

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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A Little Railroad Gets Swallowed Up

The Monterey and Salinas Valley Railroad continued to run until the last months of 1879 when it was swallowed up by the Big Four. At about that time the officials of the Nevada Central were traveling over the country looking for rolling stock. The Nevada Central, it appeared, was not able to afford the luxury of new equipment; everything would have to be second-hand.

For five years the Monterey and Salinas Valley Railroad had been running its little narrow-gauge trains. The local citizens had built it to break the monopolistic grasp of the Southern Pacific in their region. The Big Four planned to tear up the part of the road which they not broad-gauge. So here was a whole narrow-gauge railroad for sale cheap and the Nevada Central officials hastened to make a deal with Charles Crocker to buy the lot. Two locomotives, 54 cars, 38 miles of track, turntables, water tanks, and everything else.

The Nevada Central had secured a subsidy from Lander County to build a narrow-gauge railroad from Battle Mountain to Austin but the train must be running by February 8th, 1880. On Christmas Day of 1879, a locomotive arrived from the Monterey-Salinas Valley.

On February 5th ten miles of track remained unbuilt, according to "Bonanza Railroads" by Gilbert H. Kneiss. "The 8th was Sunday, and everyone in Austin who could wangle a ride or stand the walk in the bitter cold visited the end of the track, still four and one half miles away. There they saw the locomotive "Anson P. Stokes" formerly the "C.S. Abbott" of the Monterey and Salinas Valley, handling a string of flatcars; and for many it was their first sight of an engine."

C.S. Abbott was a pioneer resident of Salinas and one of the largest land owners in the county. He was the president of the group of stockholders who had built the M. & S.V., and it was in his honor that the locomotive had been named. The old "Monterey" had been renamed the "Daniel P. Hatch".

When the situation became desperate and the outlook for the completion of the road on the fatal day, February 9th, seemed doubtful, the Austin common council met in special session behind locked doors. To claim the \$200,000 subsidy from Lander County the

railroad had to have its track inside the city limits by midnight. The railroad would benefit Austin so why not prepare for the certain growth by extending the city limits? A half mile would be enough. The aldermen all voted "Aye", and the city limits were extended. Just ten minutes remained before midnight when the tracks crossed the new border line. The three last spikes were pure silver.

The charter of the Nevada-Central Railroad expired on February 1, 1938, the day before the last train ran. Rail and equipment of that and the Eureka-Nevada, its companion railroad, was sold to a scrap dealer from \$17,500, and the wreckers moved in.

It was Mr. Kneiss, the author of "Bonanza Railroads," who saved the old locomotives as museum pieces. He writes "One May day, the writer, on a solitary railfan's pilgrimage, drove into Battle Mountain and started to explore the terminal facilities of the Nevada-Central. It was a bonanza to a lover of railroad history. Three ancient locomotives, cold and waiting, stood inside the shops, their diamond stacks showing how little time had changed them. Outside were the remains of two others; one had run from Monterey to Salinas on a long forgotten line in the dim remembered past."

Finally, as assistant director of "Cavalcade" at the San Francisco Fair in 1939, Mr. Kneiss secured the sole remaining Central locomotive for this production and with the "Silver State" it represented the Central Pacific train in the "Gold Spike" scene. The "Silver State" and another of the locomotives now belong to the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society and the last of the four, "The Sidney Dillon" is owned by Ward Kimball who draws Mickey Mouse cartoons in Hollywood. Few of those who attended the Cavalcade of the Golden West on Treasure Island realized that one of those engines, resplendent in the bright scrollwork and colors fashionable in their day, once rode the narrow gauge tracks from Monterey to Salinas.