



Our Lives  
*are Made of*  
Railroad Stories



Smithsonian  
*Affiliate*



# Our Lives *are Made of* Railroad Stories

Trains and railroading are at the heart of who we are as a people. We speak in railroad language and

metaphor. Our most iconic movies were filmed on and around trains. The American songbook is full of railroad music. To speak of trains is to speak of freedom and movement. But we also wait for trains at crossings. Railroad tracks were not built through our towns and cities. We built our towns and cities around them. Our spatial relationships to the places in which we live were determined by railroads long before we were born. And most families have at least a distant relative who



The Transcontinental Railroad Gallery,  
featuring the Chinese Railroad  
Workers' Experience Exhibit

worked for the railroad because, for much of the nation's history, railroads have been among the largest industries in the United States. We are a railroad people through and through.

Much more than the big brick building at the end of Old Sacramento and a collection of railroad equipment, the California State Railroad Museum — your Museum — is the keeper of stories. Together, we collect them, we preserve them, and we tell them, all in service of helping people imagine their futures by understanding our collective past.

- Ty O. Smith, PhD, Museum Director

# Inspiration *and* Education

“I’ve always been drawn to trains. I cannot say if it was the classic stories that started on trains or just the sheer curiosity of where one was going as it passed by at the crossing, but something in my mind cemented trains to be synonymous with adventure. That sense of adventure fueled me to chase wild dreams, including my pursuit of engineering at Sacramento State. Square Root Academy is partnering with the California State Railroad Museum to increase access to STEM-learning experiences, introducing scholars and visitors to the innovation of the railways and the pioneers who revolutionized the industry and the world as we know it. By teaching our youth about the technological advancements in the railroad industry — that figuratively, and literally move us today — we are laying the foundation for them to become the innovators of tomorrow.”

Nicholas Haystings  
& Square Root Academy Scholars





# The Power of Objects and Story



Melanie Tran  
Curator

“The ability to be heard and seen without bias, in many cases, is a hard-earned privilege. That fact is not lost on me. Having grown up as an immigrant, I’m challenged with untangling who the world accepts me as and who I have the potential to be. This has made it important for me to work towards extending this privilege to the voices lost in time. Seemingly mundane objects enhance our lives with the stories they tell. They give us an opportunity to understand the people who came before us and bring relevance to the forgotten. Serving as a steward of the collection enables me to nurture these stories to live in the world. I’m excited that the Museum builds on our place in the community, serving as a platform, agent of change, refuge and place of participation where our individual stories are reflected in the larger context of our shared history.”

# Stories Connect Us



Kim Whitfield  
Exhibit Designer & Interpreter

“Sharing food brings people together, sparking connection and deep memory, whether it’s in your dining room at home or in the dining car on a train. Growing up, my family would talk and share stories when cooking in the kitchen and sharing a meal around the table. The smell of my great-grandmother’s soda bread toasting and the taste of a hot cup of tea bring my past and present together. I can just as easily imagine strangers sitting in a dining car drinking coffee and eating Old-Fashioned Strawberry Short Cake, sharing their travel stories, building community and watching a scenic landscape roll by. As an exhibit designer and interpreter, storytelling is at the heart of what I do. I work to amplify the voices and stories of our community that have not yet been heard in the Railroad Museum.”



Try History at Home

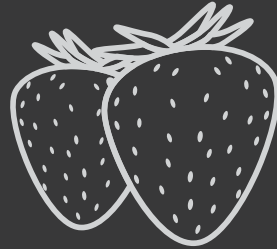
## Old-Fashioned Strawberry Short Cake

*Special Recipes for Guidance of Chefs on Dining, Café, and Coffee Shop Cars, Southern Pacific Company, 1927.*

### *Ingredients:*

3 cups flour  
3 oz. butter  
1/3 cup sugar  
3 tsp. baking powder  
Pinch of salt  
1 cup milk

For Topping:  
Strawberries (washed and crushed)  
Sugar to taste  
Whip cream (spoonful per serving)



### *Instructions:*

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Into three cups flour work three ounces of butter. Fold in one-third of a cup of sugar, three teaspoonfuls of baking powder, a pinch of salt; add one cup of milk, and mix. Put dough on pastry board, fold lightly and roll out one-half inch thick. Cut round cakes, about three inches in diameter, set on buttered baking pan, far enough apart to keep from joining, and bake in a hot oven (350 degrees, approx. 15-20 minutes, or until light golden brown and a toothpick comes out clean). When serving, split and fill with crushed and sweetened strawberries. Pour some berries over the top, and garnish with a spoonful of whip cream.





Joseph Wood, Michael Wood & Kelly Huston  
Museum Members

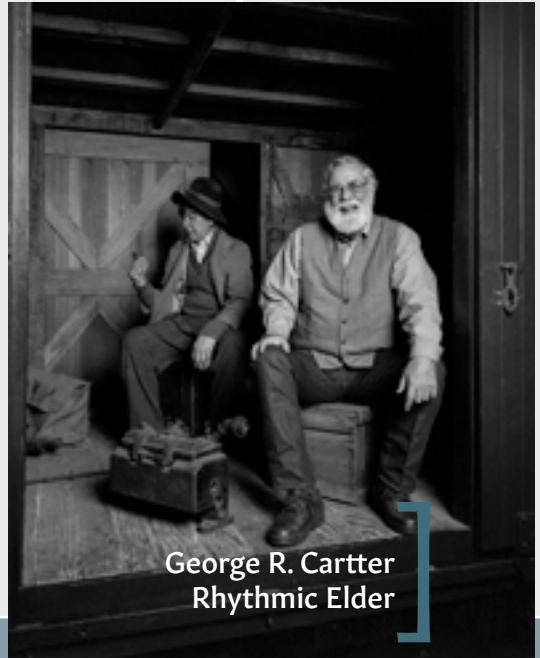
## A Museum Without Walls

“As a family, we’ve traveled many times by Amtrak from the historic Sacramento Valley Station, just steps away from the California State Railroad Museum. One of our most memorable trips was a two-day train journey from Sacramento to Chicago on the California Zephyr, because our conversations were based on what we’ve learned at the Museum. For us, the Railroad Museum is a place of learning and a nostalgic connection to the past where train travel was as much about the journey on the rails as it was the destination. We’ve had eye-opening and educational conversations with our 11-year-old son about the industrial revolution, California’s Gold Rush history and the sheer might of many emigrant workers from China who made the Transcontinental Railroad a reality. The Museum’s steam-powered excursion train on the Sacramento Southern Railroad, with the stories offered by docents, is one of our favorite activities because it brings the Museum’s history alive. The sights, sounds and smells of a steam locomotive powered excursion train is always exciting and fun for us.”



“The American Songbook is full of railroad songs. They are the rolling soundtrack to our collective experience. We are always “leaving on a midnight train to Georgia,” or “hearing that lonesome whistle blow” somewhere off in the distance, imagining ourselves hopping on a boxcar and escaping whatever makes us feel stuck. There are workin’-on-the-railroad songs; tragedy related train songs; lots of love and love lost tunes; reflections on mortality; trains as an escape vehicle; hobo perspectives; nostalgia trips; all tapped out rhythms of the rails. Trains have a rhythm. This fact did not go unnoticed by musicians. In fact, when we listen closely to the blues, jazz, or rock n’ roll, it’s hard not to hear the syncopation of wheels on tracks and steam whistles. As Peggy Seeger put it: “Trains are percussive. Trains sing. If you don’t like trains, you probably don’t like music either.”

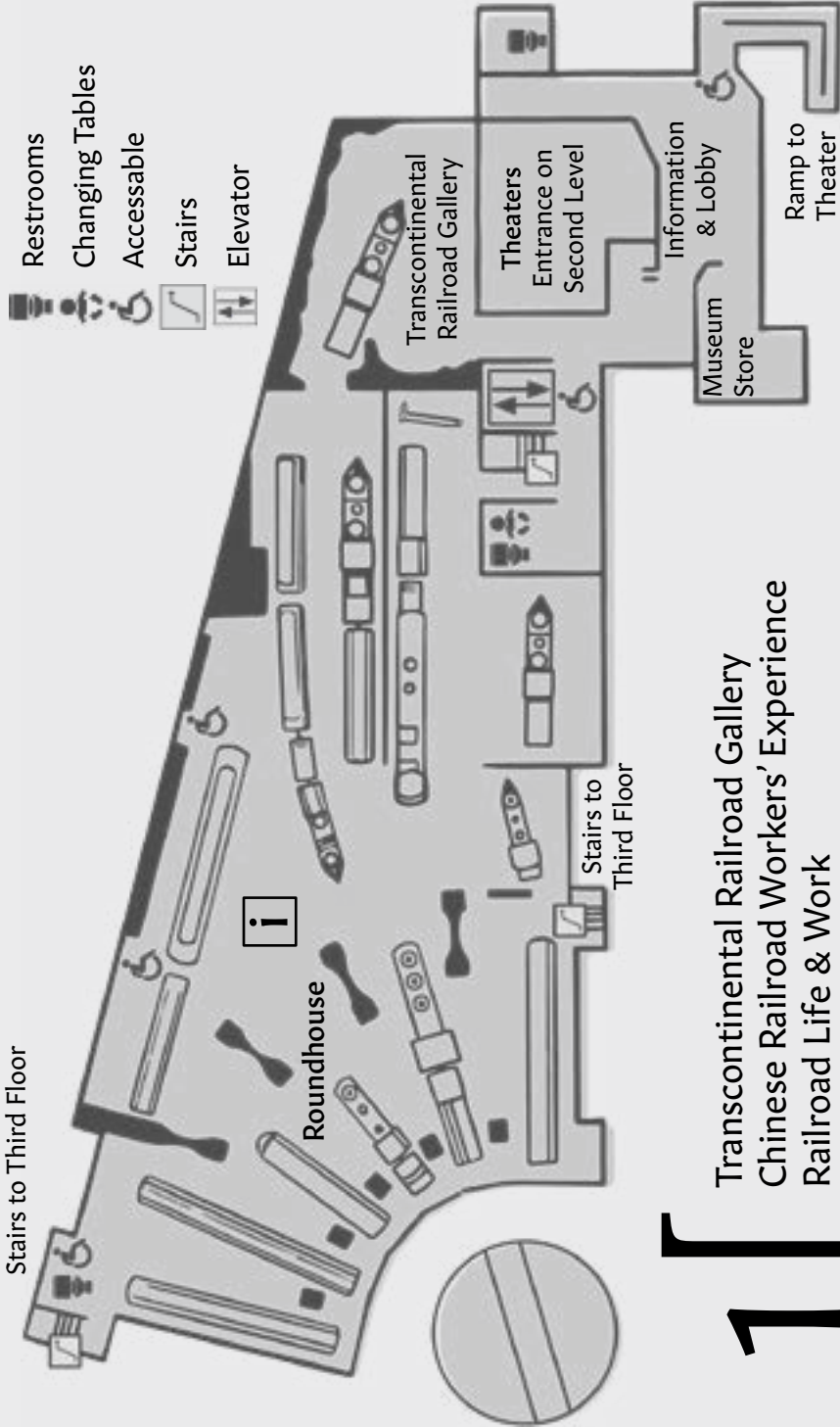
## A Zillion Railroad Songs (Roughly)



George R. Cartter  
Rhythmic Elder

**Your list is your list. Here’s a list of some of my favorites (subject to change without notice):**

1. “Johnny B. Goode” by Chuck Berry
2. “Cross Tie Walker” by Creedence Clearwater Revival
3. “Midnight Train To Georgia” by Gladys Knight and the Pips
4. “Life is Like a Mountain Railway” by Linda Ronstadt
5. “Midnight Special” by CCR or Huddie Ledbetter (Lead Belly)
6. “One After 9-0-9” by the Beatles
7. “Roll in My Sweet Baby’s Arms” by Flat & Scruggs and the Foggy Bottom Boys
8. “I Walk the Line” by Johnny Cash
9. “The Wreck of the Old 97” by Vernon Dalhart (and many others)
10. “Sentimental Journey” by Les Brown and His Band of Renown

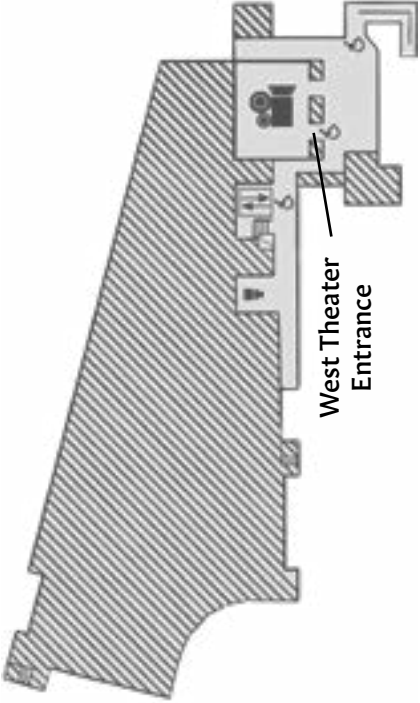


Transcontinental Railroad Gallery  
 Chinese Railroad Workers' Experience  
 Railroad Life & Work  
 Roundhouse

1

2

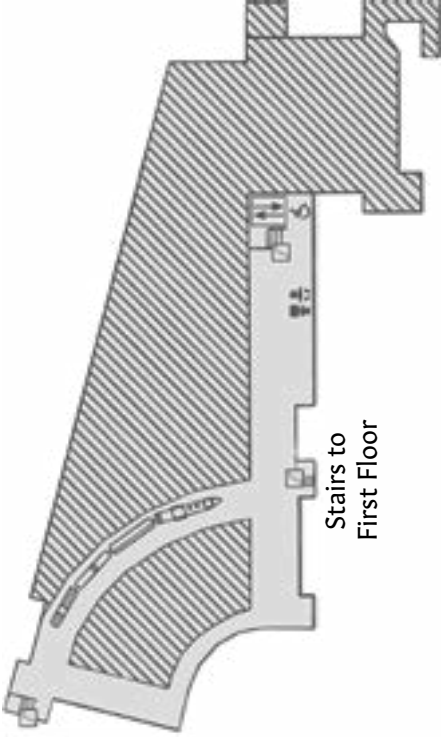
STEAM ALIVE - Powered By You!  
West & East Theater Entrance



West Theater  
Entrance

3

Toy Trains  
Model Trains  
Trestle Walkway  
Jr. Engineer Discovery Zone  
(Children's Play Area 5 & Under)



Stairs to  
First Floor

Need assistance? We are here to help you  
with your Museum experience.

# *The* Sacramento Southern Railroad

More than 30 years ago, an unlikely friendship formed on the Sacramento Southern Railroad, located steps from the California State Railroad Museum. He was a tall cowboy-hat-wearing young man who loved trains and was always hanging around the railroad. She was a railroad volunteer, like the rest of the crew. Both had their sights set on becoming engineers. Along the way, they helped each other, forming a deep bond, working hard and sharing laughs. She, the only female engineer. He, the youngest engineer. "There is a certain majestic feeling when you're sitting in the engineer seat, operating the locomotive," said Ilias. "The multitude of sounds and vibrations that a steam locomotive makes is amazing. Leaning out the cab, hand on the throttle or whistle cord, taking in every moment as the train is rocking and rolling down the track."



Ilias Athanasiou & Cheryl Meyer  
Engineers, Sacramento Southern Railroad

Ilias, Cheryl and the all-volunteer crew invite you to ride history on the Museum's Sacramento Southern Railroad excursion train.

# Keeping *the* Craft Alive

At the Shops, located in the historic railyards in downtown Sacramento, the spirit of past innovation is still felt by the people who work there today to maintain and restore locomotives. As stewards of the craft, Al Di Paolo, chief mechanical officer, and Robert Maciel, restoration specialist, feel honored and privileged to carry on the traditions of more than 150 years ago. Al always knew he wanted to work with old trains. Robert was inspired first by old low-rider cars. Both found restoration to be their passion. "I feel a real sense of accomplishment, both in restoring railroad artifacts and in carrying forward the skills and techniques that would otherwise be lost in our headlong rush into the future," said Robert. "Vintage trains, like vintage automobiles, are history, knowledge, and craftsmanship made real."



Robert Maciel, Al Di Paolo,  
with Volunteers & Foundation Staff





Joanne McKenney  
Toy Train Guru

## *The* **Magic of Toy Trains**

“Toy trains have the ability to bring out the kid in all of us, regardless of age. When I was little, my dad had a Lionel toy train layout he kept in the carport. I have fond memories of sitting with him watching the trains run around the track... for about five minutes before something would go wrong — a derailment, a signal not working, or a locomotive that refused to move. He would then spend the next three hours trying to figure out why it wasn't working properly. It made him so happy! When I was offered the opportunity to work exclusively on the Museum's toy train collection, I thought about my Dad. Seven years later I am still working with this amazing toy train collection and loving every minute.”

# A Laboratory of Learning

The California State Railroad Museum served as a laboratory of learning for students in Sacramento State's Museum Studies class. Taught by Museum Director, Ty Smith, and State Park Interpreter, Kim Whitfield, the 16-week course challenged these students to create an exhibit from start to finish. Wanting to tell the stories of people often left out of the history books, the class chose to focus on the deep history of Sacramento becoming the Farm to Fork Capital. Farmers, canners and producers helped shape an economy that influenced the region, state and country through the harvesting and transporting of fresh crops. By telling the story of the many responsible for transforming the Delta into some of the world's most fertile soil, the class gave voice to the people of the second Gold Rush, proving our lives are made of railroad stories. The Museum is not just a place to look at trains or read about railroad history, it's a laboratory where students can engage with their studies in a long lasting, meaningful way.



Graduate Students  
Capital Campus Public History Program  
California State University, Sacramento



## Museum *as* Community

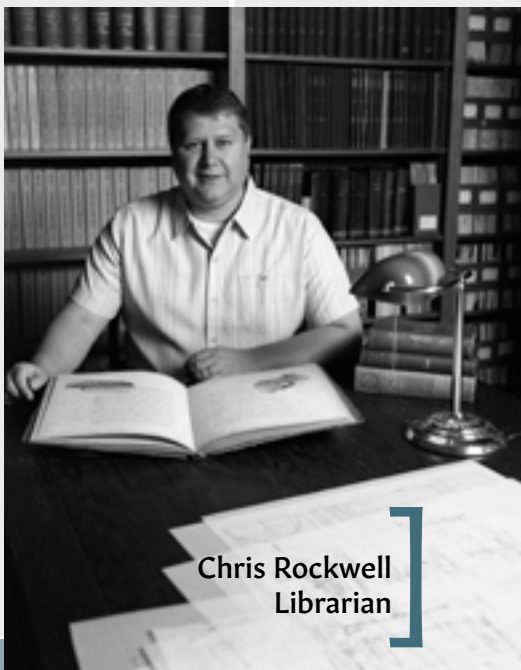
“From the first time I visited the Museum I felt a genuine sense of community,” said Jason Rankins, Visitor Services Manager. “The docents and staff share a passion about our history, and everyone goes out of their way to make you feel like family.” As a volunteer tour guide, George Palmer invites you to join his family for a 45-minute guided tour of history. “Nothing makes me happier than telling stories about the building of the railroad that connected the country from sea to shining sea,” said George. He loves telling the history of Summit Tunnel of 1867 and

Donner Lake. During the 19 years he’s been a volunteer, he has hiked the Sierras nine times, three times in 2019 at the age of 80. After hearing his stories, many community members ask how to get to the Sierras to see the amazing feat in person. “Being on the front lines allows us to build connections to everyone who enters the Museum,” said Jason. “Seeing the first impressions from our community as they begin their visit is priceless.”

Jason Rankins & George Palmer  
Museum Guides

“ I am constantly amazed by the variety of requests from all over the world we receive at the California State Railroad Museum Library & Archives. Researchers inquire about diverse subjects, such as the Chinese laborers who built the Central Pacific Railroad, the Indigenous Peoples whose lives were forever changed by railroad expansion, and the women who worked in the industry beyond “Rosie the Riveter.” It’s always satisfying to help discover information about people and the railroad, especially when community members want to learn about their ancestors and the roles they played in the building of this nation. As the Museum’s Librarian, I believe it is important we continue to collect stories of all people whose lives were affected by railroads, because they reveal how significant the industry was — and still is — to our collective experience, past and present.

## A Most Diverse History



Chris Rockwell  
Librarian

### Librarian book picks:

*Empire Express: Building the First Transcontinental Railroad* by David Haward Bain

*Ghosts of Gold Mountain: The Epic Story of the Chinese Who Built the Transcontinental Railroad* by Gordon H. Chang

*Railroads in the African American Experience: A Photographic Journey* by Theodore Kornweibel, Jr.

*Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* by Melinda Chateaubert

*The Harvey Girls: Women Who Opened the West* by Lesley Poling-Kempes

*The Orphan Trains: Placing Out in America* by Marilyn Irvin Holt

*The Railroad and the Pueblo Indians: The Impact of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe on the Pueblos of the Rio Grande, 1880-1930* by Richard H. Frost

*Traqueros: Mexican Railroad Workers in the United States, 1870-1930* by Jeffrey Marcos Garcilazo





Dr. Wesley Yee  
Board Member

## Honoring *the* Past, Inspiring *the* Future

“The Yee family cherishes its long history in Sacramento and with the California State Railroad Museum and Foundation. From being a second-generation board member to having numerous anniversary celebrations in the Roundhouse, we are part of the fabric of this incredible Museum. The nonprofit **California State Railroad Museum Foundation is a chief player in making the Museum a world-class destination.** Through collaborative efforts, we continue to acquire, restore, and maintain one-of-kind rolling stock and exhibits. I joined the Foundation Board because I enjoy the challenge of making this great Museum even better. Most importantly, I admire the leadership and my fellow board members. It’s truly an honor to serve in my father’s footsteps as a board member. I foresee a long future for the Yee family with the Foundation and an even more impressive Museum that exemplifies the spirit and history of this great state.”



# Your Generosity Fuels Our Journey

Behind every great museum are thousands of donors and members who understand the importance of preserving our collective past. Join with the California State Railroad Museum Foundation and show support for your Museum.

You can show your support in many ways:

Donate to the Foundation.

Become a Museum member. There are membership levels for everyone and membership has its benefits.

Take a scenic and historic excursion train ride on the Sacramento Southern Railroad.

Participate in Museum events.

Tell your friends, family, and neighbors about the Museum.

Contribute your story to the Museum's "Our Lives are Made of Railroad Stories" initiative.

For more information about how to get involved in your Museum, visit:

[www.californiarailroad.museum/get-involved](http://www.californiarailroad.museum/get-involved)

The California State Railroad Museum Foundation is an official cooperating association with California State Parks and a 501c(3) organization. The Foundation provides funding for numerous programs at the California State Railroad Museum in Old Sacramento, Railtown 1897 State Historic Park in Jamestown, and the Historic Southern Pacific Railroad Shops.



**CALIFORNIA STATE  
RAILROAD MUSEUM  
FOUNDATION**

The California State Railroad Museum — your Museum — is the keeper of stories. Together, we collect them, we preserve them, and we tell them.

For more behind-the-scenes photos and videos of exhibits and collections, extended essays about railroad movies and music, recipes, staff profiles, and to **share your railroad stories and connections**, join us at:

[www.californiarailroad.museum/mystory](http://www.californiarailroad.museum/mystory)

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Photographs by: Steve Abbott. Photo of Shops staff by Tim Engle.