Sonora’s Train Locomotive

Courtesy Craig Peterson

Introduction

Several months ago, we received a telephone call at City Hall asking who owned the train engine by the Fairgrounds. A few people didn't realize that the engine was owned by the City of Sonora. Realizing that the engine was not on our listing of fixed assets, as it should be, I decided to compile the necessary information to include it in our fixed assets. The engine should have been included in our first listing of all city property done in 2001.

This was a much more complicated process than I originally thought. The engine currently at the Fairgrounds is not the one originally placed there. I talked to several people who remembered the exchange, but not when it happened. I then went through the council minute books from 1964 through 1979. I found quite a bit of information on the first engine, but nothing on the current engine. I was able to acquire more information from reading the Union Democrat.

This report contains my narrative of our acquisition of the train engines and a timeline from the city council minutes and the Union Democrat. Photographs have been obtained from various sources as identified on each picture.

I had help from many people preparing this report: city employees Jerry Fuccillo, Jim Lillie, Craig Peterson and Bill Seldon; train buffs Dave Connery and Brian Curnow Sr; and historian Jim Prunetti; also Craig Cassidy and Penny Scheller at the Union Democrat.

Patricia Perry
Sonora City Historian
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May 2013

Sonora's Train Locomotive

In 1964, Pickering Lumber Company offered to donate to the City of Sonora a 1911 narrow gauge Shay locomotive for display in the city. The engine was known as West Side Lumber Company No. 7. The first record of this donation was in the council minutes of February 17, 1964. The council accepted the locomotive, but tabled the matter until a location could be found. There was some discussion of placing it behind the Bank of America, but the location by the fairgrounds was the most popular suggestion. Mr. Stanley Davis, representing the Sonora Area Business Association (SABA) concurred with placing the locomotive at the entrance to the fairgrounds.

In September 1964, city engineer, Roy Fredricksen estimated the cost of placing the engine near the fairgrounds and creek would cost about $2,300.00, in addition to the cost of moving it.

Twenty months after the first offer of the locomotive, in August 1965, the council voted to place the engine near the entrance to the fairgrounds on Stockton Road, and authorized an expenditure of approximately $1,500.00 to move the locomotive.

In September 1965, Fredricksen submitted an application for an encroachment permit to Caltrans, to place the locomotive near the entrance to the fairgrounds. This was because the engine was to sit on Caltrans right of way. One of the requirements was that a chain link fence, with barbed wire on top be placed around the engine.

On Wednesday, November 17, 1965, Shay Engine No. 7 was placed at the entrance to the fairgrounds. According to the article in the November 18, 1965 Union Democrat:

Mourners shed raindrops, not tears, yesterday as Pickering Engine No. 7 was laid to rest on its final railroad track.

Fighting intermittent rainfall and soupy mud, the moving crew spent hours guiding the retired locomotive onto the piece of track that has awaited it for weeks.

Located across Southgate Drive from the fairgrounds, the old engine with its shiny bell is in view of motorists traveling through Sonora on Highway 108.

Donated by the Pickering Lumber Corporation, the engine and its accompanying car were moved and installed on their present site a few yards from Sonora creek by Hoaglund's Transfer service of Modesto. The front wheels of the engine were removed prior to its being transported and were the first part of the train to be placed on the track.

The body of the locomotive was then moved to the end of the track on a truck. The front end of the engine was lifted by a crane and the truck pulled away leaving the engine, from the cab forward, hanging several feet over the ground.

The front wheels were then placed back under the engine and the reassembled unit was pushed onto the steel rails. A second car with the name West Side Lumber Company, on its side was then placed on the track behind the engine.

But No. 7 was not to rest in peace at its location on Stockton Road. In early 1977 two organizations wanted to buy or trade it for a standard gauge engine. In the 1970s many train buffs were realizing that much of locomotive history was being lost by the scrapping of old steam engines. No longer practical for use in the lumber industry companies were quickly selling them for scrap metal. Realizing that once these engines

were lost they could never be replaced, museums were trying to acquire them for display and operation.

Fred H. Kepner, representing the Great Western Railroad Museum in Klamath Falls, Oregon and Glen Bell who owned the Westside and Cherry Valley Railway in Tuolumne want to acquire No. 7.

Entrepreneur Glen Bell had purchased much of Pickering Lumber Company's holdings at Westside in Tuolumne City. Having made millions from creating Taco Bell fast food restaurants he now wanted to create a historic theme park and museum, based on the lumber industry in Tuolumne County. In 1968, he created the Westside and Cherry Valley Railroad to operate in the park. Because Westside was running narrow gauge he wanted Sonora's engine. According to the Union Democrat of January 20, 1977, Kepner is the one who proposed that Engine No. 3 at Standard replace No. 7 at Sonora. Further the Democrat stated, "The switch is made attractive because Kepner offers to paint the engine, letter the side and even install new fencing and a roof over the Sonora display. Any switch would probably be preferred by railroad buffs who hate to see No. 7 deteriorating inside its fenced enclosure. The engine's paint is chipping off, the display has been vandalized and ignored for many years."

The February 10, 1977 Union Democrat stated that a locomotive switch between Sonora and the Westside and Cherry Valley Railroad "will take place in about a month." Glen Bell did the negotiating with Pickering Lumber Company for their standard gauge engine on display in Standard. Pickering agreed to the exchange and Bell paid for all the costs associated with moving the engines. Before the standard gauge engine left Standard it had its bell, whistle and identification plate, but when it arrived in Sonora they were gone.

The engine exchange did not actually take place until January 1978. On January 5, 1978 engine No. 7 was moved from Sonora to Westside and on January 12th Shay engine No. 3 was placed in Sonora. Apparently, fencing was placed around No. 3 at this time.

Most people were happy with the exchange as No. 3 had a longer history than No. 7 in Tuolumne County. No. 7 was a narrow gauge, three-truck, 60-ton Shay built in 1911 for the Butte & Plumas Railway and operated as No. 4 in Oroville, California. It was acquired by West Side Lumber Company in 1917. Shay No. 3 is a standard gauge, two-truck, 60-ton locomotive made by the Lima Locomotive and Machine Company of Lima, Ohio. It was built in 1910 and sold to the Standard Lumber Company to operate on the Sugar Pine Railway in Tuolumne County.

After the close of The Westside & Cherry Valley, Bell's them park, No. 7 was sold to Roaring Camp, a train museum in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Today it operates there as "Sonora" Engine No. 7.

In March 1985, City Planning Commissioner and former Mayor, Stanley Churchill appeared before the council warning them that "one of these days you're going to find the locomotive in the creek." Churchill recommended that setting the ties in concrete and steel be part of any beautification project. City staff repainted the engine and Steve Patton volunteered his services to repaint the lettering. At this time the fence around the locomotive was also removed. Whether Commissioner Churchill's warning was heeded or not, in 1996 the city almost lost the engine to a storm.

On May 16, 1996, the city experienced a torrential rain which created a serious threat to the stability of the locomotive site, as water was rushing down Sonora Creek at an alarming rate, and undermining the ground under the engine.

The Union Democrat reported that, *Engine No. 3 took its longest trip in nearly two decades yesterday—about 10 feet to the north, at a fare of several thousand dollars.*

But the alternative was an ignominious plunge into Sonora Creek, which had risen so high during yesterday's deluge that it gouged out much of the ground under the track where the 86-year-old steam locomotive sat.

Rescuers worked from morning to evening to stabilize the 70-ton Shay engine, which hauled logs for decades for the Sugar Pine Railroad and has adorned the Stockton Road entrance into Sonora since 1978.

The problem we're worrying abut is the water is undermining the ground and the ground is disappearing," said Mike Polen soon after helping rig up steel cables from three tow trucks to the locomotive.

But the rain abated, a pile of rock and dirt diverted the creek from the undermined area, and a big crane finally arrived from Modesto to hoist the engine to a temporary set of tracks 10 feet farther from the stream.

The crane cost the city of Sonora $600 an hour, and there are still untallied costs for city workers' overtime and help from other parties. But officials felt it worthwhile to have this modern piece of heavy equipment rescue a big iron piece of the past.

"There's going to be some considerable cost, but you can't put a price on something like the locomotive," said City Administrator Greg Applegate. "This has been a historical landmark for some time."

City workers checking for storm damage yesterday morning found that the churning creek had washed out earth from under about half of the 35-foot stretch of track where the locomotive sat, next to the Mother Lode Fairgrounds.

The ground held under the wheels at each end, but part of several ties and one of the rails stood exposed under the middle. The locomotive seemed to be staying in place, but the cables from the three tow trucks were attached just in case.

Workers for the city and the Tuolumne Utilities District hauled in several dump truck loads of rock and soil, which were dropped at the upstream end of the locomotive to keep the creek from eroding the remaining ground.

But for most of the afternoon, the local crew and several dozen spectators could only await the arrival of the big crane, expected to take two to three hours to haul from Modesto and set up.

The tow trucks all together were capable of pulling well over 100,000 pounds, more than the locomotive's weight, said Polen, but that wouldn't do much good if the creek bank totally collapsed.

"It's enough to hold it," he said, "but if the bank disappears and that thing gives way, the trucks are going to go that way."

That spectacle—a locomotive and three heavy-duty tow trucks piled up in the creek—never came to pass. The rain held off all afternoon, the crane made its grand entry on the scene—and the crowd waited a couple of more hours for it to get in position.

Finally, just after 5p.m., the crane was attached by cables to the locomotive and lifted its front end about four feet. The crane then swung the front end over to a railroad tie laid atop the temporary track.

The crane then was moved over to the back end, where it lifted the locomotive again and got the entire thing parallel with the temporary track. Then back to the front end, which was lifted so the wooden tie could be pulled out and the whole engine could rest on the rails. The job was done by 8p.m.

For the locomotive-moving experts—from Husky Crane Company and from Railtown 1897 State Historic Park in Jamestown it was no big deal. The crane has a capacity of 125 tons, so a mere 70-ton steam engine was a routine job.

"We move locomotives every so often," said Railtown business manager Joe Nemmers in a break from hammering together the temporary track.

Traffic was diverted from this part of Stockton Road for most of the day, but plenty of spectators still turned out, a few of them on lawn chairs on a hill across the street, a few roaming around with still or video cameras. Police officers, other Sonora employees and a quorum of the city council milled about.

Something about old trains. And about floods and other natural disasters. There was a sense of awe about the whole thing—the mighty crane, the vulnerable locomotive, the freak rainstorm that brought them together.

"If you get this much water—act of God—what can you do?" Applegate said, "Your creeks and drains can only handle so much rain."

Because the locomotive sat on CalTrans right-of-way, the city argued that CalTrans was partly responsible for the costs as they had not maintained their property. The danger was not only to Sonora's engine as the 60-ton locomotive sat precariously upon the eroding embankment threatening additional damage to the Caltrans wall, Southgate Bridge and a main sewer lateral that ran directly across the stream bed in the direct path of the locomotive.

The cost to the city for the emergency work was $9,721.57, which after much negotiation, Caltrans agreed to pay half. Part of the controversy was because Caltrans could not locate the encroachment permit that Fredricksen had obtained in 1964, and the city did not have a copy, only the reference in the council minutes. Caltrans originally tried to get out of paying anything because they didn't have an encroachment permit, indicating the city's engine was there illegally. Since an engine had been on site since the mid-1960s this seemed a poor argument to the city. The city and Caltrans could not agree on the wording of a current encroachment permit and through the efforts of city engineer, Jerry Fuccillo, Caltrans issued a Directors Deed conveying the site of the engine to the city. The deed was recorded on December 30, 1997, over a year and a half after the storm and the work was done.

Pickering Lumber Company Shay Number 3

Courtesy Tuolumne County Museum P25287

Tuolumne County Museum TP10778

Pickering Lumber Corporation Shay Number 3
On Display at Standard CA

Courtesy Tuolumne County Museum P27883

Courtesy Tuolumne County Museum P27882

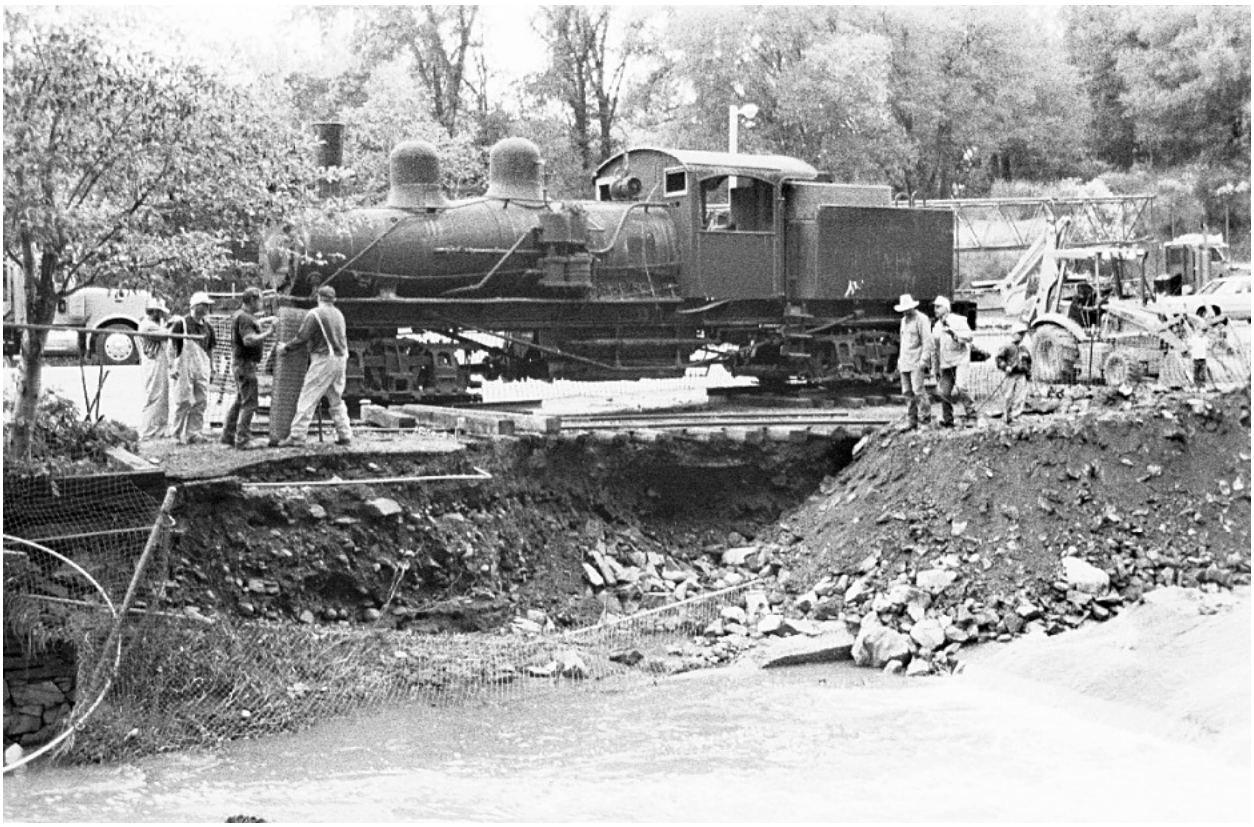
Shay Number 3 on Stockton Road, Sonora CA

Courtesy Union Democrat, March 22, 1985

Shay Number 3 leaning precariously towards Sonora Creek

Courtesy Craig Peterson

Storm Damage, May 1996

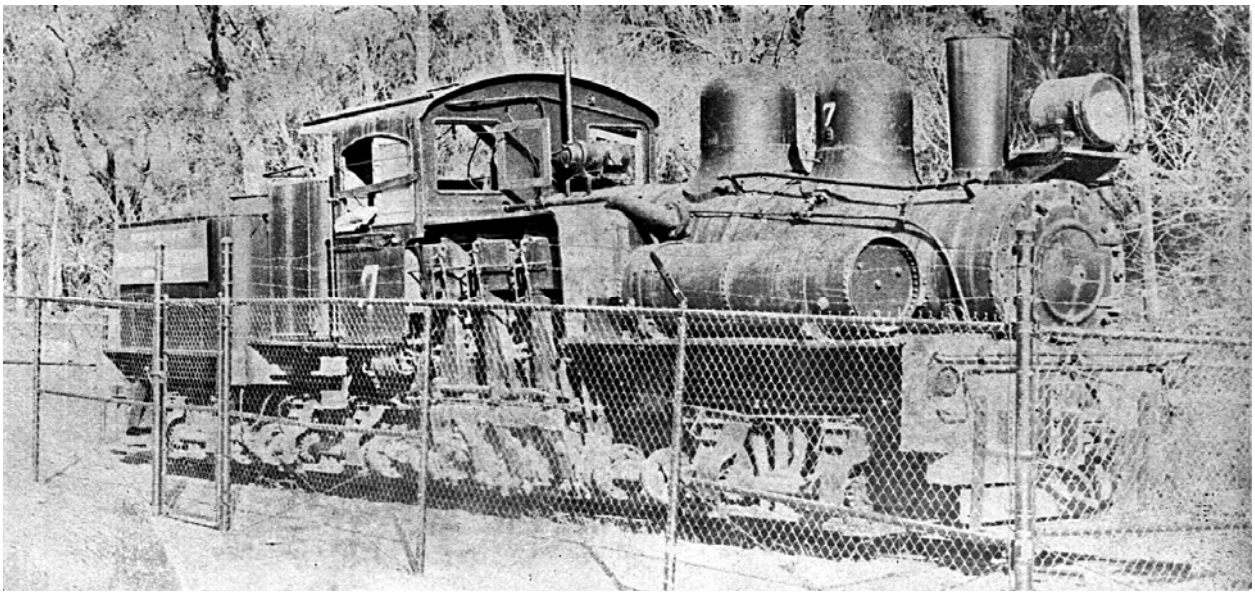


Courtesy Union Democrat

Courtesy Union Democrat

Pickering Lumber Company Shay Number 7
Located at the entrance to the Fairgrounds in Sonora CA

Courtesy Craig Peterson



Courtesy Union Democrat, Jan 20, 1977

Comparing this picture to the one above it is obvious that Number 7 had been neglected.

Shay Engine Number 7
Leaving Stockton Road and its final destination at Roaring Camp

Courtesy Union Democrat, January 9, 1978

Courtesy Roaring Camp, Inc.

Locomotive
Timeline

February 17, 1964 – Council Minutes

Mayor Eproson told the Council that Frank Momyer and the Pickering Lumber Company has given to the City of Sonora a narrow gauge locomotive. Mayor Eproson stated that the most feasible place for the locomotive is next to the Sonora Theatre if permission is given the City of Sonora by the Division of Highways. The City must move the locomotive to the location of their choice at their own expense. (The Sonora Theatre was located on the southwest corner of Washington Street and Stockton Road, the current site of the Bank of America.)

On motion Councilman Churchill, seconded by Councilman Rasor, and unanimously carried, the Council accepted the locomotive as donated by Frank Momyer and Pickering Lumber Company.

The matter was tabled until the Council decides where the locomotive will be located.

July 6, 1964 – Council Minutes

Mr. Stanley Davis appeared for the SABA regarding placement of locomotive from Pickering Lumber Corp., near entrance to Fairgrounds. Letter from Mr. B. S. Craig, Fair Manager, read at this time. Engineer Fredricksen was asked to contact Division of Highways, concerning placement of locomotive. (SABA was the downtown business association, Sonora Area Business Association.)

August 24, 1964 – Council Minutes

Councilman Stearn and Engineer Fredricksen discussed placement of locomotive, donated by Pickering Lumber Corporation.

September 8, 1964 – Council Minutes

Engineer Fredericksen discussed placement of locomotive from Pickering Lumber Company and stated preparation of spot to locate it near fairgrounds and creek would cost about $2,300.00, plus cost of moving, etc.

August 16, 1965 – Council Minutes

Mr. William Woodford appeared before the City Council regarding placing locomotive given to City of Sonora by Pickering Lumber Corporation, near entrance to Fairgrounds entrance on Stockton Street.

Motion by Councilman Akin, seconded by Councilman Churchill to authorize moving locomotive to suitable location in Sonora at expenditure of approximately $1,500.00, unanimously carried.

August 18, 1965
Union Democrat, Page 7, Column 7 & 8
Locomotive To Move To City

The city council has appropriated $1,500 to transport a locomotive that has been donated to the city by Pickering Lumber Corporation.

The expenditure will be charged to the city's $4,000 parks and recreation fund.

Fair board director William Woodford suggested the city investigate use of a piece of property northeast of the Sonora creek bridge crossing at the entrance to the fairgrounds for location of the locomotive. He said an earlier suggestion to place the locomotive inside the fair grounds near the administration building had been reconsidered by the directors after the Sonora Parent Nursery school took up residence in the floriculture building. The school uses this area for a playground, he said.

City Engineer Roy Fredricksen said the property mentioned was within the state division of highway's right-of-way for Highway 108 on Stockton Street.

The councilmen agreed to look at the proposed site.

The estimated figure for cost of moving the locomotive had been obtained from a Modesto firm by Mayor R. Wesley Eproson. Eproson said the firm would bring the locomotive to the city within 30 to 60 days.

September 7, 1965 – Council Minutes

Engineer Fredricksen presented copy of application permit to Division of Highways for an encroachment permit for placement of locomotive near entrance to Fairgrounds, together with drawing of site, and a recommendation that locomotive be placed on rails, ties and regular railroad bed with steel welded on ends of rails.

Letter authorizing permit to encroach in placement of locomotive from Donald I. Segerstrom, on behalf of Segerstrom Brothers, and request that Segerstrom Brothers be co-insured by City in event portion of locomotive rests on portion of Segerstrom property.

September 9, 1965
Union Democrat, Page 7, Column 2 & 3
Permit Sought For Engine Site

The city of Sonora has applied for an encroachment permit to locate an old Pickering Lumber Corporation locomotive on state and private property.

The site is located on the northeast corner of the intersection of Southgate Drive and Stockton Street near the entrance to the Mother Lode fairgrounds.

The property is part of a state division of highways right-of-way. A portion is also owned by the Segerstrom family.

Donald I. Segerstrom, agent for himself and his three brothers, submitted a letter to the council saying the family has no objection to the placement of the locomotive. The Segerstroms requested they be fully insured by the city for public liability.

City Engineer Roy Fredricksen suggested the site be authentically constructed with ties and rails. Measurement will be obtained from Pickering.

Mayor R. Wesley Eproson has been authorized to engage a Modesto firm to move the 59-ton engine and tender to Sonora. The estimated cost of the moving is $1,500.

October 4, 1965 – Council Minutes

Encroachment permit from Division of Highways read and filed, for placement of locomotive near entrance to Fairgrounds. Provision of permit requires City of Sonora shall assume full responsibility for any and all liability and adequate insurance is required to protect the State in this regard.

November 1, 1965 – Council Minutes

Engineer Fredricksen noted that fence required by Division of Highways, around locomotive would require a 4-foot gate and 258 lineal feet of fencing and recommended flared-out top with wires, same as fence at Fairgrounds.

Motion by Councilman Churchill, seconded by Councilman Akin, unanimously carried, Engineer Fredricksen be authorized to order necessary materials to build fence.

November 4, 1965
Union Democrat, Page 11, Column 4
Fencing Ordered For Train

Purchase of materials for a fence to be placed around an old Pickering locomotive near the Mother Lode fairgrounds has been approved by the city council.

City Engineer Roy Fredricksen said 258 feet of 6-foot fencing will be required to enclose the locomotive site on Sonora creek at the intersection of Southgate Drive and Highway 108. He said it will be the same as the fence at the fairgrounds with three wires at the top. Also included will be a 4-foot gate.

The gate and fence are required by an encroachment permit granted to the city by the state division of highways for use of the property.

Track for the locomotive has been laid and Mayor R. Wesley Eproson said the locomotive may be delivered from Standard this week.

November 18, 1965
Union Democrat, Page 1, Column 2-5
Rainy Tribute For Engine No.7

Mourners shed raindrops, not tears, yesterday as Pickering Engine No. 7 was laid to rest on its final railroad track.

Fighting intermittent rainfall and soupy mud, the moving crew spent hours guiding the retired locomotive onto the piece of track that has awaited it for weeks.

Located across Southgate Drive from the fairgrounds, the old engine with its shiny bell is in view of motorists traveling through Sonora on Highway 108.

Donated by the Pickering Lumber Corporation, the engine and its accompanying car were moved and installed on their present site a few yards from Sonora creek by Hoaglund's Transfer service of Modesto. The front wheels of the engine were removed prior to its being transported and were the first part of the train to be placed on the track.

The body of the locomotive was then moved to the end of the track on a truck. The front end of the engine was lifted by a crane and the truck pulled away leaving the engine, from the cab forward, hanging several feet over the ground.

The front wheels were then placed back under the engine and the reassembled unit was pushed onto the steel rails. A second car with the name West Side Lumber Company, on its side was then placed on the track behind the engine.

December 20, 1965 – Council Minutes

Motion by Councilman Churchill to include light on locomotive at time new street lights are installed. Churchill withdrew motion.

January 3, 1966 – Council Minutes

Councilman Churchill recommended plaque be erected alongside of locomotive site.

March 18, 1968 – Council Minutes

Mr. P. A. Bifarella, Sonora Rotary Club representative, asked the Council for permission to put up a rustic sign, 8x8, in area next to locomotive by fairgrounds for Rotary and other service clubs.

Motion by Councilman Stearn, seconded by Councilman Churchill, unanimously carried to approve sign providing it does not violate City Zoning Ordinance #376, and cleared with State Division of Highways

January 17, 1977- Council Minutes

Letter received from Fred H. Kepher, Great Western Railroad Museum regarding trading or selling the display locomotive near the fairgrounds. Discussion followed. Motion by Councilman Churchill, seconded by Councilman Leslie, unanimously carried, have City Clerk write letter or contact Westside Cherry Valley Railway in Tuolumne and have him appear at next meeting, if still interested.

January 20, 1977
Union Democrat, Page 8
Old No. 7 May Steam Again

Will old No. 7 roll again?

No. 7, a Shay narrow gauge locomotive used in early day Tuolumne county logging, was retired to a display on Stockton St. near the entrance to the Mother Lode fairgrounds years ago. It was donated to the city by Pickering Lumber Co.

Now the engine may be restored and pressed back into service as a part of the Westside and Cherry Valley railway project underway in Tuolumne.

Sonora City councilmen have twice approved plans to switch No. 7 for another display model. A year ago the city agreed to trade Westside developer Glen Bell for a standard gauge locomotive.

And this week the council was asked for a third time to exchange engines. Because the newest proposal is complicated, representatives of Westside and Cherry Valley will be asked to appear at a city council meeting.

Fred H. Kepner of Klamath Falls, Oregon, in a letter to the council, adds the new twist.

Bell had promised to replace No. 7 with a standard gauge engine, but Kepner, who operates the Great Western Railroad museum, wants the standard gauge for his museum.

So, Kepner proposes that an engine now displayed at Standard by Pickering be switched. That Shay, he said, was built in 1913 for the Sugar Pine railway and has spent its entire life in Tuolumne county.

It is also the same size as the one on display in Sonora.

The switch is made attractive because Kepner offers to paint the engine, letter the side and even install new fencing and a roof over the Sonora display.

Any switch would probably be preferred by railroad buffs who hate to see No. 7 deteriorating inside its fenced enclosure.

The engine's paint is chipping off, the display has been vandalized and ignored for many years.

A sign on the fence explains just how long the Shay has been without attention. It says interested people can ride an excursion train in Tuolumne – a ride which was discontinued more than four years ago.

February 7, 1977 – Council Minutes

Mr. Stephen G. C. Hare and Mr. James Summers of Westside and Cherry Valley Railway spoke on exchange of display narrow gauge locomotive near fairgrounds for standard gauge locomotive and advised they are still interested. Discussion followed.

February 10, 1977
Union Democrat, Page 10, Columns 2 & 3
Engine Switch Scheduled Soon

A locomotive switch between Sonora and the Westside and Cherry Valley Railroad will take place in about a month.

Jim Summers of the railroad told councilmen this week that Westside still wants to trade a standard gauge locomotive for the narrow gauge engine on display on Stockton Street near the Mother Lode fairgrounds.

The old No. 7 Shay locomotive on display will be restored and pressed back into service as part of the Westside and Cherry Valley railway project in Tuolumne.

Summers said the switch will be made as soon as an engine house is finished.

Councilmen approved the switch more than a year ago, but a letter received by the city complicated the issue.

Fred H. Kepner of Klamath Falls, Oregon, said he wanted to trade for the standard gauge so it could be displayed at his Great Western Railroad museum.

"The museum wanted to trade a narrow gauge for two standard gauge locomotive we purchased from Pickering," Summers said. "We told them no."

Then Kepner wrote a letter to Sonora proposing a trade.

"I'm sure his intentions are not malicious, but he added confusion." Summers said.

"It was always our intent to trade Sonora a standard gauge locomotive that has some historical significance to Tuolumne county for narrow gauge No. 7," Summers said.

Westside will pay the cost of transporting the engines and will paint, letter and fix the fence where the locomotive will be displayed.

January 9, 1978
Union Democrat, Page 3
Moving Out

Old No. 7, the Shay narrow gauge logging locomotive on display at the entrance to Sonora at the Mother Lode fairgrounds for years, has been moved to Tuolumne to become a part of the rolling stock at the Westside and Cherry Valley railway. The engine will be replaced in Sonora by the Pickering Lumber Company locomotive at Standard. Here the engine is pulled onto a flatbed trailer by a cable attached to a truck tractor. (Per Brian Curnow Sr. this took place on January 5, 1978.

January 12, 1978
Brian Curnow Sr. Shay No. 3 Placed on Stockton Road

Per Brian Curnow Sr., email of May 1, 2013 and telephone interview of May 3, 2013, Shay No. 3 was moved to Sonora on this date. I could find nothing in the newspaper or Council Minutes. When I spoke with Brian he said he had looked at his journal and knew the exact date. He had written in his journal about No. 7 being removed and replaced with No. 3, and had the exact dates for each event.

According to Brian, all of the work to move and place the engine was done by Glen Bell's crew from Westside. This is consistent with what others have told me.

No. 7 was narrow gauge and No. 3 is standard gauge.

March 22, 1985
Union Democrat, Page 1
Creek Could Be Next Stop for Old No. 3

Ships sink and trains wreck, but whoever heard of a train sinking?

Old No. 3 at the Mother Lode Fairgrounds, resting its 52 tons on rotting ties, needs more than a paint job, says Sonora planning commissioner Stan Churchill.

"One of these days you're going to find it in the creek," Churchill has warned the city council.

Churchill made his remarks from the audience after City Administrator Bill Smith asked for authorization to approach local service clubs about helping to pay for and work on the $3,000 job of painting the 75 year-old engine and sprucing up the surrounding landscape.

A grant application to the state parks department was not funded this year, though it may be next year. Smith, however, urged the council to complete the railroad project his year.

Churchill recommended that setting the ties in concrete and steel be part of the project. "What you need more than beautification is a foundation," he said.

No. 3, a Shay locomotive build in 1910, has graced the west entrance to Sonora since early 1978, when it replaced No. 7, a narrow gauge logging engine. The Westside and Cherry Valley Lumber Company, which later restored No. 7 and operated it briefly as part of its theme park in Tuolumne.

Originally acquired by Pickering Lumber Company No. 7 (probably should be No. 3) was a workhorse on the firm's standard gauge Sugar Pine Railroad for years. Long after diesel engines and logging trucks forced its retirement, No. 3 was sold to Westside.

Jim Lillie, Public Works employee (March 2013 interview)

In 1985 the city took down the fence that had been around the engine. Jim painted the engine and Steve Patton, a local sign painted, did the lettering on the engine. Jim and others remembered that the Shay No. 3 had its whistle, name plate and bell before it left Standard, but they were missing when the engine arrived in Sonora.

May 17, 1996
Union Democrat, May 17, 1996, Page 10A
Big rescue effort saves landmark 1910 locomotive

Engine No. 3 took its longest trip in nearly two decades yesterday—about 10 feet to the north, at a fare of several thousand dollars.

But the alternative was an ignominious plunge into Sonora Creek, which had risen so high during yesterday's deluge that it gouged out much of the ground under the track where the 86-year-old steam locomotive sat.

Rescuers worked from morning to evening to stabilize the 70-ton Shay engine, which hauled logs for decades for the Sugar Pine Railroad and has adorned the Stockton Road entrance into Sonora since 1978.

The problem we're worrying abut is the water is undermining the ground and the ground is disappearing," said Mike Polen soon after helping rig up steel cables from three tow trucks to the locomotive.

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Finally, just after 5p.m., the crane was attached by cables to the locomotive and lifted its front end about four feet. The crane then swung the front end over to a railroad tie laid atop the temporary track.

The crane then was moved over to the back end, where it lifted the locomotive again and got the entire thing parallel with the temporary track. Then back to the front end, which was lifted so the wooden tie could be pulled out and the whole engine could rest on the rails. The job was done by 8p.m.

For the locomotive-moving experts—from Husky Crane Company and from Railtown 1897 State Historic Park in Jamestown it was no big deal. The crane has a capacity of 125 tons, so a mere 70-ton steam engine was a routine job.

"We move locomotives every so often," said Railtown business manager Joe Nemmers in a break from hammering together the temporary track.

Traffic was diverted from this part of Stockton Road for most of the day, but plenty of spectators still turned out, a few of them on lawn chairs on a hill across the street, a few roaming around with still or video cameras. Police officers, other Sonora employees and a quorum of the city council milled about.

Something about old trains. And about floods and other natural disasters. There was a sense of awe about the whole thing—the mighty crane, the vulnerable locomotive, the freak rainstorm that brought them together.

"If you get this much water—act of God—what can you do?" Applegate said, "Your creeks and drains can only handle so much rain."

Bill Selden, Sonora Public Works employee (March 2013 interview)

Bill spent most of the day on the city's backhoe moving boulders from the entrance to Woods Creek park across Stockton Road to Sonora Creek. These rocks were next to the entrance road, not in the Creek. They also brought rock from the end of Southgate drive.