

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Railroad Saga**

On July 5, 1879 C.C. Flagg wrote a letter covering a trip to Monterey which we believed will cause a smile or two for our readers and add a bit of historical data to the files in passing. The letter was published recently in the Mendocino Beacon and was thoughtfully sent to us by Mr. and Mrs. Albert W. Krotozyner of Carmel, who visited there this past summer.

The letter begins with a short history of the Southern Pacific Railroad and the line of Monterey. "When the railroad in the course of construction was approaching Watsonville, it sent out in advance, as did the kings of olden times, heralds demanding tribute. The price for favoring the inhabitants of that place was \$100,000. Subscriptions papers were opened, and everyone did his best, in the anxiety to have a rail communication with San Francisco. \$41,000 was raised by them after the most strenuous efforts and proffered to the railroad company, it was laughed at.

"Finding that it was utterly impossible to get their original figures, the railroad company reduced it by \$25,000, but all in vain, for Watsonville could not meet anything like this immense ransom. A gentleman owning property some two miles from town, thought he saw an opportunity, so he gave the road \$10,000 cash and 20 acres of land to avoid Watsonville, and make this spot their station. The railroad accepted this gift, and as a result the situation is simply a nuisance to all concerned." Wrote the traveler of 1879.

Mr. Flagg goes on to tell his readers that the railroad arrived at this point, crossed the river, tunneled a mountain, which had entailed some \$200,000 expense besides being a constant menace and danger to travelers, and made their depot at this place called Pajaro.

In 1879, the writer thought that Watsonville had neither grown up to the depot, nor did a new town repay the generosity of the donor. "It is neither one thing or the other. It necessitates a line of conveyances, that are of additional expense to the traveler and causes him to shun the town." How little did Flagg visualize how Watsonville and the rich Pujaro Valley would look 75 years later.

Further along in the letter the writer expresses his personal views on other railroad projects: "The Santa Cruz narrow gauge starts at this point, a road which will get its death blow, when the South Pacific road reaches Santa Cruz direct from San Francisco. Below Pajaro, we next reach Castroville. Here also the railroad bends away from the town, which to the casual traveler presents a lonesome appearance."

Flagg's description of this brief view of Salinas as he "sped" on to Monterey. "Next stop was Salinas where the passengers change for Monterey" he wrote. "Alighting from the cars I was surprised to find another road near by. I was ushered hastily into a large wagon with some 20 others, and then away we went. You are conveyed right through the City of Salinas, passing down its broad main avenue well lined with stores and business blocks. The principal hotel, The Abbott House, is a fine large building, rented from the Bank of San Jose by E. J. Swift, who also is the gentlemanly proprietor of the Pacific Ocean House in Santa Cruz. Everyone rushed to the door to see the transfer wagon go by. The drug clerk with his sweet moustache and perfumed hair. The grocer in shirt sleeves. The nice looking dry good boys, substantial tradesmen, and duffer generally, all in the most striking attitudes, gaze benignly at us as we whirl by."

Leaving the town they suddenly diverged from the county road and struck off across a meadow, according to the letter. They aimed at a small building, and just above the tops of the grass they could see a miniature train of cars.

"They look outwardly as if they had been sidetracked a year for rest. It is the Monterey and Salinas Valley Railroad. The distance in some 20 miles. The road was built in six months' time, but it is a most singular arrangement for these two roads not to connect at a single depot."

(To Be Continued)