

# The Story of Western Pacific Caboose 668

By Katy Dickinson

Caboose Web Page: <http://wp668.org>

*Katy.Dickinson@gmail.com*

*3 May 2017*



# WP668 is now in San Jose, California where it serves as my private office.



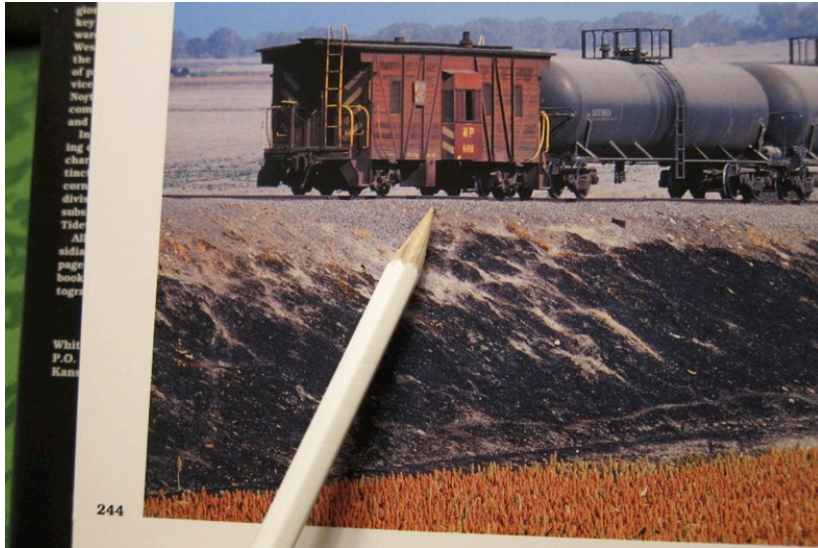
# Early WP668 History

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1916	WP668 was originally built by Pullman as a steel strapped Western Pacific wooden box car in 1916 (for World War I). Boxcar series was 15001-16000. WP668's steel straps are embossed in several places with the Pullman brand "ILLINOIS. G. U.S.A."	<i>No pictures found yet</i>
1943	In October 1943, WP668 was converted to serve as a caboose on San Francisco Bay Area freight trains (for World War II). Two bay windows replaced the original side freight doors. The front and back doors and decks, and interior caboose fittings were installed. 48 Bay Window cabooses were made 1942-1945. WP668 was the last made in 1943.	<i>No pictures found yet</i>
1976	After serving in the Sacramento area on fruit trains of the Sacramento Northern line, WP668 was retired from active service around 1976. WP668 was sold by Western Pacific to a private owner. We think it was this first private owner who removed the front of one of the bay windows and cut out a large window opening in the side of WP668. By 1979, WP668 was stored on the San Francisco waterfront.	<i>Many pictures 1971-1979</i>

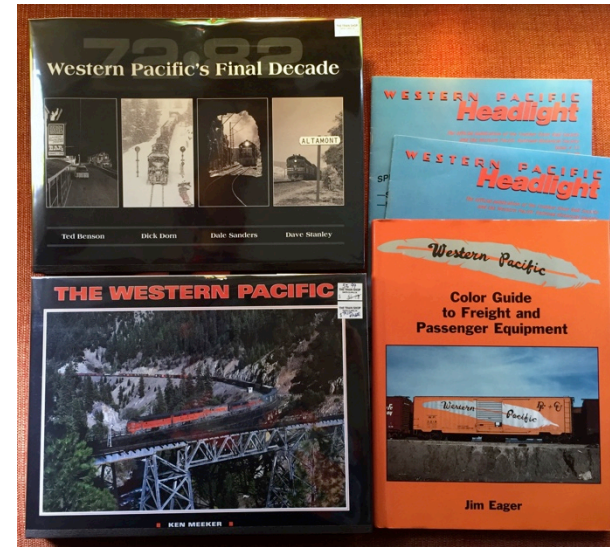


# WP668 in Books



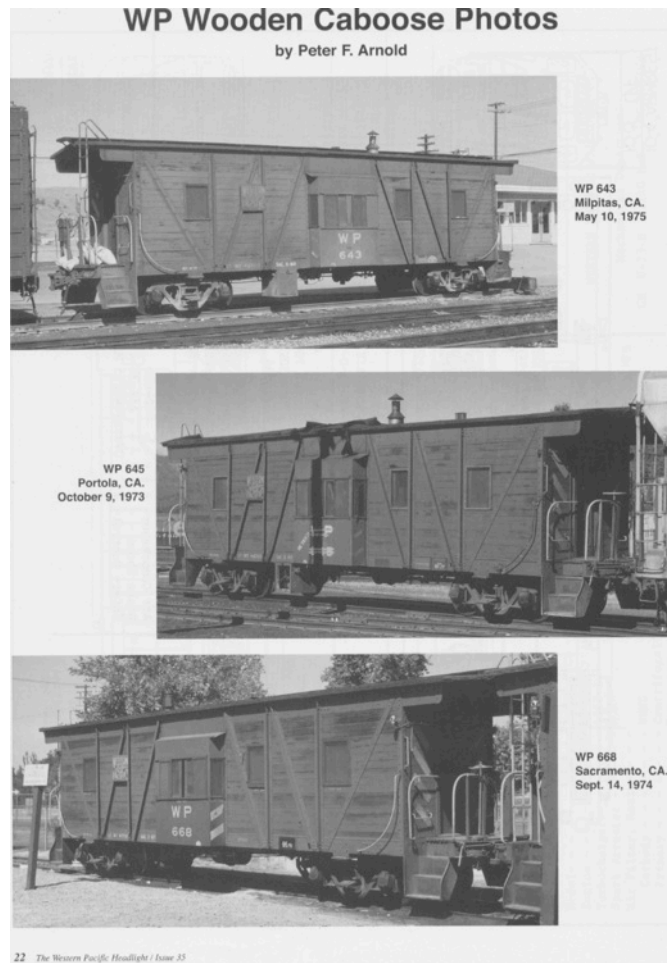
*The Western Pacific*  
by Ken Meeker, 2011 (White River  
Productions). p.244 image is by  
Dave Stanley in 1973

*Western Pacific Color Guide to  
Freight and Passenger Equipment*  
by Jim Eager, 2001 (Morning Sun  
Books). p.122 image is by Peter  
Arnold in 1974



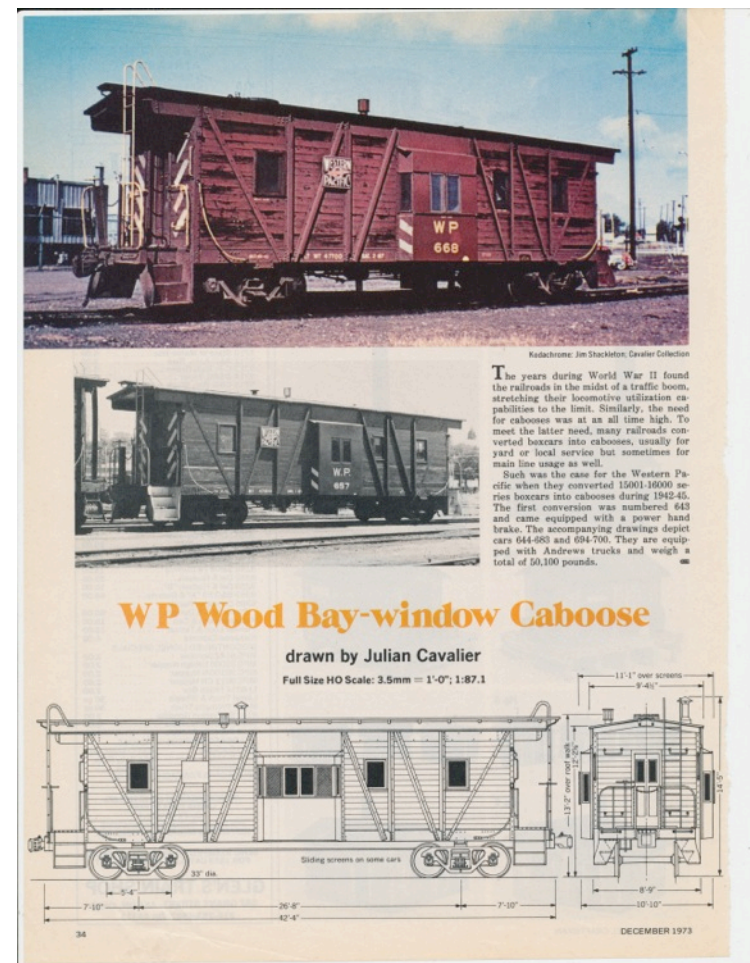


# WP668 in Magazines



2008 *Western Pacific Headlight*, Issue 35

Western Pacific Railroad  
Historical Convention



Dec. 1973 *Railroad Model Craftsman*

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# Earliest WP668 Pictures: 1971



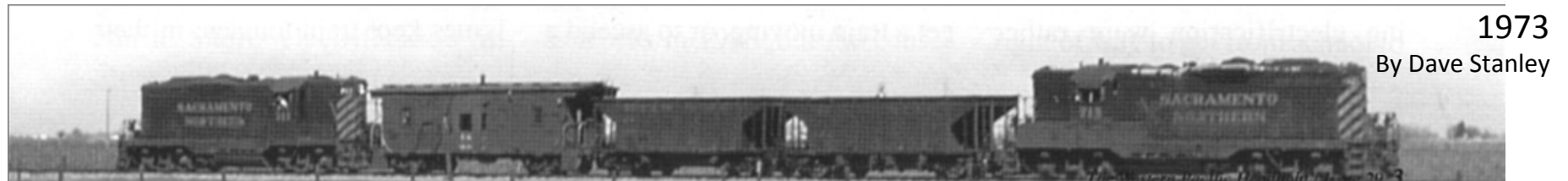
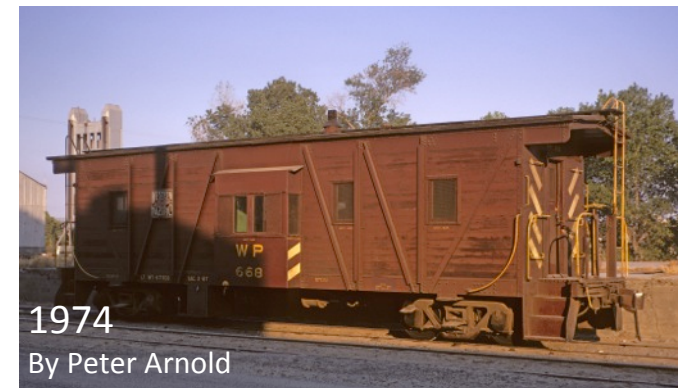
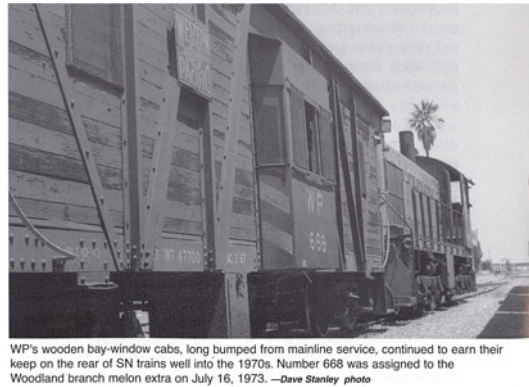
The earliest dated pictures we have of WP668 are by Don Marenzi – taken on 4 April 1971 in Cannon, near Fairfield, California

If you find any WP668 photos, please send email: [Katy.Dickinson@gmail.com](mailto:Katy.Dickinson@gmail.com)





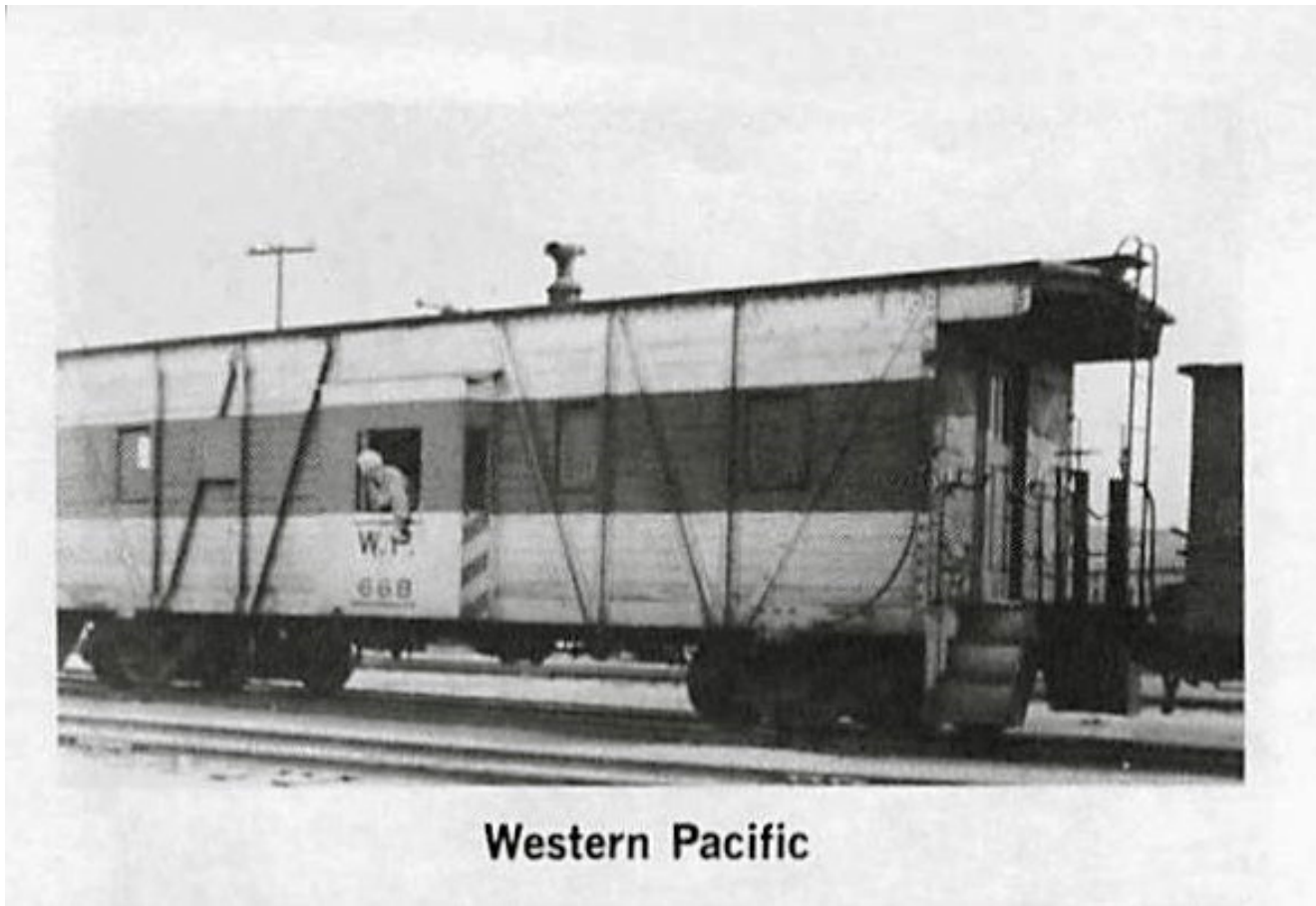
# WP668 in Northern CA: 1972-1979



Western Pacific Railroad  
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# WP668 in Other Colors



Undated Photo by Eric Bracher - featured in the 1974 *NMRA Bulletin*



# Recent WP668 History

2000	WP668 was acquired by the Golden Gate Railroad Museum (GGRM) in San Francisco's Hunter's Point neighborhood. Restoration by GGRM was planned and started.	<i>No pictures found yet</i>
2006	GGRM sold WP668 to John Plocher and Katy Dickinson in January 2006 after the museum lost its lease. In February 2006, WP668 was moved by truck from San Francisco to storage in San Jose. While in storage, the roof was rebuilt, ceiling lights were installed. Our backyard swimming pool was removed and a very short rail line built.	<i>Many pictures</i>
2007	San Jose City Council granted a variance and building permits were issued. In May 2007, WP668 was moved to its new home. The exterior was stripped and painted. Both decks and the bay window were rebuilt.	<i>Many pictures</i>
2008	Restoration continues: inside painted, floor rebuilt, linoleum installed, standing seam metal roof installed, electrical and network wiring, stained glass, cactus garden, ladders and handrails installed, historical markings and WP herald added.	<i>Many pictures</i>

# GGRM's History of WP668 - as of 2006



ABOUT THE MUSEUM SUPPORT THE MUSEUM

**Western Pacific #668**  
Bay Window Caboose



Builder: Western Pacific (Originally Pullman). Year Built: circa 1943 (1916)

This Western Pacific wooden box car was converted with several others to serve as a caboose on local freight trains in the bay area. This car was in use until approximately 1977. Built by Pullman in 1916 as boxcars, the bay windows were added in 1943 along with the other "typical" appliances of a caboose, such as bunks and a stove. This car is a sister to [Sacramento Northern #1642](#), also in our collection.

Upon the car's retirement it was sold to a private owner who leased it out as office space on the San Francisco waterfront. The caboose was acquired by one of our members and donated to the museum.

**History / Links**

- History of GGRM
- History of the Peninsula Commute Route
- The State Belt Railroad-Switching Freight on San Francisco's Embarcadero
- Southern Pacific's Famous Daylight-Premiere Train Travel on the West Coast
- The Ocean Shore Railroad Reaches the Beaches
- The California Zephyr-Along the Feather River Route
- A list of historical societies in California and Nevada
- History of the Point

**Photos / Testimonials**

- Photos/Testimonials

**Locomotives/ Rolling Stock**

- Steam

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[http://archived.ggrm.org/about\\_the\\_museum/freight/wp668.htm](http://archived.ggrm.org/about_the_museum/freight/wp668.htm)



# First Look at WP668: January 2006

*2006 Pictures by John Plocher*



Western Pacific Railroad  
Historical Convention



My Mother, Eleanor Dickinson, saw an add for a caboose for sale in the San Francisco newspaper in December 2005. We visited the Golden Gate Railway Museum in the new year.

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# Move 1: San Francisco to San Jose



Small stuff went in our car



Two flatbeds loaded by crane



Lowboy with caboose body

WP668 on SF street



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Highway 101 - Under 14'10" bridge



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Into  
Storage  
at the  
Willow  
Glen  
Elks Club  
RV Parking





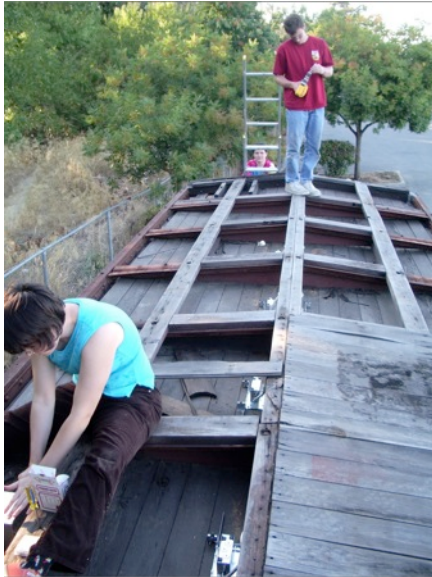
# Replacing Pool with a Short Rail Line



Filled in swimming pool, added ties, tracks (with help from the Silicon Valley Lines gandydancers), ballast, and a golden spike. Moved the trucks with help by Josh Kessler (of SVL).



# Restoration Begins: Roof & Paint



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Took out hundreds of rusty roof nails. John designed and installed new electrical, and with Felix Quintaro installed modern insulation and roofing.

What color paint?  
After many tries, we finally matched the HO-scale model for a perfect shade.



# Move 2: From Storage to Home



*South Bay Crane and Rigging  
moved WP668 twice.  
2007 Pictures by Danek Duvall*





# WP668 in the News: 2007





# More WP668 in the News: 2007

20 WILLOW GLEN RESIDENT MAY 25, 2007

## COVER STORY

**Uplifting:** A caboose purchased by a Willow Glen family for less than \$10,000 is lifted onto a trailer (above, left) at the Elks Lodge before it is driven down the street to its new home in the Plochers' back yard.

**Down the Line:** A worker, Logan Doglione, who helped relocate a Western Pacific Feather River Railway caboose from the Golden Gate Railroad Museum to Willow Glen (above, right), guides the car into position before a crane lifts it into the back yard.

**Steady and Slow:** Logan Doglione (center, right) and homeowner John Plocher hold the caboose steady while a crane lowers the car onto its wheel and track unit. A number of men on the moving crew came out of retirement to help bring the caboose down the Peninsula.

**On target:** John Plocher (left) and South Bay Crane & Rigging employee Smith direct the crane operator as a 30-ton caboose is lowered into the back yard.

in 2006. It would be the gem in their growing collection of train paraphernalia. "We were very pleased to get a local railway car," Dickinson says. "It's incredibly well made and has strong historical ties to San Jose." The caboose, originally built as a wooden boxcar, was transformed into a caboose during World War II. The side doors were knocked out and a bay window was added. The caboose became part of the railroad line that traversed through California and connected to another railroad to form a transcontinental line in Utah. "It had been out of service since 1977 with absolutely no care or love," Dickinson says. "Thirty years later, it's still in great condition."

**New home**  
The caboose was about to embark on a new adventure—moving from San Francisco to San Jose. "This caboose is part of Northern California history," Dickinson says. "Now it is coming home."

Moving a 30-ton nonfunctioning train caboose, however, was no easy task. The initial move required two semi trucks, one for the 28-ton box and the other for the 5 1/2-ton wheels and trucks. As word of mouth spread among the crew of movers and crane operators, the relocation of the caboose began to stir up excitement.

"There were guys in their 60s that came out of retirement to move our caboose," Dickinson says. Before the caravan of train equipment could be transported on Highway 101, the group needed to check clearances and obtain a permit for transport.

"We cleared the bridges by 4 inches," Dickinson says. By the end of the day, the ancient caboose had made its final journey from San Francisco to San Jose without its wheels ever touching rails.

It was set down in a local storage area, where it lived for 13 months until the couple prepared their yard and received the required permits to bring the caboose home. The couple went to work and with the help of their children, Jessica and Paul Dickinson Goodman, installed 50 feet of historic railroad track in the back yard.

The finishing touches to the nostalgic picture eventually will include an old-fashioned railroad platform and railroad signs. "It's the epitome of gonzo modeling," Plocher says. "I'm into model trains as well."

Plocher says placing life-size rails in the yard was a natural progression. It began with a train around a Christmas tree, which over time took over the laundry room and then the garage. When it got too big, he built a second garage for railroad models. It all led to the ultimate model setup in the back yard.

The family says moving the caboose turned out to be the easy part. It was the next phase that proved to be a bit tricky. The couple planned to house the caboose as an accessory building in their back yard and began the permitting process with the city.

"We've been working with the city since April 2006 to figure out all the things that need to be done," Plocher says. "It's a complex problem. It's not a round hole. The city doesn't know what rules apply, but they're willing to meaning people and think it's cool." The couple received the final approval for their project from the San Jose Planning director on Feb. 21 and the caboose moved in on May 11.

Photograph by Vicki Thompson

**Skilled Labor:** A rigging crew member holds the caboose steady while a crane lifts it over trees into the yard of Katy Dickinson and John Plocher in Willow Glen. The caboose made the journey from San Francisco to Willow Glen down Highway 101.

**We Did It:** John Plocher and his wife, Katy Dickinson, celebrate with a kiss after finally getting city approval to move a 1916 caboose they purchased into their back yard. The authentic car is the ultimate collection in their train hobby.

WGR-20070525\_page19.jpg

The caboose began its journey long before it settled in Willow Glen.

According to the Western Pacific Railroad Historical Society website, the Northern California railroad was formed in 1903, and was designed to run from San Francisco eastward through the canyon of the Feather River and Beckworth Pass and on to Salt Lake City. The railway had branches that served the cities of San Jose, Alameda, Berkeley, Richmond, Fresno, Chico and Prattville.

### Salvaging history

Plocher and Dickinson's particular caboose, the WP 668 NE and part of the line's series of trains numbered 644-668, was built as a wooden boxcar in 1916.

These boxcars were in train wrecks and catching on fire, Plocher says, making them hard to find. The boxcar escaped this common fate when it was converted into a caboose in 1943. It became a regular fixture on the line until 1977 when the caboose, like so many other from its era, was decommissioned as technology and transportation needs changed.

Caboose were originally designed to be an observation point for the train conductor and railroaders. Until the 1980s, all trains were required to have caboose attached at the end of the train. One of the technologies that changed this was the flashing rear-end device or "red."

Along with functioning as an office for the conductor, the caboose also housed an

# 2007 Year in Review

MAY 25, 2007 WILLOW GLEN RESIDENT 19

December 28, 2007 www.wgresident.com

Highlights from 2007 include (clockwise from top left) The illegal removal of three sycamores on the corner of Camino Ricardo and Willow Street sparked a citywide controversy over the protection of trees. Dick Sota, original co-owner of Dicks Bakery in Willow Glen, celebrated 60 years of operating the family business. Katy Dickinson and John Plocher shared a kiss during the move of a vintage train caboose that the San Jose Planning Department allowed them to move into the back yard of their Belmont Avenue property. Being pulled in a wagon at the Willow Glen Founders Day parade were (from left to right) Sadie Fremman, Lyra Hunt and Molly Fremman.



# Restoration Continues: Porch & Paint



After WP668 moved home, John removed the rotten porch wood and the rusted out iron, replacing these with a new larger porch. He also filled the hole in the wall. Avi Lenchner and paint crew stripped and repainted WP68. John and I added the yellow trim paint.



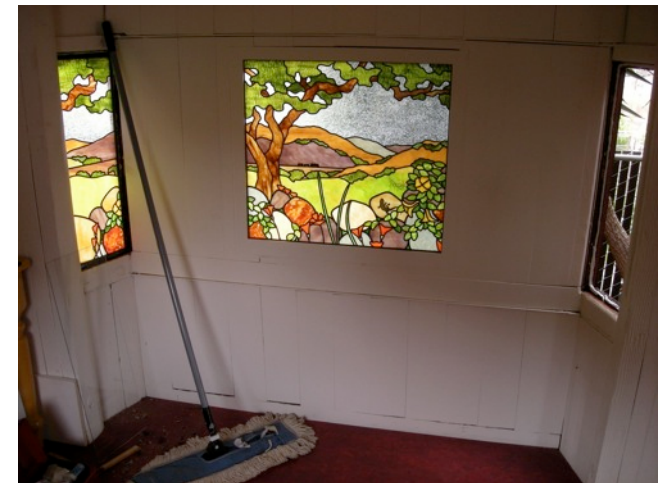


# Restoration: Bay Window, Floor, Paint





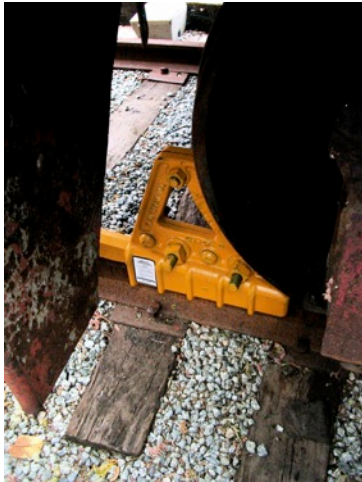
# New Roof, Stairs, Flooring, WP Markings, Stained Glass



Western Pacific Railroad  
Historical Convention



# Bookcases, Window Seat, Stove





# Current WP668 History

2009	The San Jose City permits were signed off (24 February 2009). Bay Window seat designed and installed. Stair handrails coated and finished, stair lighting installed.	<i>Many pictures</i>
2010	Installed under carriage lighting.	<i>Many pics</i>
2011	Stove installed.	<i>Many pics</i>
2013	History of WP668 presented to Pacific Coast Region - NMRA	-
2016	Added roof lights. WP668 Caboose 100 <sup>th</sup> Birthday!	<i>Many pics</i>
-	<i>Work still to be done:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Install roof walk, attach it to existing ladders</li> <li>- Restore the rest of the windows (1 done, 5 to go)</li> <li>- Complete the back deck and step woodwork (steel is done)</li> <li>- Restore brake rigging and wheels</li> <li>- Reattach and restore battery box</li> <li>- Restore (replace?) the doors</li> <li>- Caulk and paint repair</li> </ul>	-

# Daily Life in a Caboose



When cottonwoods bloom, you see every spider web.



Creaky springs announce visitors



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Unique parties!



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# WP668 Rough Costs

- \$75,000 rough cost breakdown:
  - \$6,500 to purchase WP668 from GGRM
  - \$9,500 to move WP668 (twice)
  - \$8,000 for San Jose city permits, variance hearing
  - \$12,000 to fill in swimming pool
  - \$10,000 for the new roof and floor
  - \$8,000 for stripping and painting
  - \$6,000 for bookcases and stove
  - \$15,000 for walkways, fence, this and that
- Compare to \$300/Square Foot for new San Jose construction:  $450/\text{Square Feet} \times \$300 = \$135,000$

# WP668 Suppliers

- Armstrong Carpet & Linoleum - flooring
- Avi Decorative Painting (Avi Lenchner) - painted WP668 inside and out
- Bay Area Fireplace – sold/installed our Majestic Brand Oxford stove
- Chris Gremich (CG Designs) welding – also Adam Stickles (Fusion Welding) – ladders, stairs, bay window
- Felix Quintaro – roofing and landscaping
- South Bay Crane and Rigging – moved WP668 twice
- Vincent Taylor Architectural Art Glass – designed/made the bay window stained glass
- Wildcat Metals - metal roofing on WP668



# WP668 Bibliography

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- Photo from 1973 by Dave Stanley on p. 244: *The Western Pacific* by Ken Meeker, 2011 (Publisher: White River Productions; ISBN: 1-932804-11-0)
- "WP Wooden Caboose Photos By Peter F. Arnold" p.22 *Western Pacific Headlight* Issue 35 (Spring 2008), Publisher: Feather River Rail Society and WPRRHS.
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJPM7ebfUI8> YouTube Video, Added May 11, 2007, From sfineberg , Video of the caboose move (with sound), 9 minutes 24 seconds
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GE-dBtEfwhQ> YouTube Video, Added May 14, 2007, From johnplocher, Webcam images of the caboose move from the upstairs window - image taken every 30 seconds - made into a video (no sound), 1 minute 8 seconds
- "Home Depot" award-winning story by Mayra Flores De Marcotte, *Willow Glen Resident* Volume 21, Issue 21, May 25, 2007 (cover page, pp.18-20).
- Cover photo, *Willow Glen Resident* Volume 21, Issue 52, December 28, 2007 ("2007 Year in Review").
- Photo by Dave Stanley on p. 8 in the magazine article "The Self-Propelled Era on the Sacramento Northern" by Tom Irion, *Western Pacific Headlight* Issue #29, Spring 2006, Publisher: Feather River Rail Society and WPRRHS.
- Photo on p. 122: *Western Pacific Color Guide to Freight and Passenger Equipment* by Jim Eager, 2001 (Publisher: Morning Sun Books; ISBN-10: 158248063X, ISBN-13: 978-1582480633)
- Photo p.354 in *Western Pacific Pictorial* by John J. Ryczkowski (Steel Rails West Publishing; ISBN-10: 0935250018, ISBN-13: 978-0935250015) 1979
- *NMRA Bulletin*, January 1974, p.12: photo by Eric Bracher. Original date?
- "WP Wood Bay-window Caboose" p.34 *Railroad Model Craftsman* December 1973

# Thanks and Appreciation

- My family (“the crew”): John Plocher, Jessica Dickinson Goodman, Paul D. Goodman, Matthew Holmes, Eleanor Dickinson
- Silicon Valley Lines and South Bay Historical Railroad Society members for ongoing support and crew backup
- Railfans and photographers who have recorded WP668’s long travels, especially: Peter Arnold, E. Chambers, Danek Duvall, Sam Fineberg, Don Marenzi, Jacqueline Ramsayer, Ken Rattenne, John Ryczkowski, Jim Shackleton, Stephen Sloan, Dave Stanley, Vicki Thompson...
- Don Marenzi who patiently searched his archives and located so many old WP668 photos.



# About



- **Katy Dickinson** is the Founder of Mentoring Standard: ***MentoringStandard.Com***
- She makes mentors shine. She has designed and managed successful mentoring programs in the Americas, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia – while holding a variety of senior executive roles in the Silicon Valley. **At Sun Microsystems**, she created and managed global Engineering mentoring for ten years.
- Katy Dickinson is an Accredited Mentor by the **University of the South**, was the Process Architect for the first class of the U.S. State Department's **TechWomen** mentoring program, a member of the TechWomen Alumnae Council and the **Anita Borg Institute** Advisory Board, and a lecturer for 12 years for a **University of California at Berkeley Engineering** class on entrepreneurship.
- Her blog is ***Katysblog.Wordpress.Com***
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