

Volume 2, Issue 2

April 2021



Museum Matters

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From the Collection:

This is our model train replicating the Visalia Electric Railroad, created by Louis Whitendale, Ron Wyatt, and Dr. Ron Humason. The murals were painted as background scenes by Candace Whitendale. The group of volunteers worked to build this wonderful model from August through December of 2010 and then donated it to the museum so that our visitors might be intrigued to learn more about the Visalia Electric Railroad.



The Visalia Electric Railroad operated between Exeter, Lemoncove, Woodlake and Elderwood with a 1918 extension to Strathmore. It was quite unique in that it used 15 cycle alternating current instead of the more common direct current. The original purpose of the Visalia Electric Railroad was primarily for passenger service, but this was discontinued in

1925 and overhead electric service ended in 1944. In 1965 a much shorter length of track was used for freight service. All service on the Visalia Electric Railroad was discontinued in 1996. There is a short section of interchange track still in use today by the San Joaquin Valley Railroad in Exeter.

The Southern Pacific caboose you will see on our grounds, caboose 187, was in use from about 1910 to 1960 and leased to the Visalia Electric Railroad for the last several years of its operation.

If you are interested in learning more about the Visalia Electric Railroad, you can visit the Tulare County Historical Society's website. www.tularecountyhistoricalsociety.org

On their gift shop page you will find books



written by Louise Jackson and also a DVD video produced by Carl Switzer.

As part of our efforts to expand the museum's reach to visitors, we are creating virtual tours of some buildings in our pioneer village and other exhibits that will be available soon. One of our first virtual tours will feature our Southern Pacific caboose!

Historical Highlights:

Each year the Tulare County Office of Education hosts History Day for our local schools and this year it was held virtually on February 19. Students from all over Tulare County have the opportunity to create a unique project on a topic that supports the annual theme. This year the theme was *Communication in History: The Key to Understanding* and the projects were outstanding! Students can create a documentary, perform a skit, design a website, write a historical paper, or curate an exhibit. Some of this year's projects covered topics such as the Transatlantic Cable, Myths and Legends: Communication Through Storytelling, and Communication Through Art. The students have the chance to advance to the state level competition, which will be held virtually from June 13-19, 2021. The Tulare County Historical Society has donated money to be used as a scholarship for students that are able to advance to the state level since 2013 and historical society members have volunteered as judges since 1997. Starting in 2014 our Museum Curator has participated as a judge in the event each year and this has been a wonderful way to unite local students, history, and our Museum. You can visit tcoe.org/historyday to learn more about this program.

Three Cheers for Volunteers!

A big thank you goes out to Nancy and Stan Hawkins for sprucing up our entrance to the museum! They removed the weeds, planted new plants that are drought tolerant and California natives, and installed a new drip system to provide appropriate watering. Nancy has been a long time member of the Master Gardeners. With the murals and the new plants you may not recognize the Museum next time you visit!



Day 1—Removing weeds



Day 2—Planting and irrigation



Day 3—Add mulch and all done!

Special Shout-Out:

Porterville Historical Museum has been preserving local history since 1965. Local residents, volunteers, and historians make it possible by donating their time, relics, stories, and knowledge to us. Once in a great while, we are fortunate enough to have one of these donations come in the form of an entire collection. In July of 2020, the museum was fortunate enough to be gifted a 70 year collection of photos, slides, and other ephemera relating to Porterville and the surrounding area from the late Jeff Edwards, prior to his passing on Thursday, March 11, 2021 at the age of 97.

Edwards was a local resident and historian, who spent his life archiving the photos and stories of Porterville's past, and authoring dozens of local historical books. He, like all of us, was devastated by the loss of the Porterville Public Library, with particular sadness about everything lost which was contained in their local history room. Determined to ensure the seven decades of photos and history in his collection would not meet a similar fate, Edwards graciously donated his life's work to the museum, on the condition that all the original contents would be stored in fireproof filing cabinets at the museum.

The museum, exceptionally grateful for the donation, and especially touched by the loss of their sister collection at the library, decided to take additional precautions to preserve the irreplaceable Jeff Edwards (JE) Collection. Grants for the digitization of the JE Collection were written and fulfilled to the tune of \$5K by Bank of the Sierra and local businessman Stan Edwards. This allowed for the acquisition of new equipment such as a high-definition photo and negative scanner, lightbeds, cleaning supplies, and a new computer, as well as the training of volunteers and staff. They have been working diligently through the JE Collection to sort and scan every item, in a new space dubbed the "Jeff Edwards Room" in hopes of creating a more complete database to better serve the frequent information requests of the community.

~ Article By: David Hawley



**Jeff Edwards in front of the new "Jeff Edwards Room"
in the Porterville Museum**

Photo curtesy of Porterville Museum



Super Sleuths Needed!

In light of discussions of schools slowly returning back to in person class, we selected this unidentified photo of a school from our collection. Do you recognize the old school in this photo? This photo will be posted on the Museum Instagram and Facebook page so you can comment there or email us at tularecountymuseum1948@gmail.com with any clues you might have. Put on your Sherlock hat and get out your magnifying glasses to help the museum solve the mystery of identifying this picture!

Find us on the web:

<https://tularecountymuseum.org/museum/>

Call us: (559) 624-7326

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Curator's Corner

Hello history heroes,

Spring is here and the new plants that adorn our entrance have been soaking up the rain and sunshine! This time of closure has given me the opportunity to participate in some amazing webinars as both a presenter and a participant that help to keep me connected in the museum community and I have been able to implement new ideas in our virtual programming. I am happy to say the Museum was able to welcome visitors Friday, April 9. Please check our website for our updated hours. There are so many new exhibits to explore! ~Amy King

