

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

June 14, 1951

The Narrow Gauge Railroad

In the halcyon days of yore, Carlisle S. Abbott fathered, or promoted, the organization of the Monterey and Salinas Valley Railroad Company, which built a narrow-gauge railroad from Salinas to Monterey, a distance of twenty miles. This enabled the farmers to ship their grain to tide water, and resulted in a great saving in freight.

For a short time this little railroad prospered, and then the big competitor, in order to recover its lost business, made a horizontal reduction in its freight rates, whereupon many of the farmers in the Salinas Valley immediately withdrew their patronage from the little railroad and went back to the larger company.

In Abbott's "Recollections of a California Pioneer" he tells of two amusing incidents in connection with the Monterey-Salinas Railroad Company of which he was president. Wishing to avoid the importunities of people who he knew would be clamoring for free transportation, he procured the board of directors to pass a resolution forbidding the president issuing such transportation.

While this resolution was in force, Rev. J.S. McGowan, the Episcopal clergyman who built St. Paul's church, Salinas, and St. James church in Monterey as well as St. Luke's, Jolon, was residing in Salinas and also had charge of the church in Monterey,

He, supported by a large delegation of women from his two congregations, solicited from Mr. Abbott a pass between his two pastorates. While Mr. Abbott declares that he was desirous of advancing religious affairs, at least to the small extent that would be accomplished by the issuance of free transportation to the gentleman, he was at a loss for a method of getting around the resolution above referred to.

Then it occurred to him that if the Rev. Mr. McGowan could be some means be classed as an employe of the company, the way would be open for his complying with his request, and after a little reflection it occurred to him that above all things else the little railroad needed a chaplain, whereupon he had the secretary enter upon his books an order appointing the Rev. Mr. McGowan as Chaplain of the Monterey and Salinas

Valley Railroad Company, and he then handed him his pass.

Mr. Abbott repeats in his recollections the "dirtiest political trick with which I was ever connected". There was to be a Democratic rally in the old town of Monterey, which was to be addressed by some celebrity from San Francisco, and the chairman of the Democratic Central Committee went to Mr. Abbott and asked him what the lowest rate would be for running an excursion on the night of the meeting. Abbott told him that it would not be a question of rates, that he was going to run a free train that night.

Abbott then telegraphed to the Republican State Central Committee to send the best speaker they had to Salinas for the same night the meeting was to be held in Monterey, and he then set some men to work putting temporary sides on a train of forty flat cars, and placed benches to seat the passengers.

On the day the speaking was to take place he had notices posted announcing a free excursion from Monterey to Salinas, and practically the entire population of Monterey went over to the Republican meeting at Salinas, while the Democratic orator and a few of his friends, who refused to desert him, remained at the old capital.