2013: A Year in Review

Plenty of things made 2013 at BJWRR special

Peter G. Panacy
Chief Executive Officer

The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad and W.E. Mason Carousel can tack on one more year of operation in the books at Oak Meadow and Vasona Parks.

Looking back at 2013, it is hard to fathom all of the changes that have taken place over the past 12 months. In more ways than one, 2013 was a watershed year. Most notably, there was the addition of the 5-Spot to the railroad’s roster. That alone would make the past year worth remembering.

Related to the arrival of the 5-Spot, BJWRR’s annual “Billy Jones Day” this past summer was one for the ages. Not only did we debut the 5-Spot, but we also featured the first steam double-header in Billy Jones history. Those who witnessed this historic event shall never forget.

Yet 2013 was special in more ways than just a new locomotive.

It has been a primary goal of this organization to become more than just a piece of weekend recreation for families looking for something to do. Instead, the railroad and

Modernizing the BJWRR

The railroad is finally getting into the 21st Century

Peter G. Panacy
Chief Executive Officer

For many years—at least as long as I can recall during my tenure—the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad has always had that “mom-and-pop” feel to it. We were that local attraction that kids and families visited on weekends year-round and on lazy summer weekdays. Fares were low, the staff personable and the memories endless.

None of that will change moving forward. Yet other things are changing around the railroad. Needless to say, the past 10 years have ushered in a new era for small businesses similar to ours. While never abandoning the mom-and-pop feel, organizations like our own struggle to keep pace with the times. BJWRR is no exception.

Before complicated websites, online credit-card payments and social media, small businesses relied on simple methods to reach the public—advertising in local newspapers, hosting special events, etc. With the advent of smart technology on a massive scale, it is time BJWRR gets with the program.

This process is well underway.

For years, the only method of payment we accepted was cash and checks. If a visitor wanted to use a credit card, he or she was out of luck. Think about it—how many of you still carry cash around every place you go? I no longer do. Some time ago, we installed an ATM machine to assist our guests. It helped, but really was nothing more than a stopgap option. Soon, visitors to the railroad will be able to pay with credit cards using smart technology and even have their receipts e-mailed directly to them.

The story does not just end with paying for tickets.

Donating to the railroad was another antiquated task. If someone wanted to donate, he or she had to mail a check to us directly, or visit us and drop off their donation in one of our donation bins.

Now, thanks to the advent of online payments, we will soon
carousel have aimed to be a community focal point—focusing on more special events and celebrations. 2013 saw many more of these such as the debut of the wine train in cooperation with C.B. Hannegan’s of Los Gatos. One cannot overlook the infrastructure of what makes the railroad and carousel unique. We were able to install new roofs on two buildings as well as overhaul the interior of the concession stand. To cap things off, the annual Holiday Train event this past December was the most successful winter event in our history, grossing well over $30,000 during the month. There were more lights and displays this year than ever before.

There is plenty more to come in 2014 as well, so Happy New Year and let’s keep it up! ♠

Chief Engineer’s Corner

Highlighting the railroad’s accomplishments in 2013

Bill Church
Chief Engineer

It’s been a very busy year. With the arrival of the 5-Spot, the learning curve has been steep along with numerous modifications required for our standards. The 2-Spot performed admirably, but the years have taken a toll and major repairs are required. Both the #2502 and the #3502 have had no major problems. The #4 has had a few more duties to perform. The passenger cars have also held up to their responsibilities, but are in need of some updating. All and all, the year was memorable with no closures due to locomotive breakdowns.

During our break-in period with the 5-Spot, the new locomotive gave us a few challenges. Slowly, engineers learned to control the fire and settled down to enjoy its power and smoothness. We’ve managed to certify a few engineers on the 5-Spot and will continue to bring more on line as the training continues.

All repairs on the 5-Spot were performed in house and should be completed for the new season. There were numerous modifications that were installed which we felt would make the 5-Spot more comfortable and efficient. Most of these were in the cab. We also are in the process of installing a new pneumatic bell actuator similar to the one on the 2-Spot. These modifications were performed by volunteers and a special thanks to Tom Waterfall, Bob Poli and Bill Lombardi for doing these in a timely and professional manner.

The 2-Spot still pulled most of the steam-season responsibilities. There were some minor repairs such as check-valve replacements and refurbishing the front headlight so that the side running lights are now illuminated. New safety valves were installed. This helped the ability of the locomotive to pull four or five cars up our steeper grades.

After the steam season had come to an end, we decided to overhaul the drive cylinders. We discovered that the firemen’s side piston was worn and one of the two compression rings was worn down to small pieces. Both cylinders had ridges worn into the front cylinders which will require re-boring the cylinders with a line boring tool. At this time we are trying to find a company that can do the work in-house. There are other projects that will be done during the down period such as new refractory in the fire-box, new injector water supply valves and new rear lamp.

Our diesels are, at this time, running on weekends. They’ve been quite reliable and only have required minor repairs during our volunteer days. The #4, which many people have not seen, has been handling our track work and shuffling of cars in our switching yard.

The passenger cars have also been pulling their duties quite well. It was decided to purchase new wheels and axles. This will give us reliable wheel sets far into the future and will allow us to exchange wheels and axles between all our trucks.

All and all, with such a dedicated and knowledge crew of volunteers, we’ll continue to keep our beloved railroad up and running for the pleasure of both young and old for many years to come. ♠
**From the President’s Caboose**  
*How the Railroad and Carousel are Moving Forward*

Doug Sporleder  
President, Board of Directors

Happy New Year to all who support the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad and W. E. “Bill” Mason Carousel.

I hope that 2014 is as successful for our operation as 2013 was. Our ridership and concession sales were both up and set sales records for us. We are very proud of that accomplishment.

The Board of Directors provided direction which distributed our resources across the wide spectrum of the railroad’s operations. We were able to maintain our buildings, such as repairs to damaged building siding, new roofing, new paint, an expanded concession area with new equipment and appliances and a rebuilt sound system for the carousel. All of these tasks provided much improvement to our facilities which will serve us well for a long time to come. I don’t remember when things looked better.

A highlight of 2013 was the arrival of our new steam engine, the 5-Spot. It is a beautiful piece of equipment and a true work of art!!! On Billy Jones Day in July we had both of our steam engines in operation at the same time—a very memorable event for riders and steam buffs alike. All of our engines and passenger cars are in excellent shape and demonstrate the pride our staff takes in our railroad.

As President of the Board of Directors, I along with the Board, have many people and organizations to thank for what they do for our organization. It really begins with the parents and grandparents who bring their kids and grandkids to ride our train and carousel. We are grateful for the wonderful volunteers and employees who keep up with the maintenance so necessary for our continued operation. Our volunteers give countless hours and extraordinary skills to keep us going! We also give thanks to the many members of the business community who assist us in so many ways. The Town of Los Gatos and County of Santa Clara are tremendous partners for us and we thank them for their assistance.

The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad and W. E. “Bill” Mason Carousel are true assets, firmly woven into our community-wide tapestry. I thank you all for what you do to keep us operating and wish you all a healthy, prosperous 2014. ♦

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@BJWRR

As always, visit our website www.bjwr.org and stay tuned for exciting news, events and updates!
Remembering Billy Jones
Honoring the creator of BJWRR 45 years after his passing

Billy Jones was known for his smile, love of children and charitable work. Photo courtesy of BJWRR collection.

Peter G. Panacy
Chief Executive Officer

This January marks the 45th anniversary of Billy Jones’ death.

The man, who was such an iconic figure in the Town of Los Gatos, is still memorialized by the railroad he helped create on his orchard back in 1941. Thanks to Jones’ efforts, the mission of this organization has remained unchanged in nearly half a century.

Most fans of BJWRR history already know most of the story behind Jones’ purchase of the No. 2 and the inception of the Wildcat Railroad. Many also are familiar with Jones’ career as a railroad man that continued long after his retirement from Southern Pacific. They also know just how kind and charitable he was.

An excerpt from the Los Gatos Times-Saratoga Observer on Thursday, January 11 1968—written the day after Jones’ death—says everything one needs to know about his legacy:

*Jones would never set a price for his rides; if a family were so inclined, they could ride free. [He] was generous in allowing dozens of organizations to “sponsor” Sunday rides. How many thousands of dollars found their way into [charitable] organizations was probably never computed.*

For many people in the Bay Area who know little of our town otherwise—Los Gatos meant only one thing: Billy Jones and the Wildcat Railroad.

45 years later, that legacy is alive and well. The nature by which Jones ran his railroad continues today. Families are still greeted by smiles, BJWRR continues to offer fun and education recreation at a low fare, and our contributions to like-minded charitable groups shall never cease. This remains a worthy monument to Billy Jones.

Did You Know?
The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad and W.E. “Bill” Mason Carousel are full of fun facts

There is plenty of history surrounding the Wildcat Railroad and W.E. Mason Carousel. You may think you have a good knowledge of the railroad and carousel, but…

Did you know these fun facts?

When Billy Jones first acquired the No. 2 in 1939, he nicknamed the locomotive “Betsy.”

One of the snifter valves located on the front of the No. 2 is mismatched. It actually belongs on the No. 1 which is equipped with the No. 2’s matching valve.

The current headlight on the No. 2 is actually the rear back-up light from the 1500—an Overfair Railway locomotive once owned by Jones.

Jones once owned the steam locomotives of the Overfair Railway, including the 1915 “Pacific” that is housed at the Sacramento Rail Museum.

The final operation day at Jones’ ranch was Sunday, July 28, 1968.

Much of the original track in Vasona Park was laid by San Jose State’s Alpha Phi Omega fraternity.

U.S. Navy Reserve Seabees dug and constructed the pit for the original turntable in Oak Meadow Park.

There was once a movement to have the BJWRR extend a line to downtown Los Gatos, creating a local “commuter train.”

The terms “carousel” and “merry-go-round” create confusion. Technically, they are outdated terms that have become virtually interchangeable. We still call ours a carousel.

Most carousels rotate counter-clockwise allowing many to “catch the brass ring.” Ours—derived from English design—rotates clockwise.

The current railroad has nearly 4,800 feet of mainline track compared to only 1,900 feet on Jones’ ranch.

The No. 2 was considered as a feature in the 2003 Warner Bros. film The Last Samurai.

Jones, despite all his efforts, was never able to run two steam locomotives at the same time. BJWRR operated two steamers simultaneously for the first time in July 2013.
Notable Contributions from 2013

The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad and W.E. “Bill” Mason Carousel would like to thank the following benefactors for their contributions to the railroad:

A Tool Shed Rentals
Jerry Clouse and Kimball Midwest
Robert & Susan De Guc
Kay Mason Duff (in memory of Bill and Kamille Mason)
Robert & Diane Golton
John Hannegan
Carl Herrera (in memory of Neil Vodden)
Jim Holm
Jacquelyn Lepetech
Los Gatos Community Foundation
Los Gatos Lions Club
Los Gatos Meats & Smokehouse (in memory of Chelsea Chiala)
Los Gatos Parent Nursery School
Raymond Mui
Rudi Mui
Ed Newman and Newman Steel
Geraldine Peters
Arthur and Gwen Pinkston
Phil Reader
Rino Sclippa
Tom and Carol Spears
Kee L. Yip

The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization and contributions are tax deductible. If you are interested in making a contribution to the railroad, please contact us by writing to BJWRR, P.O. Box 234, Los Gatos, CA 95031-0234 or calling (408) 395-RIDE. You may also email us at info@bjwrr.org for donation information. Your contribution will help ensure that the railroad and carousel continue to serve the community for generations to come.
**Calendar of Events**

**March 15th - Spring Schedule Starts**

The train and carousel open Saturday and Sunday from 10:30am until 4:30pm. The carousel also is open Wednesday through Friday from 10:30am until 3:00pm. Times are weather permitting.

**April 1st - Steam Operations Resume**

As the weather improves, the BJWRR No. 2 and BJWRR No. 5 shall be doing the majority of weekend operations.

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**The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad & W.E. “Bill” Mason Carousel, Inc.**

General inquiries and correspondence to the Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad & W.E. “Bill” Mason Carousel, this newsletter, or its Board of Directors should be addressed to:

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P.O. Box 234  
Los Gatos, CA 95031-0234

(408) 395-RIDE office  
(408) 354-2841 fax  
EMAIL: info@bjwrr.org

Persons interested in volunteering in the machine shop may also call (408) 395-6269.

Visit our website at www.bjwrr.org for further updates and information.

The Billy Jones Wildcat Railroad is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization working with the cooperation of the Town of Los Gatos and the Santa Clara County Parks Office. Contributions are tax deductible.

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