

INTRODUCTION TO THE JAMES "JIM" R. PEARCE RAILROAD COLLECTION

By Cheryl Pearce-Trujillo, Jim and Vivian's Daughter

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In 2018, four years after my dad passed away, my mom (Vivian) had several conversations with me about the memorabilia she amassed from Jim's career with the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad and with the Southern Pacific/D&RGW Railroad. Vivian was troubled to think that most of these items would live in these boxes in our family's closets or worse, be thrown out as trash--with nothing left to show for this trainman's 45-year career. We agreed that the two 30-gallon Sterilite containers filled with his time books, timetables, correspondence, payroll stubs, business cards, photographs, diesel locomotive schematics, equipment books, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers/Trainmen agreements, newspaper clippings, and many other treasured items might be enjoyed by railroad enthusiasts and railroad historians. I contacted a few of Jim's friends as well as the Colorado Railroad Museum in Golden. The archivist at the Colorado Railroad Museum was gracious but declined the items because the museum was out of space since they were inundated with donations from several sources. Other museums were also contacted and expressed gratitude but felt that space and security for items donated were issues.

I contacted the Salida Regional Library archivist, Joy Jackson, who oversees the library's large collections of railroading, mining, agricultural and regional items in the archives and in the "Colorado Room". Joy was very interested in Jim's items so in December 2019, Mom began gifting some of Dad's railroading memorabilia to the James "Jim" R. Pearce collection. Contained in this collection are newspaper clippings and brief stories that Vivian collected and recounted. Jim's timebooks also have been donated along with timetables used to calculate time/mileage allowed for trainmen to be paid. Dad would run and sometimes "tend" engines used movies filmed in and around Durango and Cumbres Pass. One timetable has the autographs of movie stars that Dad met when operating the train on location on Cumbres Pass during the filming of the 1969 movie, "The Good Guys and Bad Guys". Robert Mitchum, George Kennedy, and David Carridian were particularly memorable stars that Dad met. Other movies he ran and tended engines for included "Denver and Rio Grande", "Around the World in 80 Days", and "Ticket to Tomahawk"--filmed on location in the Durango area. Other items will be added.

From Vivian's accounts, Dad faced some harrowing experiences early in his career that dramatically impacted the way he viewed the dangerous nature of his job. The 1957 blizzard that stranded him and many fellow trainmen on Cumbres Pass is recounted later in this introduction. In the late 1960's he was called to rescue another stranded train outside of Walsenburg, Colorado. Dad and his fellow trainmen also helped fight the 1967 Douglas Mills Fire in South Fork which left that lumber business devastated.

Jim was on the receiving end of many photographs that major and minor photographers sent him. American author and historian, Ron Ziel, was granted permission by The Denver and Rio Grande Company to ride with Jim in the cab of his engine from Antonito, Colorado, to Chama, New Mexico. A description of Ron's gift to Jim is detailed in this introduction.

After his retirement, Jim occasionally met up with some of the men he worked with. In May of 2003, he and his former co-workers met for lunch and took a picture. Dad's note on the back of the picture read:

"This is a gathering of men who were employed by the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad which at the time the picture was taken was the Union Pacific Railroad. The reason for the picture was the railroad was being sold to a short-line operation called Rail America."



Back row (L/R): Bill Kingrey, Harley Gilleland(sp), Eldon Morgan, Don Gibbs, Jim Pearce, Melvin Garret, Terry Coombs

Middle row: Ruben Madrid

Front row (L/R): Jeff Woodward, Ralph Hawkins, George Kingrey, Fred Trujillo

*Not pictured but arrived later: Carl Jack

Picture taken by Katherine Gibbs

Jim built some lasting relationships with other trainmen who worked on The Cumbres and Toltec Scenic (CATS) Railroad. For several years, Jim's retired trainmen friends and the CATS trainmen would meet and share stories of their collective adventures. Dave Peterson, one of the CATS trainmen, stayed in contact with Dad after he left the CATS. Dave has been instrumental in helping me decide where to distribute some of the books and schematics from the Sterilite containers and he has also taken his own time to chronicle Dad's travels based on the payroll stubs that Jim kept. Dave has filled in some gaps and added some stories that he remembers Dad telling him.

Vivian was particularly happy to learn that through Dave's connections, some of the memorabilia found homes in other train museums. I am grateful for Dave's in-person meetings and email communications which have helped me understand the treasures that Dad amassed.

After his passing, Vivian would muse about how being married to a railroader was often like being married to the railroad itself--the two were inseparable. Railroading was a difficult lifestyle which meant that families were apart, had to frequently relocate, and had to survive with the wife being the mother and father. Jim and Vivian both were very proud of his career, but they had no idea how popular railroading, particularly narrow-gauge steam locomotives would become to future generations. Vivian was proud to be a part of Jim's legacy but felt that her "Jim" never viewed himself as legendary. He didn't ride on others' coattails nor did he put his stories and career out in public for personal recognition. Vivian also said that after he retired, she was merely the scrapbooking, compiler, and collector of his items. Jim's legacy was his own. Vivian and Dave both agreed that it took time and patience to pull a story out of Jim. The personal accounts in this introduction were taken from both Vivian and Dave. Vivian passed away on April 3rd, 2022.

The Twilight of Steam Locomotives

By Ron Zeil

The initial donation to The Salida Regional Library in Jim's collection included a first edition and signed copy of The Twilight of Steam Locomotives, by Ron Zeil. In the winter of 1962 when Jim was a Roadmaster of Equipment assigned to the Alamosa Division, his supervisors in Denver directed him to take an author/photographer, Ron Ziel with him on a "ride-along". Jim was a "by the book" railroader who didn't initially view this as standard protocol from many standpoints, but especially for safety reasons. Jim had no say in the matter. Jim recounted that Ron was taking photos and compiling information about various steam locomotive railroads for his book, The Twilight of STEAM Locomotives. Ron was especially fascinated by the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad's steam (freight) system in Southern Colorado. Ron would feature in his book, several steam engines that traveled between Durango and Silverton and Chama and Alamosa. Jim was tasked to take Ron along in sub-zero weather on a Chama/Alamosa run. Jim found Ron to be a pleasure and an author with a hearty love for the railroads and knowledge of various railroad companies throughout the United States, Mexico, and Canada as well as his understanding of the workings of these iron horses. Ron repaid Jim with a signed copy of his book, an acknowledgment in his book, and several copyrighted photos of his trip.

Stranded in a Blizzard on Cumbres Pass - 1957

Accompanying Newspaper Articles

According to Vivian, Jim's career was filled with some memorable highs and lows. In one particular recollection, Mom shared that Jim was stranded in a blizzard for six days and five nights in January/February 1957, on the top of Cumbres Pass (Coxo). At that time, Jim and Vivian lived in Durango. A freight train was dispatched from Alamosa to Durango and became stranded during the blizzard when the tracks became impassable. A snow train was dispatched from Durango to break through the snow which prevented the Durango-bound train from proceeding. That snow train also became stuck and Jim was dispatched with the rotary train from Durango to attempt the rescue. Dad's train also became stuck. For those six days and five nights, Jim and approximately 40 men were stuck with little food, water, shelter, and warmth. In multiple articles, the Denver Post and Rocky Mountain Newspapers chronicled this harrowing experience. Mom did take exception to one opinion piece written by Pasquale Marranzino from the Rocky Mountain News, January 31, 1957, titled "Complete Beautiful Isolation". This journalist went to great lengths to create an idyllic situation where these trainmen enjoyed their isolated setting in "the section shack and the snow sheds are safe and warm". Mom recounted that Dad was on the opposite side of the pass where the section shack was and in snow that buried the engines and caboose. See the Denver Post article titled "Evacuation of Stranded Men Begins", February 1st, 1957.

Jim had only left with enough food and water for a couple of days. Army helicopters air-dropped food some of which was raw meat (steaks) that they thought the men could grill in the engine fireboxes. Dad said that because there was no access to water for steam and their coal was limited, they had to "kill" the engines by extinguishing the fires. Dad returned home close to midnight on Friday, February 1st, 1957, almost 15 pounds lighter and severely dehydrated. He said that two trainmen became ill and had to be air-lifted out. Vivian and I were able to calculate that for the amount of time he was gone, this life-threatening experience and supposed "beautiful isolation", Jim made \$419.19.