



www.splives.org

Southern Pacific Railroad History Center
BULLETIN
October 2023

Edited by Pete Baumhefner

President's Letter

The History Center has found a great home for the SP 10, which is the only rail diesel car (RDC) ever owned by Southern Pacific. The RDC was recently donated to the Hutchinson Lumber Railroad Museum. Its president, Noah McCann, has plans to substantially rehabilitate the SP 10, with the expectation that it will be on public view at some point in the future.

The History Center will relocate its archives from Sacramento to Martinez, California in December. The move will provide board members Leslie Savoye and Gene Harmon more immediate access to the History Center's documents, photos, maps, and other items.

Our media consultant, Peter Savoy, continues to work on the migration of the History Center's new website from the WIX platform to the Word Press platform and we expect that the process will be accomplished soon. We greatly appreciate everyone's patience. When the migration is accomplished, the History Center will re-open in online book stores, and digital downloads will be available for purchase again.

We are seeking volunteers who can provide articles for the History Center's quarterly journal, *The Southern Pacific Experience*. Also, if you have a background in Word Press, you can help us to add content as we expand our new website after it is operational. If you can be of assistance, contact us at splives@splives.org.

I thank all of our members for their continued support of the History Center, and please let us know how we are doing.

My best regards to all,

Bill Fowler
President, Southern Pacific Railroad History Center

Editor's By-Line

Our readers and members are welcome to submit stories about their personal or one of their friend's experiences on the Southern Pacific. This month we include a story from Jeff Asay who worked on Southern Pacific as a train order operator and interlocking tower operator. Enjoy his story about learning things the hard way and following critical rules that will keep you out of trouble! Thank-you Jeff for contributing this story!

My Days at Dayton Avenue Tower – Learning a Lot of Lessons on the Fly

By Jeff S. Asay

As summer approached in 1966, I had been hanging around Southern Pacific's Burbank Junction Tower on second trick (4:00 pm to midnight), visiting with tower operator Bill Martin and listening to the way the train dispatchers (Coast and Valley at this location) issued the train orders. Operator Martin told me to go down to 6th and Main Streets in Los Angeles, the headquarters of Southern Pacific's Los Angeles Division and former headquarters of the Pacific Electric Railway and talk to Chief Train Dispatcher Harry Galyan about hiring on as a summer train order operator. Harry was a nice, friendly fellow nearing retirement and I guess he liked me because he sent me over to see Phyllis Pedigo, the station clerk who was responsible for all train order operators, to do the necessary paperwork to get hired. Pretty quickly, I was employed by Southern Pacific as a student train order operator.

So, in late May 1966, I began to officially break in as a student train order operator at Burbank Junction, Saugus, and San Fernando, copying and hanging train orders and learning the station names the train dispatchers used on the various routes. That did not last long. Phyllis Pedigo called me and told me to start breaking in at Dayton Avenue Tower at the south end of Los Angeles Taylor Yard on second trick as I would be relieving the tower operator for his two-week vacation. This instruction was a complete about-face for me! I had never been to Dayton, the largest and most complicated interlocking tower on Southern Pacific's Los Angeles Division, but I knew they did not copy train orders at Dayton. Heck, they never even spoke to a train dispatcher at that location. I had hired on to be a train order operator working on the main line. Now I was suddenly a tower operator working with yardmasters!

The second trick tower operator at Dayton was a guy named Pete Powlick, who held a fairly high seniority spot on the Los Angeles Division. Powlick showed me the basics of running the big General Railway Signal Company Model 2 pistol grip interlocking machine, which involved pulling the levers out in a defined order depending on the route the train was to take. There were certain combinations of levers that were used all the time and I had to memorize them so that I did not have to look at the model board of tracks and signals every time a train approached. I soon got it figured out and Pete let me run the interlocking plant on my own.

Powlick's claim to fame at Dayton was target practice with his air pistol that he always brought to work. He would pull out this pistol and begin shooting pigeons off the girders underneath the Interstate 5 bridge that crossed over Southern Pacific's right of way and trackage immediately adjacent to the tower. There had always been pigeons in this specific location because in the early days of Los Angeles there was a pigeon farm located here. In fact, the yard track that was next to the Los Angeles River under the bridge was called the "pigeon farm." When the yardmaster wanted to send an engine over to the Cornfield Yard via this track, he told the tower operator to line it via the pigeon farm.

After a few days of practice, Powlick said I was qualified and he called for the signal maintainer, "Buck" Buckingham, to sit in with me for a few hours while Powlick took an extended dinner break. It was Southern Pacific practice to have the signal maintainer who had responsibility for the particular interlocking machine to officially qualify you at that particular location. I guess Buck liked what he saw, and he pronounced me ready to go. Phyllis Pedigo marked my record as qualified at Dayton and sent me the official message to protect second Dayton for the next two weeks. I showed up at the appointed time and place and by some miracle got through my first day on the job with Buck keeping a wary eye on what I was doing.

Even though I could operate the interlocking plant at Dayton, including the small Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) panel that controlled the crossovers at Los Angeles Taylor Yard's Mainline Tower, I really had a lot to learn about Dayton. Mainline Tower was about a mile or so north (railroad west) of Dayton on the double track main line. Trains would line up and go into Taylor's A yard or into or out of the C Yard at Mainline Tower. The tower was not an interlocking tower, but rather an elevated switchman's location where the switchman could direct movements into and out of Taylor Yard. The Dayton tower operator and the Mainline Tower switchman had to work together to move trains into and out of Taylor Yard; neither could unilaterally move a train into the yard or out of the yard on to the main line. I never did have a clear understanding of how the switchman on duty actually operated the yard switches under his control in the yard. The Mainline Tower had a big number board on top of the tower that was supposed to display the track number on which a movement was authorized in the yard, but it was all "Greek" to me.

This lack of knowledge about Mainline Tower led me to do something I should not have. Later in the summer, working second trick at Dayton again, I was talking to the Mainline Tower switchman about a train that was ready to depart Taylor Yard west from C-Yard's track number 1. There was nothing being operated over the main tracks and the train

dispatcher was ready to accept the freight train for movement up the Coast Line. I did not know that the switchman was just a student and that the actual person on duty had left for some reason. I said, "let's get this guy out of town if it's okay with you and the yardmaster." He said he would do whatever I said, so I lined up the mainline crossovers and he put "1" on the Mainline Tower number board and soon I saw the caboose start to go north and the movement showed up on the CTC panel controlling the mainline crossovers.

About thirty minutes later, I got a call from the Taylor Yard assistant general yardmaster (AGYM) who proceeded to tell me how upset he was about the move we had made. The student switchman had failed to line up the yard switches for the move off C-Yard's track number 1 before he put up the number in the number board and the train had run through three or four incorrectly lined switches departing the yard! This time, he said, we're going to "bury" this mistake and just fix the switches without telling anyone else. The next time, he said, "it's your job!" I made really sure there was no next time!

My relationship with yardmasters at Los Angeles Taylor Yard was not always the best. One night while I was working at Dayton, the crew on a switch engine working in the Bullring Yard portion of Taylor Yard called me from across the Los Angeles River and asked to come into the low end of C-Yard and go to lunch. It was quiet and the low-end C-Yard yardmaster (who shared the top floor of the tower with the tower operator) was nowhere to be seen. So, I didn't see any reason not to do this. I gave the switch engine the signal to come across the river and it did so and went into the yard.

You guessed it! Sure enough, about thirty minutes later, I received another bawling out by a yardmaster. The low-end C-Yard yardmaster made it quite clear that I was never to let that switch engine or any other engine or cut into the low end of C-Yard without specific permission from him. This lecture went on and on. I got the picture. There was so much to learn about how the railroad really operated.

Later that summer, the assistant general yardmaster got even with me for the Mainline Tower fiasco. He got his chance because I violated the number one ironclad rule for working second trick at Dayton, a rule that Pete Powlick drilled into my head and which I mistakenly decided to ignore one evening. The summer of 1966 was very busy on the Southern Pacific at Los Angeles Taylor Yard. Freight trains from the east on the Sunset Route and from the north on the Coast and Valley lines all converged at Taylor Yard during the late afternoon. In addition, there were local trains from the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach (Ports) and the Los Angeles basin coming north from the numerous branch lines that spread out all over the Los Angeles area. Moreover, the eastbound Coast and San Joaquin Daylight passenger trains had to run by Dayton and get into Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal, the Lark's (Southern Pacific's overnight train between Los Angeles and San Francisco) locomotives had to come out of the Taylor Yard diesel facility and head down to the passenger terminal and then the Lark itself would come west. On some days, the expedited Coast Line freight, No. 371, would need to depart from the Los Angeles Transportation Center. Lastly, the locomotives for Train No. 2, the Sunset Limited, had to go down to the passenger terminal as well.

So Powlick warned me when I was learning Dayton: Always, always keep one of your two main lines open for the passenger and hot freight moves. That's rule number one! Do not violate it! But this was easier said than done. Freights from the east would ease into Mission Tower's interlocking, located just railroad east about a mile from Dayton and staffed by Santa Fe employees, and want to turn north to get into Taylor Yard. You could put one long freight and one medium-length freight on the westbound main track between the Main Street crossing and the Mainline Tower signal. Two long freights would block Main Street. So that led to rule number 2: never, ever, block Main Street. If you did, the Los Angeles Police Department would be hunting you down because there was always a lot of vehicular traffic moving on Main Street near downtown Los Angeles.

The Mission Tower operators would try to help, but they could not hold the freight trains coming from the east without fouling the Southern Pacific CTC limits controlled by the train dispatcher in Los Angeles. It never failed while all this was going on that a couple of long local freights from the Ports would come north from their work in the basin and demand access to the main lines going up to Taylor Yard. These local freights used Union Pacific owned trackage pursuant to a trackage rights agreement between Southern Pacific and Union Pacific for a few miles of trackage located along the east bank of the Los Angeles River. Woe unto you if you told Mission Tower to hold them on the Union Pacific main track. The Union Pacific train dispatchers who dispatched the Union Pacific line would not stand for it. They would in essence embargo the Union Pacific line against any further Southern Pacific train movements until their precious East Bank line was cleared.

So, the inevitable happened one afternoon. A group of trains arrived at Mission Tower at the same time and wanted track space to go north to Taylor Yard. I filled the westbound main and managed to block Main Street in the process. Mission Tower had to hold some freights coming from the east and the Southern Pacific train dispatcher was irate. Mission Tower had to do the same to the Union Pacific main line and that train dispatcher was irate. Mission Tower was yelling at me to do something, and I was begging the Taylor Yard AGYM to take trains into the yard at Mainline Tower. He said that was not going to happen! Then the AGYM directed a freight coming from the Valley Line that was usually yarded at Taylor Yard at the top end of A-Yard down the westbound main to Mainline Tower, plugging that up. Then it got really bad!

The AGYM promised me that if I would take the freight trains coming from the east and the local freights coming from the Union Pacific main line the wrong direction up the eastbound main track from Mission Tower to Mainline Tower, he would start taking freight trains off the main lines into Taylor Yard in less than an hour. "Don't do it," I could hear Powlick saying in the back of my mind, but I did it anyway. I told Mission Tower to send all the stopped freight trains up the route we normally used for eastbound trains and he soon complied. This of course meant that I now had no way to run passenger trains down to Mission Tower, and eventually into the passenger terminal, nor could the Lark and Sunset locomotives get to the passenger terminal, unless the AGYM kept his promise.

You can guess what happened. The AGYM went on sabbatical (or so it seemed to me) and left everything plugged up. Both the Coast Daylight and the San Joaquin Daylight took long delays waiting at Mainline Tower for one of the main lines south of there to open. The AGYM was nowhere to be found and the freight trains stayed glued to the main lines. I soon received a call from the Taylor Yard terminal superintendent, the top Southern Pacific manager of the facility, asking me if I had any idea what I was doing. I said certainly I knew what I was doing. I was messing up royally at the instigation of the AGYM! Trains soon started to move as they were finally taken into Taylor Yard.

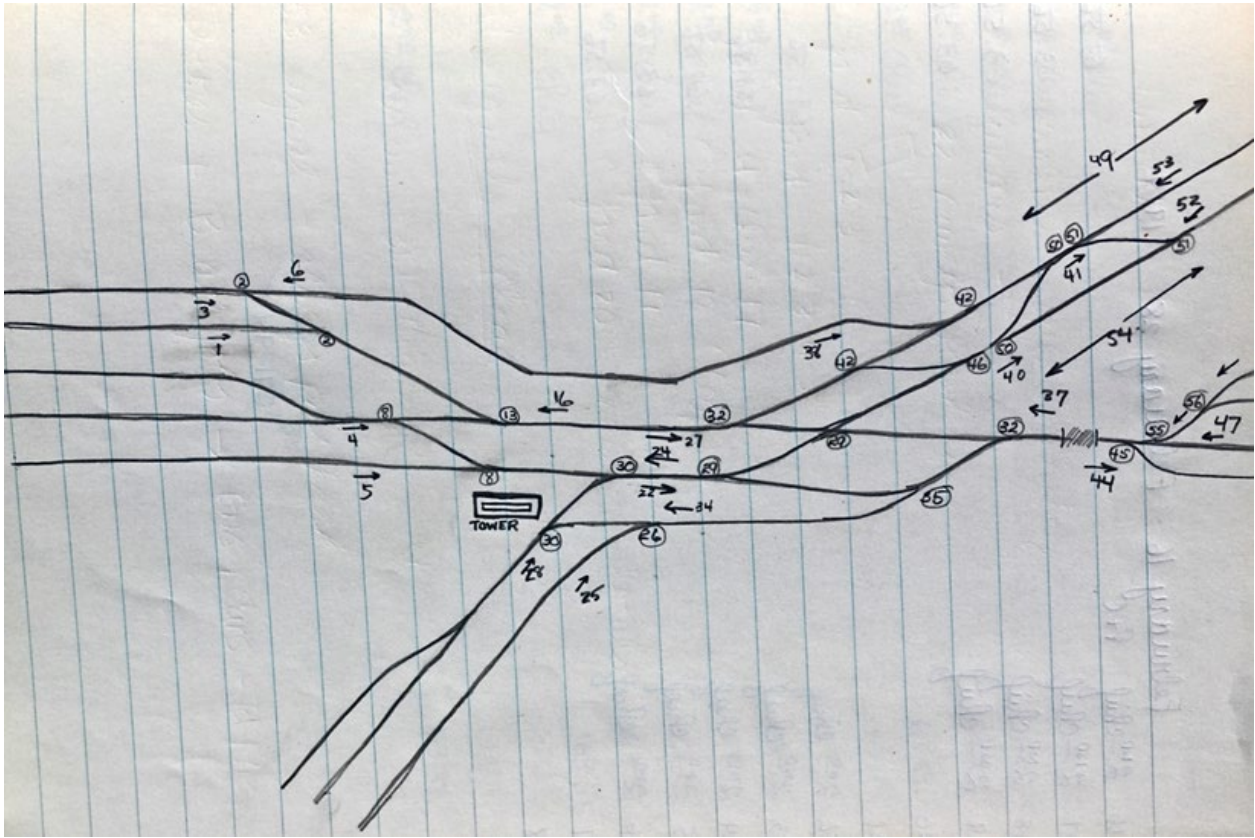
Another lesson learned! Always keep one main line open, which is good advice for life in general.



SP Extra 6371 East departs Los Angeles Taylor Yard passing under a signal bridge controlled by Dayton Ave. Tower visible in the upper right. Photo by Robert Morris.



SP Extra 6429 East departing Taylor Yard. The roof of Dayton Ave. Tower is visible just above the first freight cars immediately behind the locomotives. Photo by Robert Morris.



A hand drawn schematic of Dayton Ave. Tower's switches and signals controlled by the tower operator. Railroad west is to the left and east to the right. Taylor Yard "C" Yard is left of the tower. The "Pigeon Farm" is the line furthest below the tower. Mainlines toward Santa Fe's Mission Tower, known as the "East Bank" are located in the upper right and the line headed to the right center crosses the Los Angeles River where interchange tracks to the Santa Fe, Southern Pacific's Cornfield Yard, Bull Ring and Links yards are located. Schematic by Pete Baumhefner.

As a nonprofit public benefit educational institution, the History Center relies upon charitable contributions to support the development of its virtual archive. We seek monetary and in-kind donations. The SPRHC is seeking books related to railroad history, particularly the Southern Pacific and associated transportation memorabilia donations (excepting rolling stock, furniture, non-Southern Pacific magazines and hardware such as switch stands, tools and similar items). If you or people you know have items that are available for donation, please contact us at sprhc.lives@splives.org. Please provide brief descriptions of the items you wish to donate, exceptions to very good or better condition of your materials and the number of items you have. We will contact you with further information to discuss next steps including where to ship the donations. The History Center will send you a tax deduction letter allowing you to specify the amount of your donation. Your monetary and in-kind donations are a critical part of our ongoing efforts to preserve and make widely available the history of the Southern Pacific.