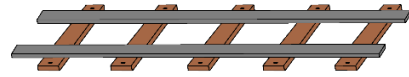


# On Track



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If you are receiving this newsletter for the first time, welcome to the fold! We are cataloging our visitor logs for the last few years, and your name and email appeared! If you wish to be taken off our list, just let us know, but we hope that you will stay with us, follow us online, and return as a visitor sometime soon. Previous editions of this newsletter may be found on our [website](#). If you have comments on the newsletter, please send them to [nmheritagerail@nmheritagerail.com](mailto:nmheritagerail@nmheritagerail.com) or directly to your humble editor, John Taylor, at [jtlymtnest@aol.com](mailto:jtlymtnest@aol.com)

**Current Status:** The locomotive is “in the barn” with an army of volunteers working on the discrepancy list (known locally and infamously as the “punch” list) from the May 6 steam-up and roll. The boiler and tender have been drained and most of the access points are open to permit a thorough drying. The big items to address from the punch list are fixing a leak on the injector line at the steam turret, fixing seating surfaces on a boiler inlet check valve, and lapping the throttle valves for better seating and sealing.

**Accomplishments:** We were invited to have an information table at the mayor’s recent State of the City Address held at the Rail Yards. The address was reasonably well attended, and we spoke with lots of interested visitors and even a few city and state officials. It was another good opportunity for us to educate the public about who we are and what we are working to accomplish. Through meetings with our city fiscal agents, we are making progress in understanding the requirements and procedures required to work with and through the city to use the pending capital outlay funds, while we continue to plan and budget the restoration and repair tasks at the Rail Yards. Several members met with one of BNSF’s yard operations personnel to discuss what is required for 2926 to move through their Abajo Yard and which of the tracks that lead into the turntable is the one they would prefer us to use. More discussions with BNSF’s maintenance of way people are in the works.



**Profile of a member:** We spend a lot of time at the site rushing around looking for a part or trying to figure out why the injector steam pipe is still leaking after all these years. Wrinkled foreheads and grumpy visages seem to be all too prevalent. So, the next time you want to see a smiling face, just wander down to the support car where you will find a welder, *par excellence*. He will tip back his helmet and give you a smile and a warm greeting (because that’s what he does). Of course, we’re talking about Howard Lewis, best known for his welding expertise, a big smile, a laid-back attitude, a nasty doo-rag, and a shredded orange sweatshirt!

Although born in Tucson, Howard’s family migrated to the Duke City when he was only a few months old. He graduated from Sandia High in 1974 and went on to UNM where he graduated with a degree in architecture in 1979. He liked part of the architecture business, but yearned to be outside “doing stuff,” so

he joined the Iron Workers union and worked while attending apprenticeship school from 1979-1983.

Howard moved to San Diego and worked for the Cabrillo Crane Company, installing and moving the large tower cranes that are used to erect high-rise buildings. You've seen his truck with the prominent Schuff Steel Company logo (it's also on that famous orange sweatshirt)—he worked for them for 27 years, mostly in San Diego, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas. His initial job for Schuff was as a connector, the individual that takes the huge beams and other support pieces from the cranes and installs them on the structure (no acrophobia in this guy, but maybe Mohawk lineage somewhere!). He helped build the Eiffel Tower in Las Vegas (he said that he thought there was another one somewhere in France, but he wasn't sure), and he managed the part of the construction of the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Sin City where they installed 161,000 tons of steel.

Howard moved to Albuquerque/Rio Rancho in the mid-1990s because his fiancé, Brenda (who, Howard asserted, was cute and could cook), had found a job here. They've been married for three decades. Brenda must be a very understanding woman because Howard's life before retiring in 2017 consisted of getting up on Sunday, flying to some far away job site and flying home on Friday (maybe a case of "I married you for better or worse, but not for lunch??").

Howard came to our site after the COVID ban expired, and a tour by past president, Dr. Mike Hartshorn, convinced him to join. He says that his principal hobby is "knocking off Circle Ks," but really, when not at the site, Howard enjoys painting cars and hot rods, joining his wife in their garden (she buys, he digs), and spending time in his art studio painting or air-brushing. All of these activities are accompanied with the deafening sounds of 1980s bands.

So, the next time you are grumping around the site, drop by the support car for a smile—he'll be there, but speak loudly, his ears are still ringing from the music (?) of Def Leppard and Kiss!

**A short historical note:** The Belen Cutoff was a long-awaited boon to the Santa Fe Railway, saving thousands of dollars on every train that did not have to scale Raton Pass. However, every silver lining has a cloud! The slow-moving trains climbing up to Abo Pass were frequently targeted by thieves who would jump onto the cars, steal cargo, and throw it off the car to be picked up by followers.

The Santa Fe decided to put a stop to the thievery and put two railway detectives on an eastbound freight out of Belen on January 22, 1911. One of the detectives got off at the water stop at Scholle, but the other agent, J. A. McClure continued with the train.

When no one had heard from McClure by January 24, a posse was sent out to find him. The bandits had not been very smart; their target was bags of corn, and the posse simply followed the trail of spilled kernels to the ranch of Frank Howe and his sons, a family that was locally known as the Abo Pass Gang.

When they got to the ranch, they found McClure's body, shot four times, and dumped head-first into a well. Meanwhile, with a \$500 bounty on their heads, the Howes had ridden east to Gallinas on horseback and then fled south on an El Paso and Southwestern freight train, heading for the Mexican border.

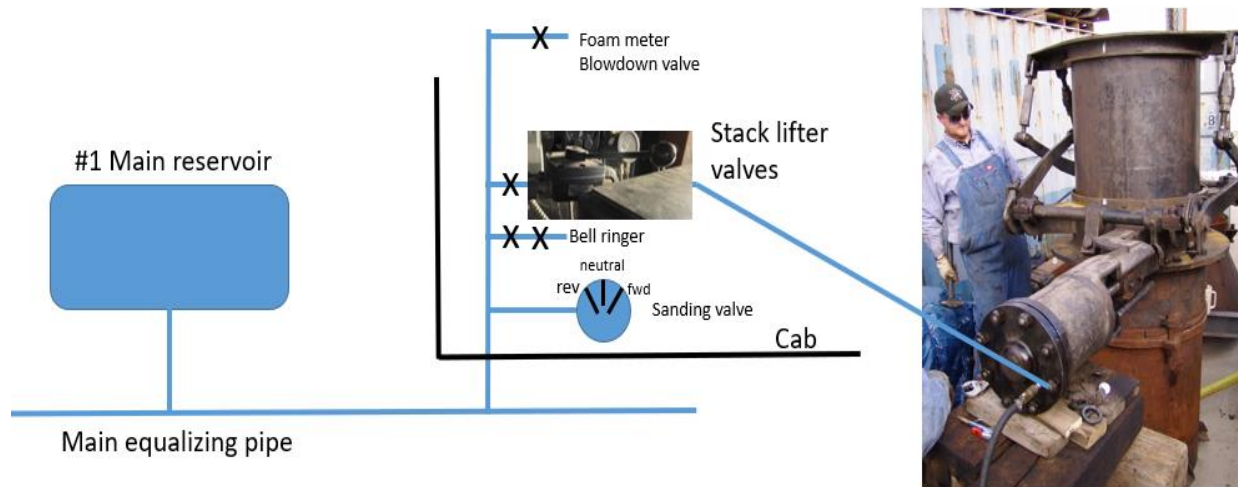


East of El Paso, the four men were spotted by Customs Agent Thomas O'Conner. O'Conner thought that the men looked suspicious and confronted them. During a subsequent gunfight, O'Conner was killed and Howe's 17-year-old son, Robert, was wounded.

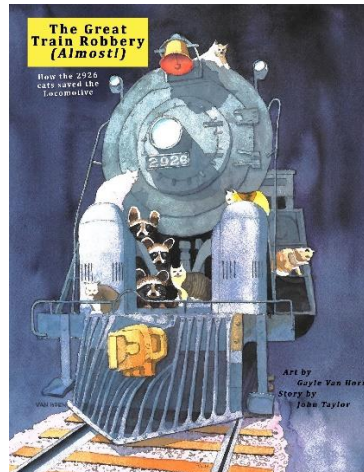
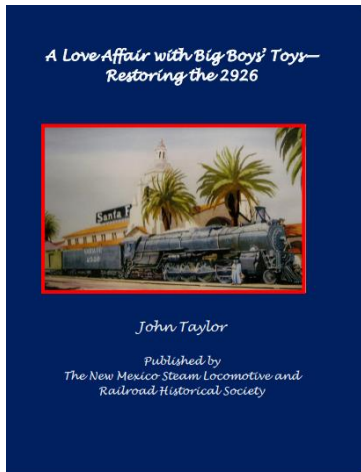
Fred Howe and his younger son, Guy, escaped into Mexico, leaving the wounded Robert behind. Robert was captured, and on January 30, Fred and Guy were killed in a gunfight with a posse that now included four Texas Rangers. Robert confessed that he had killed O'Conner and that Guy had killed McClure. Unfortunately, Robert's trial record has been lost so we do not know what happened to him.

There were persistent rumors that the Abo Pass Gang and other thieves in the area had inside help from someone in the Belen depot who would "spot" good targets for the bandits. However, no one from Belen was ever "called on the carpet," and the Abo Pass Gang and other train robbers along the Cutoff faded into history.

**How does it work** Many visitors (and some workers!) are surprised to learn that the 2926's smokestack can be raised and lowered. This feature was not a part of the original build but was added during a 1940s overhaul. A taller stack increases draft to improve combustion and certainly helps keep smoke out of the cab and any open passenger car windows. The stack lifter uses air from the #1 main reservoir (fireman's side) via the main reservoir equalizing pipe and shunts it to both sides of a piston to activate the scissor lift. The engineer controls this operation using a valve that sits above the brake stand. The schematic and image below show this piping arrangement and the main components. A video on the website will allow you to see the system in action.



**What's New in the Store** We have a new supply of both the restoration history book and the coloring book for kids(of all ages), and the store is well stocked with shirts, mugs, and lots of art. Check the website for details and ordering information.



**What's new on the website ([2926.us](http://2926.us))** Be sure and checkout the video (part 2) and local press coverage of our May 6 run on the Sawmill Spur, the “sizzle reel” from the Stagecoach Foundation, and other news. Go to the website's “News” page.

**How you can help and other tidbits:** If you are interested in donating to our cause (because operating a steam locomotive takes money!), check the [website](http://website) to donate through [Paypal](https://www.paypal.com) and/or click on our [GoFundMe](https://www.gofundme.com) and [Venmo](https://www.venmo.com) links! Be sure to check out our [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com), [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com), and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com) pages as well! Other potential sites of interest: our friends at the [Wheels Museum](http://www.wheelsmuseum.com) and activities at the [Albuquerque Railyards](http://www.albuquerque-railyards.com). The Board of Directors is soliciting a volunteer to act as a Webmaster for the organization. This person would need to be a member but could work remotely. Tasks would include maintaining the website, adding photos and photo captions, and adding other materials as needed (e.g., newsletters, advertisements for the store, etc.). If you are interested, please contact [John Roberts](mailto:John.Roberts@2926.us) or [Gail Kirby](mailto:Gail.Kirby@2926.us). Please see our Membership page to discover our other volunteer opportunities. In addition, election season is here. We need candidates interested in filling the Secretary or Treasurer positions, so please help us.



HAPPY FATHER'S DAY



*June 14<sup>th</sup> is Flag Day—Fly yours Proudly!*