

~ SP 259 ~

By Russell W. Green

## The SP 259 Caboose

What is a caboose? There are actually four definitions of the caboose according to Webster: a) a ship's galley; b) a freight-train car attached usually to the rear mainly for the use of the train crew; c) one that follows or brings up the rear and finally; d) Buttocks. I think it is safe to assume we're talking about the definition provided for the last car on the train.

The caboose served as the "office" of the train from which the conductor, brakeman and flagman road when in motion and as a hotel for the entire train crew when stopped. Most railroads assigned cabooses to conductors and in doing so, many of the caboose interiors were personalized, yet maintained its railroad identity on the outside. The caboose was also used on many short line railroads as a passenger car and even as a freight car.

As a young boy growing up with a family background of engineers, conductors, firemen and telegraphers, I was always fascinated with the caboose. So much in fact that I even built a 1/8th scale replica of a 24 foot wooden caboose for the Northern Pacific Museum in Livingston, Montana. That project is what got me started in railroading with 1/8th scale trains. I have also had the privilege of building most of the Orange County Model Engineers (OCME) club's cabooses and that includes the newest one, the Southern Pacific ~ SP 259 ~ bay window wooden caboose! It was generally accepted that the Milwaukee Road and Baltimore & Ohio were often credited as the pioneers for the introduction of the bay window caboose as early as 1937. The bay window cabooses were normally associated with steel cabooses, yet, there were many built with wood. The SP 259 was a wooden caboose. It was used as the prototype version of the bay window caboose to develop the steel version of the bay window caboose that the Southern Pacific would eventually build.

The bay window caboose offered several advantages over the caboose that had a copula. There was an alcove from which to view the train by the conductor and brakeman. The bay window reduced clearance issues with regard to the caboose height. As railroads modernized, freight cars were built larger and taller, restricting the view to the front of the train. Most issues on a train occurred on the sides of the cars or in the wheel areas, all of which were easier to see from a bay window. Bay window cabooses could be built cheaper and were easier to design because there was not a second story on the car. They were also easier to heat, no copula to dissipate the heat in winter from the single pot belly stove that was near the center of the caboose. The bay window caboose was safer. No one fell out of the bay window like they did going up or coming down or sitting in the copula. If the slack was taken up, a train man could be thrown about the caboose. In a bay window caboose, a crewman was less likely to get tossed about and injured because it allowed the occupants to stand on a level floor, no climbing involved.

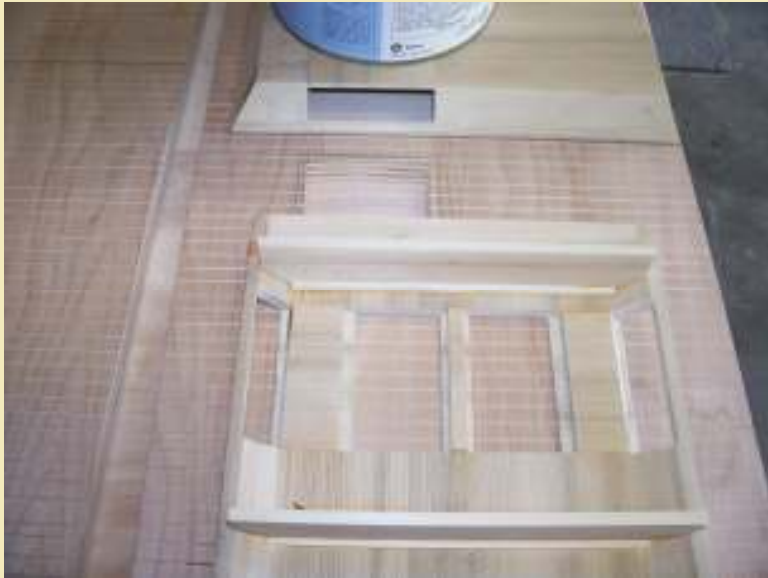
The OCME ~ SP 259 ~ is a near 1/8th scale replica of the original C-30-1 class wooden caboose built with a cupola that was constructed by the Southern Pacific Railroad in March of 1903 at an estimated cost of approximately \$1,200.00. The original car had arch-bar swing motion trucks for ease of riding and a pot bellied stove to keep the conductor and his crew warm in the winter. In January 1953, SP 259 was converted to a bay window caboose in Sacramento California. The conversion removed the cupola, added a bay window, removed the vertical post hand brake wheel and replaced it with the newer Equipco geared hand break. The paint scheme of the SP 259 after conversion had the entire bay window painted Daylight Orange. Somewhere between 1956 and 1961 the sides of the bay windows were repainted in the traditional mineral or Box Car Red. The ends of the bay windows however remained a Daylight Orange. Beginning in 1961, all Southern Pacific bay window cabooses were converted to the paint scheme that the scale model for OCME of the SP 259 has now. The current disposition of the full size SP 259 was not known. Numerous efforts were attempted to obtain the maintenance card(s) of this caboose, but none were found. My sincere appreciation goes to the research efforts by those individuals at the California State Railroad Museum. Approximately 300 hours were needed between September 8, 2009 and February 5, 2010 to research, design, construct, paint and letter the caboose. The caboose is the property of the Orange County Model Engineers and will be stored and operated at Fairview Park, Costa Mesa, Ca. My appreciation to Anthony Thompson and his Southern Pacific Freight Cars, Volume 2: Cabooses book along with his excellent work in researching the history of the Southern Pacific Railroad and specifically the history of its 'caboose.' He found what may be the only two pictures in existence of the SP 259 and fortunately for us all, his book contains them. The SP 259 is part of California's railroading history.

Russell W. Green



It all begins with researching the project, finding the details and then beginning the construction..





Determining sizes, how it should be constructed and fitting each piece in order is essential.







Laying out the pieces and erecting the structure.



Making the stove pipe chimney.



Once closed in, inside & roof construction begins.





Never have enough clamps. Cellophane used to prevent glue from oozing onto structure.

Over 30 sticks of wood are in this picture.



Creating strength for the over hang. Oak framing.

Fitting the steps.





Making the top and top covering details.







The grated porch floor is removable to get to the coupler pin.



The roof runners and step pads.

Hardware being constructed.





The painting process begins.  
Four to six coats of color, two to three of clear.



Fitting details must be applied in order,  
here the Equipco geared brake wheel is fitted.



As color goes on, the beauty of the cabooses comes to life. Rounding the corners was not original on wooden cabooses, only on metal ones. I did this because it brought out the lines of the cabooses more vividly.



Once painted, it must cure...but always good to take it out side and admire your work.





Adding the lettering and details.





Here the RPKD means repacked bearings – by whom and the date.  
I added OCME here instead of Oak (Oakland) which was on the original  
Car when the picture I used to make this caboose was taken in 1953.

The solid square means that there is a sanitation system on board.

The type of a caboose is: C-30-1.



The wheels were weathered for effect.



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