

# **“STEAM TRAINS IN THE PARK”**

## **The Story of the Community Partnership between the Golden Gate Live Steamers, the Southern Pacific Railroad Company and the East Bay Regional Park District.**

**By Ken Shattock**

The Golden Gate Live Steamers started in the basement of the late Victor Shattock's home in Oakland, California in 1936. You might wonder **why** in the basement? Well, going further back, like all boys Victor was fascinated by steam railroads so much that he was determined to build a railroad of his own.

After World War I, he came down from Canada and went to work for the Southern Pacific in 1923 in the “Water Service Department”.

Every time he moved he looked around the house for a place to establish a railroad. Finally, in 1934, he found a nice house with a large basement some 32 x 45 feet in size. Ideal, as there was nothing else in the basement except for the furnace and laundry tubs. For the next five years he was requested so many times to display his Live Steam trains or put them where people could ride them.

He had a lot of visitors to his trains, some curious and some downright interested in the “hows and wherefores” of building them and locating raw materials. Naturally, they thought that kits might be available. The press was attracted to this new thing, running live steam engines in the basement of a house. Editors were fascinated and the concept of steam engines, pulling cars around a scenic railroad in the basement of a hobbyist's home prompted them to write it up.

From all this publicity Victor got many visitors, and the most frequently asked question was: “How do you get started?”, “Where do you get your kits?” Two or three of them, along with Victor, then and there decided to start a club and get the information to everyone on a more or less mass-production basis.

This changed the concept from a scenic indoor railroad to an operating outdoor railroad.

The new club wanted to get some land to operate on and ride their engines. They catered to influential people whenever possible. They put on a show in the Oakland Auditorium and for the Southern Pacific and the Yardmaster's Association who wanted something unusual. It was put on at 74<sup>th</sup> Avenue in East Oakland for the Storekeepers there. Moving benches, they built an 80-foot long track and had an engine running up and down hauling children. They queued up all the way around the block. Member Larry Duggan wore himself out lifting kids on and off the riding car.

This had its benefits in publicity and the club developed many friends which paid off later.

In the mid-to-late 1940's the search was on for a suitable piece of land on which a permanent outdoor track could be laid. Eventually, the club got word of an area in Redwood Regional Park in Oakland that might be available for constructing a miniature steam railroad facility. It was located at 7861-A Redwood Road, a couple of miles East of the intersection with Skyline Blvd. Upon inspection, it was found that a lot of vegetation had to be cleared before a real survey could be done, and stakes driven. But it was a suitable site and it was available for use by the club, under the auspices of the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) of the Park Department, whose intent was apparently to provide an entertaining spectacle for the public at large. The late club member Frank Dee was chiefly responsible for negotiating with the Board of Directors of the Park District.

But where was the money going to come from for all of the necessary materials to build a track at the Redwood Park site? And how much labor would be required to build such a monumental project as initially planned. During the basement days of the club dues were ten cents a month, mostly for coffee and donuts, but they often ran in the red, so dues were raised to one dollar a month or simply ten dollars per year. Even so, the coffers were hardly full by the time the decision to move to Redwood Park was made. It was decided to use the basement railroad

as a fund raiser. When Vic had visitors and spectators he asked them to make a donation to their new track fund. Many would give a dollar or so, and not infrequently, even a ten dollar bill. Occasionally the donation was even larger. After a visit by a local scout troop, the lady in charge sent the club a check for \$120.00; quite a sum in those days! Fortunately too, the club still had good connections with people at Southern Pacific, some twenty-six managers, whom were made Honorary members of GGLS. This connection was to stand the club in good stead later on.

Within the club there were many discussions as to the type of facilities that should be built at the new site. Most members favored having an elevated track so that they could ride behind their engines sitting "side saddle" on a flat car behind the locomotive. Remember, in those days there were far fewer large engines than there are today. So the need arose for a good supply of lumber for the high track construction.

Being faced with the problem of spending all the money on rails, which looked like it was necessary, we called a meeting in the basement. We got S.P. officials down there along with officials of Redwood Park. We put on a show with engines all over the place. It showed the officials what we were doing.

We felt that we were advertising railroads anyway and if we could get their help, our troubles were over. Regarding those meetings, a lot of them took place during the War; not only various officials visited the basement, but also the police. Vic didn't know why, but maybe the number of cars parked in front of the house aroused suspicion. "Wonder what all those cars are doing there?" Maybe subversive activities! Anyway, they were there. One early arriver introduced himself and said he wanted to know what we were doing there. Vic invited him in and to stay for the meeting. He said he'd like that and it was not until then that he told Vic he was with the police department. Vic didn't recall if he left a donation or not, but it didn't make any difference.

Well, the club held the meeting, showing how worthy the work was that they were doing, and that it deserved the meeting attendees support and that any help they could give the club. They'd be glad to have. The result was the club got

engineers to make contour maps, stake out the railroad, everything, so all they had to do was give it to the engineer of the Park District so those people could fill exactly to where the stakes had been driven. It was a great help, and the club would end up with a lovely flat piece of land. There were objections, of course, especially from the Horseman's Association. "Why should the club have all this level property?" Several complaints like that, but the club had to prove themselves. So the club had meetings with discussions and decisions regarding the track and type. Most of the fellows wanted an elevated track so you could sit on a car and drive your engine. And where would we get the lumber? How about the Southern Pacific?

So one day Vic went to the Roadmaster at Oakland Pier and asked if he could let the club have about 150 ties. Good ones, not new, but usable ones. He said, "You've got your nerve". "There's dozens of customers who want them badly and we won't even give or sell to them....." Vic told him he wasn't interested in their customers, that the club were only interested in getting 150 ties.

Then the Roadmaster said, "Where are we going to get 150 ties?" Vic told him GGLS has spies out and they have a lot of friends. "S.P. is tearing up a 'ballast deck trestle' at Cordelia, California and there is a boxcar in the West Oakland yard with over 200". "Where did you get that?" said the Roadmaster. "It makes no difference—" Vic replied.. "You have the ties and we want them".

"Are you going to need that many?" asked the Roadmaster... "Yes, we will", replied Vic!

The Roadmaster didn't ask how the club was going to get them to Redwood Park, but Vic was a foreman with two trucks at his disposal so he had them back a truck to the door of the boxcar and roll off the ties. Vic thought, too, that the Live Steamers would be surprised when they arrived at Redwood Park the following Sunday and saw what had been done. The ties had been delivered and nicely stacked at certain locations around the new site by S.P. employees. The club now needed some kind of lumber to construct support piers to put the ties on.

Lots of lumber was kicking around the S.P. in various places that was 7 ½" x 17' and 24' ... S.P. employees took the lumber to S.P.'s woodworking mill in West

Oakland who wore out five band saw blades because of the sand and grit in the lumber. So the club got plenty of piers and one day sent a truck with a gang to place them around the site at Redwood Park as the club had already laid out a 60' circle, so it looked like they were going to have to be satisfied with that. Meanwhile, the "brain trust", Harry Dixon as Secretary, Tim Reardon, Vice-President and Vic Shattock as President, not being satisfied with the layout the way it was and realizing that there were some members who were content with only that 60-foot circle, started working on other options and one day, went to the Park and tore up the whole circle. The club realized that the Park District folks were not as sympathetic as they would be in later years. They thought the club was just a bunch of crazy nuts anyway.

The club figured that if it doesn't work out, the land can be used for baseball or something.

As such, the ties were only suitable for use as high track beams when stretched end to end, so more 'spare' lumber was acquired from S.P.'s various facilities and sawn into desired shapes at the Mill. The lumber which the triangular piers or bases were constructed of came from the large bridge timbers that became available upon the dismantling of the overhead trestle approaches to 16<sup>th</sup> Street Station in Oakland, which formerly hosted the S.P. Red Electric trains of the 'IER' system. Some of these massive timbers were rather bent or twisted and contained a lot of grit in the wood. They had to be planed and then cut to size.

After building toward the upper end, the fellows were getting sort of tired, but there was another thing about the ties. They were not exactly square! They had a twist in them, so it was necessary to get them flattened out. After using all sorts of tools, planes and adzes, etc., an S.P. man came along and said the club could have a "planer" if we'd like. So they arranged for the electrical power! They had all sorts of electric tools. Very little pick and shovel work was done. The ground there was hard as concrete. S.P. furnished the supplies and the club got them all the way around. Next was ties for the rails. It was determined that over 7000 scale cross ties would be needed but an order was placed for 7500.

The club got the Bridge & Building people at S.P. in West Oakland, under Supervisor Ernie Haase to cut them from pure Redwood. Band them, package them and deliver them to Redwood Park. So then there was the question of being in debt because most of the club's money had gone for purchasing rail-some 6000 feet. They needed nails to bind it all together. Good old S.P. had a kind heart! When the club opened the track officially on Labor Day weekend in 1950, one fellow told the SP Asst. General Manager (Mr.E.D.Moody) that "there's more SP stuff here than you'd expect to find here, isn't there?"

"Oh no", he said. "We knew the club was getting it!" But the club used to take most everything they wanted. They put in a Transfer Table, water tank, angle iron and all kinds of other stuff all made in the SP shops at West Oakland.

Construction at the Redwood Park site had originally got started in mid-1948. Once all of the heavy vegetation was cleared away by the Park District, club member Scotty Gordon of the S.P.'s engineering department went to work and did a complete survey of the site. He then drew up contour maps of the site and then the Park District performed all of the required grading according to these maps at no cost to the club. The first track built at Redwood Park was the High Track, used for the smaller gauge engines. It was all that was necessary in those early days. This was a multi-gauge 2 ½", 3 ½" and 4 ¾" gauge setup that used scale railroad ties, for the roadbed. These scale cross ties were fastened across the top width of the prototype supporting ties. Originally, the aluminum rails were fastened to the ties by drilling holes in the bottom flanges of the rails and driving in screw nails, a system later abandoned. However, the screw nail system kept the original track in perfect alignment for many years.

Throughout all of this construction activity the people at S.P. were amazingly supportive and cooperative.

Most of the money that had been saved by the club was allocated to buying rails for the new Redwood Park track as previously mentioned, which left little for any other purchases. It was at this time that our good connections to S.P. Officials paid off again. We held a dinner meeting with them at Oakland's Belini's

Restaurant on Telegraph Avenue at 40<sup>th</sup> Street, and then again in the basement meeting room of Vic Shattock's home and showed them how worthy the work was that we were doing was and that it deserved their continuing support. Without S.P.'s help the Redwood Park track may never have got underway. At least it would have been delayed for a long time.

The track was 1,330 feet long and had a transfer table, about six-foot six-inches long that was used to move the engines from the firing up tracks to the operating track. The track was officially opened on September 2, 1950, at which time the Golden Spike Ceremony was performed. A miniature golden spike was jointly driven by Mr. E.D. Moody, Assistant General Manager of the Southern Pacific Company and Mr. John MacDonald, President of the park district Board of Directors. A red ribbon, stretched across the track, was then cut by Mrs. Irene Evans, one of Vic's daughters who was employed in S.P.'s West Oakland Signal Office. Following the ribbon cutting portion of the ceremony, a parade of locomotives took place, led by Jim Keith's 4-6-4 Hudson locomotive driven by his son, Sid. Jim and Sid were from the Southern California Live Steamers organization.

The years went on and after being located in Redwood Regional Park from 1948 to 1971, the Park District offered the use of a larger piece of land on which to expand in Tilden Regional Park-Berkeley. The golden spike celebrating the completion of that new facility was driven in 1975, exactly twenty-five years after the completion of the old Redwood Park facility.

In July 2011, the club celebrated their 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary since being started in Vic Shattock's basement in 1936. They've come a long way! It's hard to say what would have happened if the mighty Southern Pacific railroad had not stepped forward to help, so many years ago. They evidently were very civic minded at the time. I know that my grandfather, Vic Shattock, and other members of the club were grateful for what the S.P. did for them in those early days. I would like to acknowledge those S.P. employees as I personally recall, who were directly involved in making the club's dream come true:

Harry Peterson, Water & Fuel Service Supervisor  
Ernie Haase, Bridge & Building Supervisor  
Ted Bean, Supervisor, System Maintenance-of-Way Shop  
Eddie Hoagland, Master Mechanic  
O.M. Barlow, Division Engineer  
Scotty Gordon, Asst Civil Engineer  
Marshall Morse, Engineering  
Julian Watts, Chief Dispatcher  
Byron Alvers, Electrical Dept  
Irene Evans Gogna, Signal Dept  
Bob Rooney, Bridge & Building  
Carl Nordberg, Machinist, System Maintenance-of-Way Shop  
Thad Dickes, Pumper, Stationary Boiler Plant, Oakland Pier  
E.D. Moody, Assistant General Manager  
Liston O. Allen, Legal Dept, San Francisco  
and so many others.

With their help and backing, a wonderful facility was built in the East Bay hills of Oakland, Calif for operating “**Steam Trains in the Park**”, for generations of families yet to come. Thank you Southern Pacific!!!

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