



2180 South Carson St.
Carson City, NV 89701
775.687.6953



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SPRING 2020
143rd Edition

Inside this issue:

A Brief History of the
V&T's Lyon—Part I
By Todd Moore

Message from the
Director, Dan Thielen

Message from Friends' 2
President Barry Simcoe

Call for Candidates 3

**THE NEVADA STATE
RAILROAD MUSEUM**
An Agency of the Nevada
Department of Tourism
and Cultural Affairs



NEWSLETTER OF THE NEVADA STATE RAILROAD MUSEUM

A Less Pretentious Little Snorter: A Brief History of the Virginia & Truckee's First Locomotive — Part I

By Todd Moore

The collection of the Nevada State Railroad Museum has a new addition. It is a replica of the Virginia & Truckee Railroad's pioneering first locomotive - *Lyon*. This article explores the new addition in two parts. Part I examines the background and history of the original locomotive. This history is primarily drawn from contemporary newspaper accounts and published histories. Part II examines the fascinating story of the replica locomotive.

(Continued on page 4)



The Lyon as it appeared in the 1890s at the Virginia & Truckee's Carson City shops. The locomotive last saw service on the V&T circa 1879. The V&T modified the Lyon for use as a stationary boiler in 1889.

Message from the Director

By Daniel Thielen

This has been an unusual year for us and we are still coming to grips with operating the museum within the pandemic. The museum was closed to the public for about three months. Staff worked alone, or from home. So far, no one has contracted the disease and we are grateful for that. The museum has always put the safety of volunteers, the public and staff

(Continued on page 3)



The Railroad Museum was a lonely place for three months as the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the United States. (Photo, Travel Nevada)

VISIT THE MUSEUM

**Open 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Friday through Monday**

Closed Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Christmas and New Year's Day

Museum Admission:

Adults 18 & Over - \$8.00
Children (Under 18) - FREE
Museum Members - FREE

STEAM TRAIN & MOTORCAR RIDES

Rides run every weekend May through September with select dates in October, November, and December.

The complete 2020 operating schedule is available at:
carsonrailroadmuseum.org

STATE OF NEVADA

Steve Sisolak, Governor

DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS

Brenda Scolari, Director

DIVISION OF MUSEUMS AND HISTORY

Myron Freedman, Interim Administrator

NEVADA STATE RAILROAD MUSEUM, CARSON CITY

Daniel Thielen, Director

SAGEBRUSH HEADLIGHT NEWSLETTER

Adam Michalski, Curator of Education: Editor
Correspondence: amichalski@nevadaculture.org
Lara Brown, Museum Store Manager: Designer

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Address correspondence for the *Friends* to:
Friends of NSRM
PO Box 1330
Carson City, NV 89702



**NEVADA STATE
RAILROAD MUSEUM**
2180 South Carson Street
Carson City, NV 89701
775.687.6953

Message from the President of the Friends of the NSRM, Barry Simcoe

Light at the end of the tunnel! The museum is finally coming to life after the long COVID-19 shutdown. The museum has finally reopened with reduced hours and many restrictions due to COVID-19. However, it has reopened. Some motorcar operations have resumed, and steam train operations started again on the weekend of June 20th and 21st. Train operations will be impacted by COVID-19 restrictions, but I think we will successfully operate. The annual safety training also occurred on this same weekend.

Our Director, Dan Thielen, has been the driving force behind the effort to reopen the museum. We all owe him a heartfelt Thank You for his efforts.

The Board of Trustees of the Friends has voted to extend all memberships by three months. We believe this will help offset the loss of benefits to our members due to the museum closure. You will receive notification of this in the mail. In addition, the Board voted to help the museum with funding for specific requests due to the closure.

These are, and have been, very difficult times at the museum. Despite these issues I believe the museum and the Friends group have a great future. Your support of the Friends is more critical than ever. Please continue to renew your memberships, volunteering at the museum, and your support in all the ways you have over the years.

Together we can get through this.

Thanks,

Barry

Email: barrysimcoe@sbcglobal.net
Phone: (775) 379-1353

FNSRM Board Meetings are scheduled for August 3, 2020 & October 5, 2020. All members of the Friends organization are encouraged to attend.

Message from the Director

(continued from page 1)



The museum remained closed for three months due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

as our paramount concern. We have taken great measures to ensure that we can operate safely. It is a great track record and we intend to continue that great tradition.

We have had layoffs and cut-backs on our hours to meet the dramatic reduction in revenue. This has had a tremendous im-

pact on our staff. We extend a fond farewell to three members of the museum in Carson City: Mort Dolan, Stephanie Fry, and Jillian Jaeger. We wish them the very best.

During the shutdown, the State froze our budgets. Some critical work could not move forward. The Friends of the Nevada State Railroad Museum stepped in and provided some non-traditional help by purchasing materials to ensure the museum looks good, provide a new throttle for locomotive #25 and parts for motorcar #401. This could not have been done without the support of Friends like you.

We received two substantial donations in the past few months: Thank you to the James Howell Living Trust for their donation of \$103,000. John Gaffney also reached out and gave the Friends a large donation as well.

Thank you so much, John. Your kindness is well noted.

We have had to cancel several significant events due to COVID-19. Our Easter Egg Hunt was the first casualty. The 2020 *Ironhorse Railcamp* was re-scheduled to 2021. This program takes tremendous development and manpower. It is a wonderful outreach effort and it was hard to make this decision. We also had to reschedule the visit of the locomotive *Glenbrook* to the Cumbres and Toltec Railroad to August 2021. Stand by for more information on that visit.

The rest of our year is continuing as planned, but we could have additional constraints. But so far, with the controls put in place, we will move forward.

Stay safe. Keep your mask on and wash your dang hands! 🚂

Friends of the Nevada State Railroad Museum Call for Candidates 2020

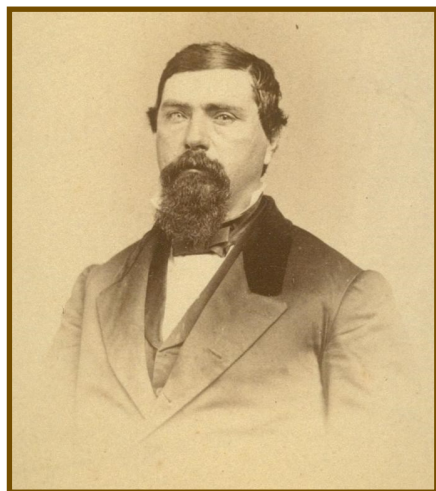
It's time again where the Friends recruit volunteers to serve on the Board of Directors. This is where decisions are made to best help the museum. This year the Board may begin making decisions on how to help the museum with the ongoing construction of the "Lyon" locomotive replica. This locomotive appears to be the future in service locomotive to pull the passenger trains. Speak your mind. Become a Board member.

To get your name on the ballot, send a concise resume including your name, address, phone number, e-mail address, occupation history, hobbies, and anything else you may feel would be useful to the museum to: vtrrloco18@aol.com. Or by U. S. mail:

David Brambley, Registrar
2016 State Ln.
Big Bear City, CA 92314

Deadline for ballot inclusion is August 14, 2020. **Get involved. Volunteer!**

Lyon (continued from page 1)



Peter Donahue, founder of the Union Iron Works in San Francisco.

tive begun by Stanley Gentry in the 1990s.

Part One

The origins of the original *Lyon* reach back well before Nevada was a state. The cry of “Gold!” that arose from Sutter’s Mill in California was heard worldwide. One of those who responded to it was a Scottish transplant to New Jersey named Peter Donahue. When Donahue arrived in California in the fall of 1849, he quickly discovered that there was more money to be made in making and selling equipment to the miners than in mining itself. Prior to the Gold Rush, Donahue had been an apprentice to the Union Iron Works of Paterson, New Jersey. Consequently, he and his two brothers set up a forge inside of a tent and named it “Union Iron Works,” likely drawing upon the reputation of Peter’s former employer.

The western Union Iron Works prospered during the peak of

the California Gold Rush. By 1856 it had grown into one of the largest industrial plants in California, spanning several city blocks in San Francisco running between First and Fremont streets on the southern edge of Mission Street. It turned out all manner of heavy mining equipment. As the Gold Rush waned, however, so did the Union Iron Works. Control of the company passed to H.J. Booth, who had prior experience running a foundry in Marysville, California.

Enterprises all over California sought to lift themselves out of the economic doldrums that followed the Gold Rush by diversifying and becoming economically self-sufficient. One of the key proponents of this effort was William C. Ralston, one of the owners of the Bank of California. Ralston and the Bank of California loaned copiously to California manufacturers and, between 1860 and 1880, San Francisco grew into a major manufacturing hub.

Among the enterprises financed by Ralston’s Bank of California were the major mines of Nevada’s new Comstock Lode. When it came time to equip those mines, San Francisco’s industrial might was put to work. When the Virginia & Truckee Railroad was formed (with Bank of California backing), it was therefore natural that it would look to San Francisco for some of its first locomotives.

In January 1869 the new Virginia & Truckee entered into a contract with the Union Iron Works for

the purchase of two small construction locomotives, *Lyon* and *Ormsby*, costing \$15,000 each. The contract terms and specifications are preserved in a ledger book in the NSRM’s collections. The contract calls for *Lyon* to have a 2-6-0 or “Mogul” wheel arrangement and to be delivered to Carson City in May, 1869. (The contract terms were reprinted in the July/August 1992 Sagebrush Headlight.)

The first mention of the *Lyon* appearing in public is in the May 9, 1869 issue of San Francisco’s *Daily Alta Californian* newspaper. Reporting on the grand parade San Francisco held to celebrate the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the paper describes a “Magnificent Procession” in many parts, one led by H.J. Booth himself:

First came the men of the Union Iron Works, numbering 250, with white capes, and the words ‘Union Iron Works’ printed on the back. [...] From the corner of Montgomery and Bush Streets the highly finished locomotive Calistoga was drawn on a truck by 20 grays. Following this was another truck, drawn by four horses, containing the large boiler for the first locomotive built for the Virginia and Truckee Railroad.

(Continued on page 5)

As with most construction projects, the *Lyon* construction did not proceed according to schedule. The August 6, 1869, *Sacramento Union* newspaper notes that, "[t]he boiler and frame of locomotive No. 1 of the Virginia City and Truckee Railroad, was being placed on the Central Pacific cars yesterday, preparatory for shipment to its destination today. The tank belonging to this engine was forwarded a few days ago." Indeed, the *Reno Crescent* of August 7, 1869, stated, "V.&T.R.R. No. 1. A tender bearing these cabalistic letters stands on the platform of the C.P.R.R. depot. Look out for the cars when you hear the bell, you Carsonites!" As members of the NSRM's present day motor car and steam train crews will attest, many Carsonites still have not heed-

ed the advice of their Reno friends.

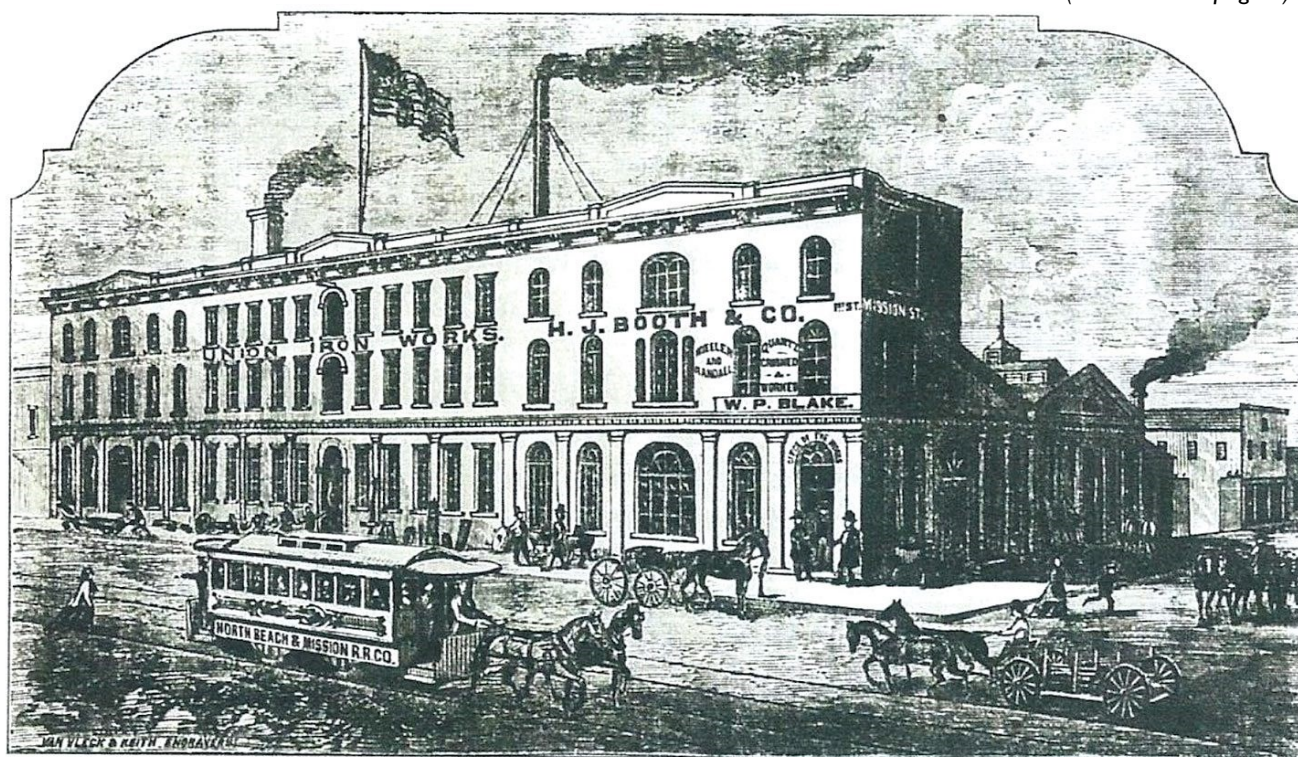
By September of 1869, the *Lyon* had been assembled on the grounds next to the Carson City Mint and was finally pushing and pulling construction trains. The September 30, 1869, *Carson Appeal* proclaimed, "The Steam Horse goes snorting over the track, up and down, past the Mint and out toward the sage brush." This began a series of "firsts" for *Lyon* in its V&T service.

The most notable of these "firsts" occurred on November 12, 1869, when *Lyon* led the first train across the Crown Point Trestle into Gold Hill and entered the Comstock. The event was proclaimed a "Great Railroad Jubilee" by the *Gold Hill Daily News*. It de-

scribed the scene in lively detail:

At 10 minutes of 5 o'clock, the locomotive Lyon, with a construction train of four cars, came steaming around the bend south of Crown Point Ravine, and stopped at the south end of the bridge for minute or so, thoting [tooting] her whistle, which was at once responded to by all the steam whistles of all the hoisting works and mills, far and near and the thundering of old General Grant [a cannon] from Fort Homestead, creating a most terrific din, such as is not often supposed to [be] heard this side of Pandemonium - an infernal screeching, deafening din, such

(Continued on page 6)



The original Union Iron Works were located at First and Mission Streets in San Francisco.

Lyon (continued from page 5)

as no one here ever heard before, and lasting all the time the locomotive was passing. Flags waved from both engine and tender, as she gracefully but slowly rolled across and we presume the Gold Hill Brass Band, riding on the locomotive, was playing some glorious air appropriate to the occasion, for we saw them going through the motions. On the locomotive were a number of those who have been most instrumental in the conception and prosecution of this great railroad enterprise, Mr. Sharon riding in front, while [Henry] Yerington, the Superintendent of Construction, rode mounted aloft on the poop-deck of the pilot house.

Another first for *Lyon* came less than a week later, when she pulled the first ore train on the new railroad. On November 18, 1869, the railroad brought journalists, including one from the *Gold Hill Daily News*, to witness “the locomotive *Lyon*, decorated with Stars and Stripes, and drawing seven cars loaded with ore from the Yellow Jacket mine, this being the first train of ore ever sent over the road.”

Upon completion of the railroad, it had few locomotives but much freight to haul, so the little *Lyon* was pressed into regular service hauling trains between Virginia City and Carson City for one or two years. The December 30, 1871, *Daily Territorial Enter-*

prise noted that *Lyon* brought in the “forenoon train” from Carson City to Virginia City and returned to Carson despite very heavy snowstorms that made travel difficult.

By late 1872, *Lyon* apparently needed repairs to address worn and broken parts. The November 12, 1872 *Gold Hill News* wrote that, “[t]he locomotive *Lyon*, which has been undergoing repairs in the railroad shop at this place for some time, was put upon the track yesterday in good shape, and is making her regular trips as heretofore.”

Lyon’s next service appears to have been as a switch engine in the Virginia City and Gold Hill areas. The January 10, 1873, *Daily Territorial Enterprise* mentions *Lyon* as a “switch engine” working the Hale and Norcross works, and the April 26, 1873, *Virginia Chronicle* refers to *Lyon*’s sister, *Ormsby*, taking over for *Lyon* “as switch engine for Virginia and Gold Hill” while *Lyon* was in the shops for repairs.

By July, 1873, *Lyon* had received a major rebuild. On July 11, 1873, the *Gold Hill News* announced that “[t]he ‘*Lyon*, one of the oldest locomotives on the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, has been thoroughly overhauled and repaired at the roundhouse, Virginia City, under the direction of Master Mechanic Bowker. The *Lyon* left for Carson a few days ago for the purpose of being repainted.” On August 14, 1873, the *Gold Hill News* noted that the loco-

motive was back on the line and “looking handsomer than ever.”

After her 1873 rebuild, *Lyon* was engaged in hauling mine tailings from Virginia City to Washoe Valley for milling and her larger sister, *Storey*, took over as Virginia City switch engine. The *Virginia Chronicle* of May 18, 1873, noted that “Johnny Bartholomew, the engineer immortalized in song as the hero of the burning [Gold Hill] tunnel, has been promoted from the splendid locomotive *Genoa* to the less pretentious little snorter *Lyon*, and is now engaged in hauling tailings to Park’s Tailing Mill, in Washoe Valley.”

About a year after Johnny Bartholomew’s “promotion” to the *Lyon*, the locomotive resumed its duties as the switch engine for the Virginia City depot area. The *Virginia Chronicle* of May 25, 1874, remarked that “[t]he little locomotive *Lyon*, now doing the switching in the yard of the Virginia depot, a day or two ago pulled out of the Consolidated Virginia dump, 16 iron ore cars loaded with ore, and pushed them up to the depot. This is one more than the [larger] locomotive *Storey* ever pulled out the above named place, consequently, *Lyon* carries the broom.”

By the end of 1874, *Lyon* had lived a short, but hard, life and was in need of an overhaul yet again. After the locomotive was involved in a collision with two flat cars and had its smoke stack

(Continued on page 7)



The Lyon as it appeared in the 1890s in the Virginia & Truckee's Carson City yard. By the time this photograph was taken, the locomotive was well past its useful service life. There are no known photographs of the Lyon while in operation.

swept off by an ore chute, the railroad sought a replacement for it instead. The December 24, 1874, *Virginia Chronicle* heralded the news that "Superintendent Yerington . . . has ordered from the East, a new locomotive to take the place of the switch engine *Lyon* which is constantly getting out of repair." The last published reference to *Lyon* as the Virginia City switch engine is found in the April 5, 1875, *Virginia Chronicle*, which announced that the newly-overhauled locomotive *Virginia* had taken *Lyon's* place.

Not long after being displaced as the Virginia City switcher, the V&T used *Lyon* sporadically, possibly for hauling ores around Silver City and for pulling the "gravel train." A few years later, the road fell on hard times and had little use for a small, used up locomotive like *Lyon*. The

locomotive was stored inside the wooden original Carson City engine house next to the Governor's Mansion beginning in 1879. By 1887, the prospects for its future use were so negligible that it was moved to outside storage in a variety of locations near Carson City. In 1889, the locomotive was modified for use as a stationary boiler and towed to the Reno Reduction Works. The locomotive was scrapped in Carson City around 1900.

It is unlikely that any of the original *Lyon* still exists. It is possible that parts of the locomotive, such as its bell, headlight and whistle were reused by the thrifty Virginia & Truckee shops. Indeed, no less than three different individuals and museums have claimed to have *Lyon's* headlight in their collections. Correspondence from Henry Yerington to the State of California indicates that *Lyon's* boiler was put to re-use as the

steam plant for the Inyo Development Company works in Keeler, California, around 1900. There is no sign of the boiler in Keeler today.

Records regarding the *Lyon* are few. All but one construction drawing of the locomotive were destroyed in the Great San Francisco Earthquake & Fire of 1906. There are no known photographs of the locomotive in service. Only about a dozen photos of the locomotive in various states of disuse are known to exist.

Despite having such a short career and so few artifacts of its existence, memories of the original little *Lyon* lived on, especially in the imagination of Stanley Gentry, of Clear Lake, Iowa. Those memories and that imagination were destined to bring a new *Lyon* into being less than one hundred years after the demise of the original. 🚂

For the safety of our visitors, staff and volunteers, the Nevada State Railroad Museum has put the following safety protocols in place .

Staff, volunteers and visitors to wear masks, at all times, inside the museum facility.

Museums are ADA accessible.

No food allowed, except bottled water.

Maintain at least 6 feet of distance from other visitors.

Family group up to 10 persons is allowed, and the group must stay together.

Expect delays if the museum is busy and the flow of visitors is controlled so as not to exceed capacity and to insure safe distancing.

Follow the directional arrows and signage through the museum.

