the time openly worried about “the tons of lying pamphlets” that dishonestly lured people to the Northwest. Journalist Ray Stannard Baker reported in *Century Magazine* in 1908, “Ask any settler in some part of the West why he immigrated, and he will invariably point you back to the beguiling road, a pamphlet, a fevered folder, an enthusiastic agent.”

Historian Carlos Schwantes of the University of Missouri, St. Louis, writes that it is not possible to know how many settlers the various promotional pamphlets and exhibits attracted to the Northwest, but the region’s political and business leaders certainly believed they did the job. More than 30,000 people emigrated to Oregon between 1874 and 1877, according to records of the Oregon Steamship Company, Schwantes notes, and it could hardly be coincidental that subsequent waves of immigration during the first two decades of the 20th century coincided with massive railroad promotional campaigns.

Schedules & Timetables for 2011

Make sure you check the calendar on our Website at <http://www.rcgrs.com/> for the most up-to-date schedules and timetables.

It is our Society's policy to attempt to have an event or open house on every second Saturday of the month. Other and additional dates during a month are also available and encouraged. Anyone interested in having an Open House or sponsoring an event, please contact **Tom Gaps 503-659-8893, tgaps@comcast.net**

June 11, Saturday, Noon to 5 p.m.: Tom and Betty Gaps open house. 5922 SE Skyhigh Ct., Milwaukie, OR 97267, 503-659-8893 Details to be announced.

June 18, Saturday, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.: "Railroads In The Garden Summer Tour," Bill Derville, Chairman. The tour booklets have been distributed and volunteers are needed to help at the railroads open for the tour.

June 21 - 25:

2011 NGR Convention in Overland Park, Kansas

July 9, Saturday, Noon to 5:00 p.m.: (quarterly meeting) Open house at Allan and Kathryn Warrior's "Burlington and Missouri River Railroad" (CB&Q). The hosts are assuming it will be a warm day and intend to serve cold-cut sandwiches. Salads and desserts are welcome.

The lunch will be at 1:00 p.m. and the quarterly meeting will be immediately following. Some of the attendees may want to bring chairs.

The railroad is track power and the rolling stock have Kadee couplers. A large scale railroad operation is planned for all those who want to participate. Independently operated guest switch engines (track powered or battery powered) would be welcome and helpful to make the game successful. Although the "official time" is noon until 5:00 p.m., the railroad will be open for operations from 10:00 a.m. until evening.

July 30th & 31st and August 6th & 7th, 2011:

"The Great Oregon Steam-Up" at Brooks, Oregon: The Great Oregon Steam-Up is the largest event at Antique Powerland during the year and involves all of the museums and many other participants. One of the unique aspects of the event is that most of the equipment is operating. A parade takes place each day at 1:30p.m. and includes vintage tractors, trucks, and automobiles. The steam powered saw-mill operates twice a day and the trolley tours the site perimeter all four days of the show.

Learn about the early machinery that made Oregon work. Hear about innovators and manufacturers of the past. Machines include farm tractors and implements, early engines, crawlers, fire apparatus, vintage trucks and cars, logging gear, an early Oregon flour mill, and an authentic steam sawmill. Rides include an historic trolley and a miniature railroad (7-1/2 inch gauge).

Scheduled activities: Machinery demos, sawmilling, flour milling, fire apparatus demos, harvesting, kids pedal tractor pulling, traditional tractor pulling, and a Big Parade!

Other Attractions: Blacksmithing, a country store, models, early electricity exhibit, miniature farm display, children's passport program, swap meet and flea market sales, country music, and great food! \$10 for people over 12 years of age.

August 6 - 9: Glacier National Park Trip

August 13, Saturday: Bill and Jean Dippert open house.

September 10, Saturday: (quarterly meeting) Jeff and Dianne Lange open house.

October 8, Saturday: Ron and Merlene Bacon open House.

November 12, Saturday: Annual RCGRS Luncheon

December Christmas ships?

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