

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- The December meeting of the Southwest Chapter will be held in conjunction with the Holiday Potluck party at the Railroad Museum.
- Don't forget the holiday Potluck at the RR Museum on Dec. 4. at 3 pm. See page 3.

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William Howard Taft's Train Trip to El Paso to meet Mexico's President Porfirio Diaz in 1909

President Taft made a western tour by special train from September 15 to November 1st, 1909. Two major stops on the route were by D&RGW narrow gauge to Gunnison, Colorado to open the new Gunnison irrigation tunnel, then back on standard gauge and down to El Paso to meet with Mexican President Porfirio Diaz. The Colorado trip went without incident until reaching Denver where Taft became lodged in a narrow hotel bathtub due to his girth and had to be extracted by his staff, requiring much soaping and pulling.

El Paso and Cd. Juarez were both handsomely and extensively decorated for the visit of the two presidents. Taft traveled in his private car, the *Mayflower*, previously used by copper magnate, W.C. Greene. His train consisted of the *Mayflower*, two Pullman sleepers, two more private cars for officials, and a diner. The train arrived at the Union Depot yards at 9 a.m., most probably having come down the Santa Fe through Albuquerque. It then proceeded at a slow pace down Main St. to Oregon St. where the party was welcomed by Mayor Sweeney and taken to the nearby St. Regis Hotel for breakfast. Local officials were told to wear morning coats and top hats. Gold match boxes were presented to the President and his staff and silver boxes to other guests. Immediately after breakfast, Taft and his entourage were escorted around the Plaza and greeted by 4,000 school children singing "My country Tis of Thee."



Taft's train arriving at Main & Oregon Streets. (photo from the Aultman Collection, Border Heritage Center, El Paso Public Library.)

Taft & Diaz (cont)



Due to unrest in Northern Mexico, safety precautions were extraordinary. Ten carloads of soldiers arrived from Fort Sam Houston. The police department swore in 250 extra officers. President Diaz arrived in grand style at the Chamber of Commerce for toasts and speeches, to be followed the same evening

Mexico City on the Mexican Central, in which the Santa Fe RR was heavily invested. In those days, before nationalization of the railways, many carried American crews.

Engineer Carl Lathrop remembered the day well.

by a banquet at the Juarez customs House. Diaz' days as Mexico's president were numbered as the Revolution would begin shortly. Diaz traveled from

He handled Diaz's pilot train. "My engine at the time was No. 645, a Brooks Ten Wheeler, A sleek machine she was and quick as a cat on the throttle, but so defective in riding qualities that I often had to stand up, taking the jolts through my knees. The brass hats decided to use this girl on the Diaz Special. For four days, they held me at Gomez Palacio, paying me a dollar an hour for loafing around town while she was being decorated." Engineer Lathrop was able to make a trade for the engine 646 which had better riding qualities and was equally decorated.

He related "Mr Alfred, the General Manager, burst into my cab, "Lathrop, we're late, can you make up some time!". Away we went, my shotgun stack blasting



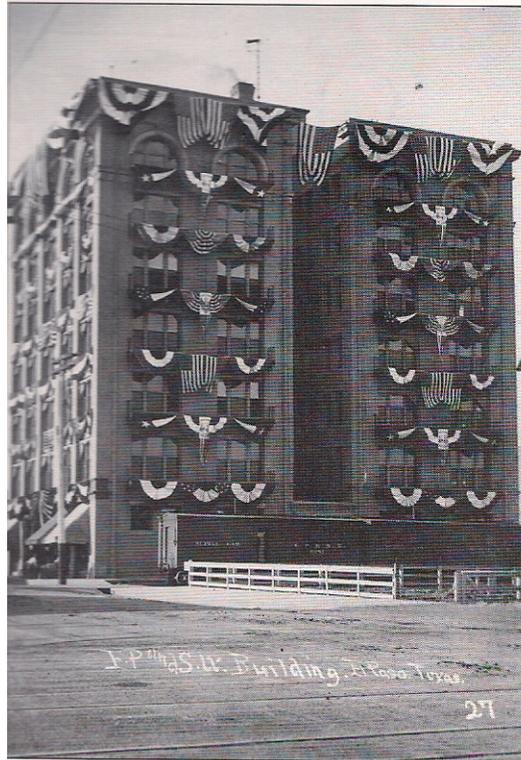
(Conclusion of Taft-Diaz)

smoke as we found our stride. The side rods of the 646 flashed a rhythm of speed. This is the way I like to run: wind her up, then listen to the mutter of exhausts. We stopped at Escalone, some 125 miles up the line. We had made up the lost time. From there on into Juarez, I paced the trip in a more leisurely manner. Surrounded by his braided and bronzed bodyguards, the Hon. Porfirio Diaz strode to the center of the bridge, There he met the jovial, smiling, and somewhat corpulent William Howard Taft. It was a meeting I will never forget."

References:

Withers, Bob; The President Travels by Train.

Worthington, Patricia; El Paso and the Mexican Revolution.



"The decorated El Paso & Southwestern Building"

The El Paso Times, Oct. 16, 1909.

Southwest Rail news

Tucson's *Old Pueblo Trolley's* vintage streetcar line ceased operations on October 31st, 2011. The reason is the advent of Tucson's "modern streetcar" operation which will add to both ends of the vintage trolley line. Running up fourth St and university Avenue, Old Pueblo's route was single tracked. The new line will be double tracked, so vintage trolleys are down while construction goes on, probably two years. In the meantime, the group will concentrate on refurbishing their equipment, including the single truck Brussels car and the double truck Japanese car.



Don't forget the Christmas Potluck at the Railroad Museum, 400 W. San Antonio St, Sunday, Dec. 4th at 3 pm. Hosted by the Harvey Girls organization. Bring a side dish or add \$5.00 to the kitty. Call Carolyn Buchanan at 915-755-1819.

