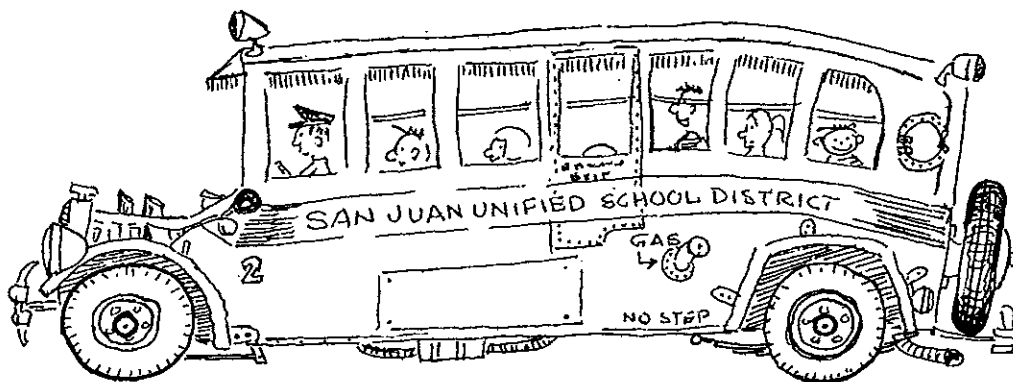


Big Yellow School Busses

Memories of the San Juan School District Transportation Department



Cartoon courtesy Ed Larson

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Memories of the San Juan School District Transportation Department

Those who knew the early and real history of the S. J. S. D. bus transportation are those who made that history, and they are now unfortunately long since in the Great Bus Garage in the Sky with the Great Director of All Transportation. It behooves us of the following generation to be sure that our route sheets are up to date for at ages 80 and 79 our own routes are nearing completion. We must leave clear route sheets for others to know and follow. Two of us selected for this task happened to be "Red" Hughes, Class of '47, and Herman Graham, Class of '48, as both of us greatly enjoyed our days of 'playing in the yellow paint' as bus drivers, etc. "Red" is the son of the legendary Glenn Hughes who built the department, and "Red" did much in the planning of both busses & the operational aspects until his teaching career demanded his full attention. It was then that a bus driver, Herman Graham was moved from steering wheel to a desk as an administrative assistant to the senior Mr. Hughes. Glenn disliked paperwork; his heart and skills were in the shop.

The San Juan Union High School District, formed in 1913, did not originally purchase school busses but contracted with private carriers such as Mr. Taylor of Fair Oaks; Mr. Sim Green of Fair Oaks, and Mr. Glenn Hughes of Carmichael. Little is known of the experiences of Mr. Taylor or Mr. Green, but more will be written of Mr. Glenn Hughes as he continued to contract haul until 1935. Mr. Hughes returned in 1947 or 1948 to build the foundation of the present school bus system. A gentleman, a man of intellect equaled only by his outstanding character and superb mechanical ability.

In 1931 the S.J.U.H. School District purchased two new Indiana conventional busses, busses # 1 & # 2, powered by powerful six cylinder Hercules JXD engines. Remember, this was the days of 40 horsepower Model A Ford cars & trucks. The Patchetts & Cartson body added was built in Newman, Calif These two busses went into semi retirement about the time of WW II. More will be written of old bus # 1 later.

1935 saw the purchase of two new Ford conventional 36 passenger busses, # 3 & # 4, which saw service until the mid-1950's. Excellent service was realized from these vehicles even though they carried Pyrene fire extinguishers (now illegal) and jump seats to add a death-trap feature in case of a crash (also long since illegal). Also they were built with mechanical brakes with a vacuum assist, certainly not the best braking system.

1938 saw the arrival of the first White conventional bus and the switch to bigger sized busses. Bus # 5.

1939 saw Ashley Graham, brother of Herman Graham on his first run in bus # 6, another White conventional. If memory serves this writer correctly, Glenn Hughes allowed

Herman Graham to turn the keys back to the Gillig factory at Hayward, Calif. upon retirement of that vehicle in honor of his brother Ashley Graham who set the prewar WW II engine record in the fleet.

In 1941 the school district went big bus in a big way. A very heavy Gillig body was put upon a White chassis, we had our first cab-over engine. This vehicle was first cousin to a General Sherman tank, and what a tiger to work on! This writer carried the recommendation from Mr. Hughes to Superintendent W. T. Mooney requesting approval to retire old # 7 as it was beyond repair. Mr. Mooney facetiously refused to sign the document, stating that he had never yet seen any machine that Mr. Hughes could not repair. He signed however. Those two gentlemen understood and greatly respected each other, working very well together.

1946 saw the addition of bus # 8, a Ford conventional in the pattern of busses # 3 & #4, more horsepower and with no Pyrene fire extinguishers or jump seats. By this time the new bus included vacuum assisted hydraulic brakes, a vast improvement safety-wise over mechanical brakes.

Big changes were made in the transportation department in 1947 -- 1948. Prior to that time most of the bus maintenance had been done by Mitchell Dodge of Fair Oaks or the White Truck dealership in Sacramento but was now done mostly at the Sunnydale Garage in Carmichael. After two disastrous attempts to establish a maintenance unit to maintain the District busses & vehicles, the right man was hired. Glenn Hughes came aboard and soon no bus was allowed to hit the road unless everything was properly repaired and in excellent working order.

A new totally-built Gillig coach, # 9, the pride and joy of the department, was purchased in 1949 for the dazzling sum of \$12,000. Powered by a 150 h. p. International Red Diamond (AKA a Cornbinder) engine, this vehicle was thought to be first cabin, and every member of the department took extreme pride in this beautiful coach.

Pride comes before the fall. Our new wonder-bus was equipped with an 'air clutch' a step into high technology for the time. Unfortunately in less than 5,000 miles the new bus had a clutch failure and had to be towed in from Carmichael to the bus garage. This was attempted by the Hughes father & son, using Glenn's 40 h.p. Model A Ford. One hill on San Juan Avenue was too much for the Model A and another bus had to complete the tow job. Glenn, to the best of this person's belief never got around to disclosing that the so-called 'air clutch' mystery was merely an air powered-assist unit, used on almost all S. J. busses after 1947 and until 1960..

In addition, in 1948 - 1949 a new bus maintenance shop was built on South Mariposa Avenue in Citrus Heights, adequate to provide for the service & repair of the eight busses. After unification in 1960 some 33 busses were serviced at that outdated shop, but fortunately a complete new facility was built in 1957 or 1958 in Carmichael, adequate for all major repairs and was used for approximately 40 years.. This new Carmichael

shop was the brainchild of the employees, "When we build the new shop it should include . . ." Careful notes of these remarks were made and finally turned over to a drafting teacher, Marc Brann who put them onto paper in the form of a blueprint for architect Nick Tomich. That was our new shop.

The transportation employees enjoyed great morale. It was fun to come to work each day. We had a great boss, we knew it, and acted accordingly. When a bus broke down it was an unwritten more that no driver left his or her bus seat until the last student was safely homeward bound. There was no thought of overtime. Great was the joy and pride felt one night when S. J. brought more rooters to a Friday night game in Marysville, Ca. than the home town produced. Friday nights our yellow beauties transported our student bodies in all directions, sometimes returning at 2 A.M. We were proud of our service and our fleet. Of special joy to this writer was to see our Hall-Scott powered school busses out-pull Greyhound busses in the Marin County hills while on a San Francisco field trip.

Extra trips were like candy to the bus drivers. A break from the routine, new adventures. A music trip to San Francisco with now music teacher, "Mr." Hughes (we called him Mr. Hughes if students were around, otherwise he was still "Red") developed problems. A schedule malfunction after the musical performance caused Mrs. Marilyn Hughes, wife of Mr. Hughes, to call a restaurant near Fisherman's Wharf to ask if the restaurant could feed two bus loads of students in one hour. The response she received is not proper for publication, but we ate and ate well (within one hour). Behind every successful man there is a good women who rescues him.

One is not to mess with young high school students in love. Mr. Paul Rued who came aboard in 1958 as Supervisor of Transportation was acting as a substitute driver one afternoon when he saw a flagrant abuse of law and order, a young man with his arm around a very willing young female student. The substitute bus driver immediately issued a cease & desist order.

"Whatsa matter, Mister, are you against romance?" asked the young swain. "Yes," replied Mr. Rued, "I am." With that the student looked at the authority figure's left hand and innocently asked, "Sir, is that brass ring on your left hand a gasket for a spark plug?" The Marines never retreat but sometimes they know to advance to the rear.

Working for a Quaker-trained principal, a man with such upstanding morals that he does not speak or understand crude language and gestures, can be trying upon younger generations. It took a conference of young male drivers to draw up a document appropriately worded that Mr. Mooney would understand that the bus driver had been disrespectfully 'flipped off' / 'given the birdie' by a student. The term ' obscene gesture' carried the vote that day and got a conviction.

1951 saw the beginning of changes in the school district when El Camino High School was built. Both faculty & transportation grew and would continue to grow. With more students than buildings to accommodate them, school busses and hallways were used as temporary classrooms the first year.

.There can be mechanical failure too which must be taken into account. A citizen stopped to report that Bus # 22 was stalled on Mariposa and had some sort of rod hanging down, Bill Kaufer, shop foreman, assigned an employee to, "Go take some wire and wire the rod up and get the kids to school." There was more to it than that. The offending rod was a broken connecting rod in the engine which had almost sawed the engine in two.

Unification in 1960 of the five elementary school districts, Acade, Arden-Carmichael, Fair Oaks, Orangevale and Sylvan, with the San Juan Union High School brought about many, many changes. Transportation was no exception, and it was unchartered territory for almost all. Added to the 35 high school fleet was the busses of the elementary district, making a total of 79 busses, as well as some important staffing. From the Sylvan District came Tony Mutoza (Tony the tire man); Ernie Dieterich of Orangevale District; Howard Walker of Arcade District, Norman and Katie Harper of Arden- Carmichael District, along with Mrs. Irene Delamater who did a most outstanding job of drawing up a complete new routing system and coordinating the three levels of schools to be served by bus service. San Juan Unified School District temporarily had the second largest school bus fleet in California.

August 2001. It was moving time again for the entire transportation department. The headquarters, shop facilities and crowded traffic patterns in Carmichael had outgrown themselves and forced the move to the former Coca Cola facility at 3050 Orange Grove Avenue in North Highlands, Ca. A somewhat changed mission had taken place over the years as well. Of the 197 busses in use on the eve of this centennial, 115 busses were for the needs of the Special Education students.

In an interview with Mrs. Debbie Kennedy, Operations Supervisor, and Mr. Scott Wilson, Head of Vehicle Maintenance, it was disclosed that there were 158 full-time bus drivers plus 27 substitutes; 13 full-time bus maintenance employees plus supervision. This under the directorship of Ms. Nikki Hughes. The typical annual mileage of this fleet is 2,874,384 miles and an annual budget of approximately \$13 million dollars.

Mrs. Kennedy spoke to the problem of public confusion regarding motorists stopping for busses loading and unloading students. Some problems never seem to go away as this was a problem over fifty years ago. The law changed in 1951, again in 1998, reversing itself. The motoring public as hopelessly confused on the subject. As stated, some problems never seem to go away.

And now back to yesteryear for a bit.

Previously mentioned Bus # 1, the old Indiana conventional, along with this person had a thrilling if not terrifying time together. One morning Mr. Hughes was short one bus driver to fill the routes. This writer was in the process of obtaining his bus license but did not yet have his bus permit. With approval (and with the expected, "Be careful," from the principal), the new almost-a-schoolbus-driver headed for the County prison camp to pick up a load of prisoners who did yard work at the school. Bus # 1, the old 1931

Indiana, looking like part of the props for the TV show Beverly Hillbillies, only with a kid at the wheel, labored up a rather steep hill into the prison grounds.

Which one is Al Capon ?; is that one Dillinger?; how many have concealed guns or knives? crossed the young driver's mind. As we started down the steep incline in a rickety old bus with a young kid at the wheel, what crossed the minds of the passengers? Probably enough to have them give up their favorite fermented grape drink.

Mr. Taylor's connection with San Juan was not complete. His daughter, Mrs. Estelyne Mulch had as a favor to Principal W. T. Mooney licensed up and driven bus during WWII. Soon Mrs. Mulch was moved into the financial clerk position for the high school where she worked until retirement. A grand lady, respected by all, Mrs. Mulch is the only person issued TWO diplomas of graduation by that school. One as a graduating senior student, the second for 26 years of excellent service on the books.

A question: How can a 100 year old school District have a 101 year old school bus? NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE AT SAN JUAN. At the next local parade watch for a 1912 Traffic Truck San Juan School bus. This bus is so old that numbers had not been invented yet, hence you will find no school bus number on this rig, and it now has 40 years as a member of the San Juan fleet.

Donated in the late 1960's by the late Art Doudell, this vehicle was a pile of rusty junk. Thanks to many, many hours of volunteer time by the shop employees and a generous donation by Gillig Bros. of Hayward, Ca.,, this old 1912 Traffic Truck came to life as a school bus of that time period. There is a plate on the side of the engine which reads, "Warrantee void if 12 m.p.h. is exceeded." This is the last known Traffic Truck in existence.

A hundred years ago there was little regulation of California motor vehicles. California had only recently begun to license drivers. Into this void fell a lack of safety in California school bus transportation. The independent contractors had no rules to go by, therefore the bus chassis would often be extended to enable them to haul more passengers. Seats were often benches running lengthwise of the vehicle instead of crosswise as in modern busses. Hence the game by the young male passengers of shifting all their weight to the extreme rear of the bus which would raise the front wheels off the pavement. Steering ability of the driver would be lost.

The administration countered this by hiring a recent U. C. Berkeley graduate in 1922 not only for his academic skills but also for his weight. This young teacher would ride directly behind the bus driver hence counter balancing the weight of the passengers in the extreme rear of the bus, restoring steering to the driver. It was also rumored that this young teacher had been a star wrestler in college which helped him as a beginning teacher. It was not until almost four decades later at his retirement that it was disclosed by this person that he had NOT wrestled at Berkeley as a student. His name? W. T. Mooney.

CLASSIC PEANUTS by Charles Schulz



With respect,

"Red" Hughes, Class of '47

Herman Graham, Class of '48