



# News Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **Historian Shirley Burman to Present Women in Railroading History Program at Museum**

**SACRAMENTO, Calif.** – On Saturday, March 29, 2008, the California State Railroad Museum will host special programming during Women's History Month. This day only, at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. celebrated local railroad historian and photographer Shirley Burman will present the fascinating story of railroad women, based on her 25 years of research and photography. Her illustrated program deflates the idea that a woman's place was in the home in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Burman's research begins in 1838, during the Industrial Revolution, when women were already working many jobs outside of the home including railroad employment as "ladies" car attendants.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the most important breakthrough for women was the invention of the telegraph. Women excelled as operators learning to transmit and dispatch train orders (instructions) in Morse code, proving that women had the ability to take on and understand technical tasks. During the Civil War many of these new telegraph operators were asked to help the war effort, taking over or assisting when men left to join the armed forces. At the same time, slave women and children were forced to lay rails for railroads in the South.

In the 1890s women were working on small railroads in various capacities—often dressed as men so as not to be noticed. But by the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were railroad designers, depot architects, and bacteriologists studying refrigerator car efficiency. More commonly known are the stories about thousands of women employed by the railroads during World Wars I and II. They took up the slack in physically demanding jobs, most being let go at wars' end. The Santa Fe Railway's Harvey Girls and Detour Guides are also showcased in the lecture, as they were a famous part of the industry during the era of passenger travel and tourism.

Today, women hold positions in almost all railroad jobs that were formerly "for males only," working and earning equal pay as locomotive engineers, conductors, and brakemen. The number of women has risen significantly in management positions, including Executive Officers for all the mainline railroads as well as Amtrak.

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Shirley Burman's show gives participants a peek into this little known segment of women's history and the railroads. Her passion for the subject comes through in her show. The approximately 40-minute lecture is enlivened with anecdotes, and the photographs Burman has both taken and collected bring this unique piece of railroad history to life. Entry to this special March 29 railroad women program is included with regular Railroad Museum admission (\$8 adults, \$3 youths ages 6-17, ages 5 and under admitted free).

Shirley Burman's program joins an ongoing series of changing exhibits and programs at the California State Railroad Museum. Currently on exhibit at the Museum is a special exhibit, "Must Women Wear Trousers?: Women's Struggle in the Railroad Workplace, 1900-1980." On display the month of March—national women's history month—and through June 15, this exhibit features engaging text and fascinating photographs of women at work on the railroad. Also included are three-dimensional artifacts and period illustrations, bringing the subject to life in ways that will appeal to families of all ages. For 24-hour info, visit [www.californiastaterailroadmuseum.org](http://www.californiastaterailroadmuseum.org) or call (916) 445-6645.

### ***About Shirley Burman***

Shirley Burman was a newcomer to railroad photography in 1978, when California State Parks hired her to work with their under-construction project, the California State Railroad Museum in Sacramento, particularly the research and restoration staff for the locomotives and cars which were being prepared for display. She immediately found her place in a male-dominated field and developed a life long interest in railroads and the people who work for them, especially the little known history of women in the industry.

In December 1983, Burman left her State job for self-employment. As a photographer for the railroad industry, she was provided access to workingwomen in her quest to uncover the story of railroad women. By 1991, she had enough information and material to share her findings first with a slide presentation at the Oakland Museum, followed by an exhibit at California State Railroad Museum.

Burman's historical landmark exhibit showcasing women in the railroad industry traveled the U.S for the next seven years. A second exhibition was created in 1996, and continues to travel today. She has been a guest lecturer for museums, libraries and state historical societies from California to New Hampshire, and served on a fact-finding panel at the Smithsonian discussing railroads in state parks. Burman has been published in several historical periodicals and recently in the new *Encyclopedia of North American Railroads*. Her railroad photographs have been used in numerous publications, books, annual reports and advertisements.

Burman has been a Curtis Park resident for 46 years and continues to research, photograph, and lecture about railroad women.

*Operated by California State Parks with assistance from the nonprofit CSRM Foundation, the California State Railroad Museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day. Widely regarded as North America's finest and most-visited railroad museum, the complex of facilities includes the 100,000-sq. ft. Railroad History Museum plus the reconstructed Central Pacific Railroad Passenger Station and Freight Depot, 1849 Eagle Theatre, and Big Four and Dingley Spice Mill buildings in Old Sacramento. 24-hour info: (916) 445-6645 or [www.californiastaterailroadmuseum.org](http://www.californiastaterailroadmuseum.org).*

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