

PRIVATE VARNISH[®]

THE MAGAZINE OF PRIVATELY OWNED RAILROAD PASSENGER CARS

Fellow friends of the Cumbres & Toltec Scenic Railroad

This article is a reprint from "Private Varnish," No. 127. The magazine of the American Association of Private Railcar Owners, an organization that we have belonged to for many years. We enjoyed the article so much, that we thought it would be of great interest to many of you. This has been reprinted as a special section to the "C&T & Dispatch." It's our hope that after reading it, many of you will feel the same way.

*Best regards
Fred and Dale Springer,
Salado, Texas*



Original VARNISH

BY RICHARD HARRIS

In 1920 when Walter and Cordelia Knott moved to the sleepy little town of Buena Park, California, to farm 20 acres of rented ground, their neighbors never would have dreamed that the modest 20-acre start would be the birthplace of America's first themed amusement park, expanding over many years to become the 160-acre highly-developed facility that exists alongside the Interstate today.

It all started when Walter got interested in cultivating berries. A few miles away in Anaheim, Parks Superintendent Rudolph Boysen had experimented with a new strain of berry, but the plants kept dying on the vine. Walter took the scraggly plants back to the farm, tended them carefully, and named the new berry—which actually was a cross between a loganberry, red raspberry and blackberry—after its originator Ralph Boysen. He figured out how to grow them so successfully that they became the family trademark. With all those berries around, Cordelia began selling boysenberry jams and jellies from a roadside stand. She figured that folks might enjoy a little something to eat once they got to her place, so she started serving home-cooked chicken dinners for 65 cents each, on her wedding china no less!

Folks loved those chicken dinners way out there in the country (in those days) and despite the Great Depression, Walt and Cordelia's berry farm grew in fame and size. Believe it or not, by the 1940s their restaurant was serving as many as 4,000 dinners on Sunday evenings! Walter figured he needed to give the lines of patrons waiting

spirit of his grandparents, not to mention his love of the Old West; something that might be another reason to come out to Knott's farm. He started planning his Ghost Town, thinking that there were plenty of abandoned old buildings out in the brush that he might buy. The first structure he moved in was the Gold Trails Hotel, which had originally been constructed in 1868 at Prescott, Arizona. A sticker for authentic

built the place up. As the years passed, he conceived, built and refined ideas, like his famous "peek-in," inside the Ghost Town jail where Sad Eye Joe, the talking inmate, told his tale of woe.

Highlights of many patrons' berry farm trips were pictures taken with "dem thar varmints" Handsome Brady and Whiskey Pete.

Then Walter got railroad fever, specifically the three-foot gauge vari-



EDNA AND



Looking at the back platform end of the *Durango*, the four-placed dinette is in the immediate foreground. The 10-seat parlor looks like a pretty cozy place to view the Rockies as this is the way the car was reconfigured in 1937 for service on the *San Juan*. The drumhead is still attached to the railing. COURTESY OF STEVE GUARD & RICHARD HARRIS

the purchase of D&RG No. 340, another Class C-19, and coach No. 310.

D&RG K-27 No. 464 was purchased in 1973 and operated until 1977, when it was donated to Genesee County (Michigan's) Huckleberry Railroad.

Locomotive overhauls in the late nineties saw both engines leave the shops with authentic prototype paint jobs, stacks, and pilots. RGS No. 41 carried the original "sun burst" lettering scheme on the tender. D&RG No. 340 was painted and trimmed just as she appeared in the good ole days.

The original passenger cars have had all of their bathrooms removed along with stoves and washbasins to provide for more seating. The wooden seats have folding backs that frequently break, and the upholstery and interior woodwork receive constant wear and tear; so the railcars must be constantly maintained to keep them in service. Since the grand opening in 1952, the cars were painted yellow and green, but in that last few years they have been repainted with original Pullman Green and carry Denver & Rio Grande on the letter boards in gold.

Which brings us to *Edna* and her sisters. In alphabetical order, so as not to get any of the old gals cross, we'll start their histories with the *Chama*.

Built in 1880 by Jackson & Sharp as *El Gringo*, the 42-foot chaircar seated 25. A rebuilding as a parlor car by the railroad in 1902 left her with a new name, the *Camp Bird* and seating for 46 in Pullman-style sections. Readers should keep in mind that on a three-foot gauge car, 25 of the 46 seats would not be sold due to the 33-inch seat width, but Pullman classified them as 46-seat cars, regardless. In the spring of 1937 she was modernized once again, this time with a galley and four-place dinette, ten parlor chairs, steam

ER SISTERS

his Ghost Town & Calico Railway in January 1951 with the acquisition of the narrow-gauge D&RG's ex-*San Juan* coaches 325, 326, and parlor cars *Chama* and *Durango*. In August, he purchased Rio Grande Southern No. 41, a Class C-19, 2-8-0, and in November the RGS business car *Edna*. The passenger cars were shipped to California from Alamosa in September by railcar and carried the rest of the way to the farm by Belyea Trucking

locomotive and train were being fixed up and painted, three quarters of a mile of track had been laid and ballasted in and around Walter's ghost town. The engines and cars got full Hollywood treatment with pointy cowcatchers, diamond stacks and wild yellow paint jobs. The original consist (back from the locomotive) was one of the parlor cars, followed by the coaches with the other parlor car carrying a drumhead à la the *San Juan*.

and a closed front vestibule. Renamed *Chama*, she was assigned to the *San Juan* as a parlor-buffet car. Retired and sold to Walter Knott in 1951, she carried GT&C Railway's No. 103. The *Chama* was converted to a combination coach baggage car and became No. 351, the *Camp Bird*, and later re-named the *Calico* by 1978.

The *Durango*, the third car to carry that name on the D&RG, started out life at Jackson & Sharp in 1880 as a 25-seat chair car, just like her sister, though christened *Senorita*. By 1903, she was rebuilt as a parlor car (with mahogany interior trim) and renamed *Pagosa*. And just like her sister, she was upgraded for *San Juan* service in 1937, and left the shops weighing 47,500

pounds, a 21,000 pound gain in weight from her original as-built configuration. (*These were two well built and easy riding cars-Ed.*) After retirement she followed her sister to Buena Park, and was renumbered No. 104. Over the years the *Durango* was reserved for use by the Knott family and invited guests for special events at the Berry Farm. Recently the interior has been refurbished to its 1937 configuration; the Heywood Wakefield revolving reclining plush seats and carpeted flooring looking just like the day she rolled out of the shop.

Which brings us to *Edna*. A year younger, but still a sweet Wilmington girl from Jackson & Sharp like her sisters, she was, at 44 feet, a little longer

and at 35,500 pounds, a little heavier. She was built as a D&RG business car for use by the General Manager, classified as a sleeping-observation car. The car was sold to railroad builder Otto Mears in July of 1890 and re-named *San Juan*. He transferred ownership of the car to his Rio Grande Southern at a later date. During 1899 she was re-named *Edna* and by 1903 had been shortened up a bit to 41 feet 10 inches. By August 1921, she had been renumbered as B-20 at the railroad's Burnham shops. Still worth remodeling in 1925, she was extensively reconfigured with an enlarged stateroom. The Baker heater was moved to the end of the car, an enclosure was

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The cars were hauled to Knott's by one of Jack Belyea's trucks. No. 580 appears to be a heavy Sterling truck-tractor equipped with an engine-powered winch. The driver is wearing the standard uniform for truckers back in the early 50s and appears to be slowly lowering the car down the inclined trailer to the ground. Jack Belyea moved SP No. 3025 to Griffith Park and was no stranger to moving railroad equipment with his trucks and trailers. Note the railroad jack being used to steady the car as it slowly moves back to earth. The jack gets slid along the cribbing and prevents the car from leaning drastically towards the men in the event it derails. ORANGE COUNTY ARCHIVES





The *Durango* has a good-sized galley for a car with a four-place dinette section, indicating that travelers took turns taking meals. Its 11-foot length included room for the spiffy Electrolux refrigerator. The only giveaway that this shot wasn't taken in 1937 (OK, don't look out the window.) is the plastic draw-spout on the stoneware urn atop the shelf. To the left of the locker in front of the window resided a gas stove. In back of the photographer is the ice cream locker and a pantry. This restoration is complete right down to the logo on the front of the refrigerator door. COURTESY OF STEVE GIUARD & RICHARD HARRIS

There aren't enough clues in this photos for us to identify the location, but the presence of the palm trees suggests it's a team track rather than one of the area's big railroad yards. Santa Fe's San Diego line goes through Buena Park, Fullerton, and Anaheim, and both UP and SP had branch lines down to Anaheim. One thought is that after taking the D&RGW over La Veta Pass, the cars may have gone the rest of the way on the Santa Fe. (A possible Santa Fe routing would be Pueblo-La Junta-Las Animas-Amarillo-San Bernardino-Fullerton.) Walter Knott was a thrifty, pragmatic farmer, so it makes sense that to keep his trucking costs to a minimum, he would have routed the cars as close to the farm as possible. ORANGE COUNTY ARCHIVES





The Edna's observation room still has the built-in desk from its 1925 remodeling. The tables and chairs appear to be likely candidates for the space but don't show up in the 1903 or 1925 floor plans. The wicker chair in the right hand corner would have been just the sort of accommodation that would have lined the walls. The plush section-styled chairs in the foreground pull out to become beds for additional guests. Can you imagine a trip over Lizard Head Pass and what the views from 10,250 feet must have looked like from these windows? COURTESY OF STEVE GIUARD & RICHARD HARRIS

After the remodeling in 1925, only one of the sections remained in place. Sleeping accommodation for one was possible when the seats were converted. Another berth pulled down from the ceiling. The panelled walls are a Jackson & Sharp trademark, indicative of the exotic woodworking that company was famous for. COURTESY OF STEVE GIUARD & RICHARD HARRIS



The pullout berth in the observation room gets made up when the seat cushion is pulled forward far enough to allow for the lowered seat back to become the rest of the berth. Having the heating pipes under the berth must have been a plus when the snow flew up in the Rockies. COURTESY OF

STEVE GIJARD & RICHARD HARRIS

Hallways in standard-gauge passenger cars are never very wide. In narrow-gauge cars, they might even be smaller. The *Edna's* master stateroom is through the opened door to the left. The brass bed is just barely visible. COURTESY OF STEVE

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built, for the ice chest on the kitchen end platform, and an upper and lower seat-berth section was removed so that a bathroom could be relocated. She was equipped with a battery-lighting system either at that time or soon after. By 1950, she was looking poorly, but that didn't keep Walter Knott from adding her to his collection.

Appearing to be recently refurbished, these days the *Edna* is one handsome old gal. She carries both name and number on the GT&C, and a great deal of Colorado narrow-gauge railroad history as well.

With Stephen Esposito, Editor, PRIVATE VARNISH magazine

Richard Harris grew up in Orange County, California, and operated rides at Knott's Berry Farm and Disneyland. His lifelong fascination for amusement parks has been channeled into articles on rides and rider safety. His book, Early Amusement Parks of Orange County, was released in 2008 by Arcadia. PV

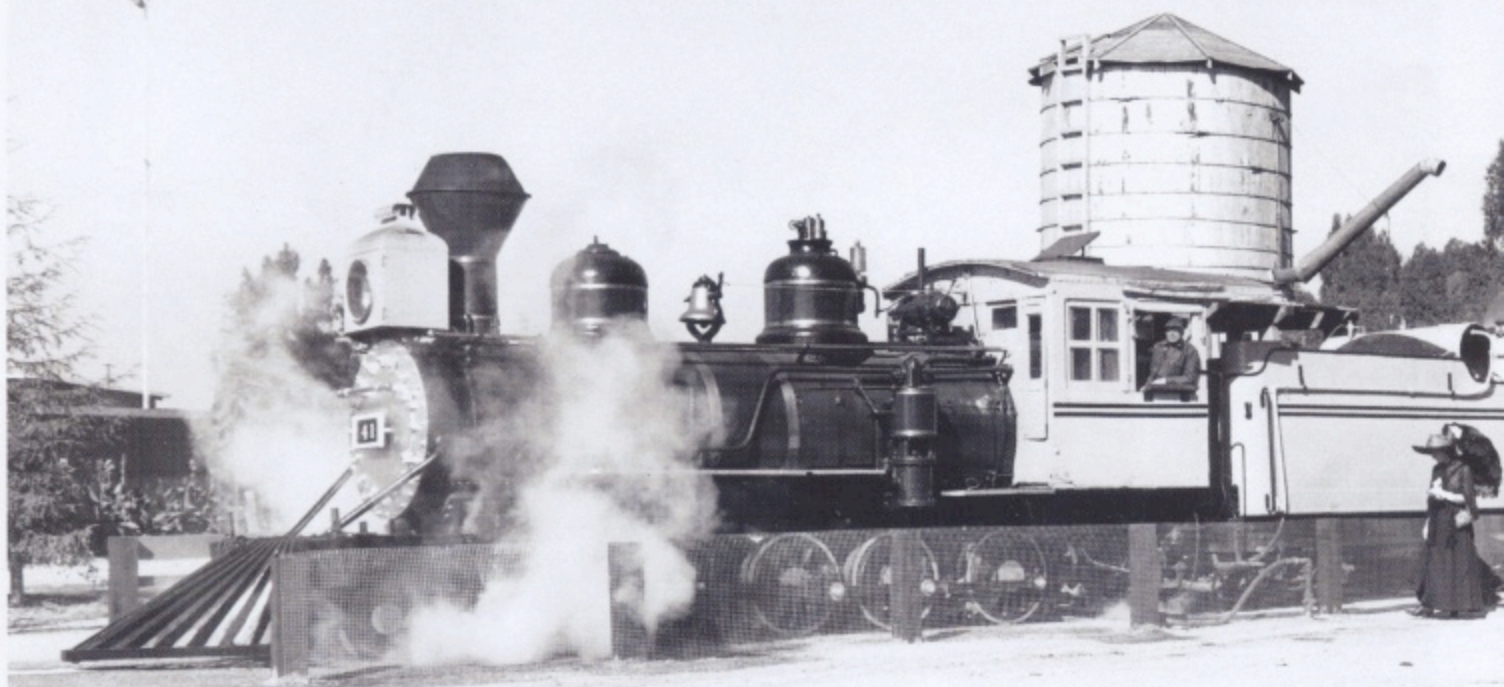
PAGE 8: The *Edna's* master stateroom has all the comforts of home including a ample closet, drawers for clothes under the bed, a wash stand, and did I mention a commode? COURTESY OF STEVE

GIJARD & RICHARD HARRIS

PAGE 9: The Baker stove back in the corner provided heat for the car. Meals were prepared on this Pacific model coal stove from the John Van Range Co.







ABOVE: By the time this shot was taken in the 50s, No. 41 had arrived and departed Ghost Town many times. In what appears to be a Publicity Department photo, everyone is all decked out in full regalia. You have to wonder if there are any costumes left hanging in the Wardrobe Department! COURTESY OF ORANGE COUNTY ARCHIVES

INSET: The afternoon before the dedication of the new Ghost Town and Calico Railroad on January 12, 1952, Walter and Cordelia Knott posed in front of their first steam locomotive. The following day Sterling Hayden, who played McCabe in the movie *Denver and Rio Grande*, was on hand for the driving of the golden spike accompanied by Linda Nelson, who played Linda Prescott in the same movie. Despite the rainy day and sporadic downpours, the spirits of the participants were never dampened and the event was a resounding success. COURTESY OF ORANGE COUNTY ARCHIVES

FRONT COVER: If you were a conductor, you could have done a lot worse than punch tickets from this bevy of Hollywood beauties perched on the *Chama's* platform in 1953. If you carefully look at the side of the car, you see some arrows from a previous trip's 'Indian attack' lodged in the siding! KNOTT FAMILY COLLECTION

BACK COVER: *Edna*, circa 1970. KNOTTS FAMILY COLLECTION







This article originally appeared in PRIVATE VARNISH magazine, No. 127, published quarterly by the American Association of Private Railroad Car Owners, Inc. The AAPRCO directors invite all interested parties to visit the AAPRCO website to find out more about the benefits of membership, or to purchase a subscription to PRIVATE VARNISH magazine. Private railroad cars can be chartered for trips or stationary usage from AAPRCO members who advertise in the PV CHARTER GUIDE. Copies may be ordered through AAPRCO's website. AAPRCO also sponsors a yearly convention special train, tickets for which are available to members.

