

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

November 1, 1954

### **How They Completed the Railroad on Time**

The Monterey and Salinas 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 monopoly of the Southern Pacific in their region. The Big Four planned to tear up the part the road which they did 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 provided the train was running by Feb. 8, 1880. On Christmas Day of 1879 a locomotive arrived from the Monterey-Salinas Valley.

Gilbert H. Kneiss published his book "Bonanza Railroads," a few years ago and from it we have learned most of this story as to what happened to our Salinas-Monterey Railroad and its equipment. It seems that on Feb. 5, 10 miles of track from Battle Mountain to Austin remained unbuilt. The 8th was Sunday, and everyone in Austin who could wrangle a ride or stand the walk in the bitter cold, visited the end of the track, still four and one-half miles away. They saw the locomotive Anson P. Stokes formerly the C.S. Abbott of Monterey and Salinas Valley, handling a string of flatcars; and for many it was their first sight of an engine.

We might relate here that C.S. Abbott was a pioneer resident of Salinas and one of the largest landowners in the country. 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, Feb. 9, 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 tracks inside the city limits by midnight. The railroad would benefit Austin so why not prepare for a 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 10 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 expires on Feb. 1, 1938, the day before the last train ran. Rails and equipment of that and the Eureka-Nevada, its companion railroad, were sold to scrap dealers for \$17,500, and the wreckers moved in.

It was Kneiss, the author of "Bonanza Railroads," who saved the old locomotives as museum pieces. He wrote: "one spring day, the writer, on a solitary rail fan's pilgrimage, drove to Battle Mountain and staid to explore the terminal facilities of the Nevada-Central. 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 Salinas to Monterey on a long-forgotten line in the dim-remembered past."

Finally, as assistant director of "Cavalcade" at the San Francisco exposition in 1939, Kneiss secured the sole remaining Central locomotive for this production and with the Silver State, it represented the Central-Pacific train in the "Golden Spike" scene.

The Silver State and another of the locomotives now belong to the Railroad and Locomotive Historical Society and the last of the four, the Sidney Dillon, is owned (1950) by Ward Kimball, who drew the Mickey Mouse cartoons in Hollywood.