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“Cathedrals of Labor” Exhibit to Highlight Heritage of Southern Pacific Sacramento Shops

Opening May 10, 2001, at the California State Railroad Museum is the major new exhibit “Cathedrals of Labor: The Industrial Legacy of the Southern Pacific Railroad Sacramento Shops.” This exhibit of historic photographs, maps, shop machinery and other artifacts highlights the architecture, people, and products of the Southern Pacific Sacramento Shops. The exhibit will remain on display at the Museum through the first quarter of 2002.

At first forced to hire local plumbers and machinists to assemble and fix steam locomotives, the Central Pacific (which eventually became part of the Southern Pacific Railroad) began construction of its own shop facilities in Sacramento during the early 1860s. From these early beginnings, Southern Pacific’s Sacramento Shops grew to become for a time – the West’s largest industrial complex. With over 4,000 people employed here during its busiest years, the Shops were the railroad’s most important mechanical facility.

Among the many jobs performed at the Southern Pacific Sacramento Shops were complete overhaul, remanufacture, engineering and construction of steam locomotives, passenger cars, and freight cars; plus similar work on other heavy duty items such as track and signaling components. The re-plating of dining car silverware was undertaken here, and the Shops even had a lumber mill and its own steel foundry for production of large castings.

“Cathedrals of Labor: The Industrial Legacy of the Southern Pacific Railroad Sacramento Shops” focuses on the architecture of the Shops (which dates from the 1860s); the kinds of products that were produced, including complete steam locomotives, passenger and freight cars; the machinery and technical skills utilized; and the people who made it all happen. Viewers will find photographs and maps, excerpts from newspaper and magazine articles, recollections of Shop workers, and selected three-dimensional artifacts – including full-sized locomotives – from the collections of the California State Railroad Museum and the Sacramento Archives and Museum Collections Center.

Operated by California State Parks with assistance from the California State Railroad Museum 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 interpretive railroad museum, the complex of facilities includes the 100,000-square foot Museum of Railroad History plus the reconstructed Central Pacific Railroad Passenger Station and Freight Depot, 1849 Eagle Theatre, and Big four and Dingley Spice Mill commercial buildings in Old Sacramento. For updated 24-hour information, call (916) 445-6645 or visit www.californiastaterailroadmuseum.org.

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