

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Early Aviation**

The third in the series of Keepsake from the Book Club of California to the members of this non-profit association of book-lovers and collectors who have a special interest in Pacific Coast history, is of value to these collectors and those interested because of its change of setting of the historical stories to the south in this golden state of ours.

The club was founded in 1912 with its chief aims to further the interest of book collectors in the West and to promote an understanding and interest in fine books and fine printing.

"The Free Harbor Contest or Citizens Versus Railroad" is the title of this third historical item in the Keepsake series. A picture of Santa Monica Harbor and its surroundings accompanies the well printed leaflet. It is a reproduction made for Richard J. Hinton, for "Hand-Book of Arizona," San Francisco: 1878.

The editor of this number, Carey L. Bliss, writes: "Santa Monica was a thriving little town of about 1,000 inhabitants when this lithograph was made. John P. Jones, the Comstock millionaire, gave the town its initial promotion in 1875 and for several years the community prospered. An 1800 foot wharf was constructed to handle the expected steamship traffic and soon ties and rails for the Los Angeles and Independent Railroad were being unloaded by ships which came from the East Coast around the Horn. The railroad did not prove as profitable as expected, and so in 1877 it passed into the hands of the Southern Pacific Co."

The S.P. destroyed the wharf, declaring it unsafe and soon the harbor of San Pedro seemed to be the principal port of Los Angeles. The "boom of the eighties" which made the location of a port in Southern California a great prize, and the election of Colis P. Huntington to the presidency of the Southern Pacific in 1890 both affected the transportation problems of the South.

Within a few months after the election of Huntington to the presidency, the Southern Pacific began construction of a line to Port Los Angeles, a location just two miles north of the town of Santa Monica which was named by the S.P. officials. At the same time work was begun on a 4,300 foot wharf, to contact with the railroad.

In 1893 the railroad and wharf were completed and then the officials and citizens of the community began to realize that the town was about to lose much of its trade to the privately owned Southern Pacific Company. From that date are listed many battles in Congress between the S.P. and those who backed San Pedro. In 1899 the Huntington forces were defeated and a bill was passed in Congress voting funds to make San Pedro a free, deep-water port. Santa Monica lost and soon returned to the quiet atmosphere of a resort town.

The lithograph contained in the folder is very rare, printed by the firm of Briton & Rey in San Francisco about 1875. A tiny train of the Los Angeles and Independent Railroad is seen puffing its way toward the first wharf, which was the pride of Senator Jones. A few ships are seen lying offshore, but the open roadstead indicates clearly that this shallow bay could never have a safe deep-water harbor.

The fourth and last number in this issue of Early California Transportation concerns the "First Aviation Meet in America." Dr. David W. Davies is the author of this phase of the Book Club's series. The facsimile program reproduced in this number is from an original in the Huntington Library and Art Gallery in San Marino.

Naturally Los Angeles was excited in the early days of January of 1910 when the American and Foreign Aviators announced daily flights and prophesied what aviation would do for California. In the course of remarks made by President Twining of the Aero Club of California, he said, "The preservation of aeroplaning as a sport and the elimination of professionalism is important."

The accompanying folder – the facsimile of the original program – there are photographs of M. Louis Paulman and Glen Curtiss, the "skilled operators" of the machines. The propeller blades, it was said, "revolved so swiftly they were not visible to the eye." The crowds "saw the oncoming aeroplane, swift as a bird in flight and appearing every whit as graceful, under perfect control of the aviator, riding the air at any desired height and with far more safety, apparently, than the automobile hugging terra firma, several hundred feet below the extended canvas wings. It was a sight calculated to make the blood flow faster, even in the veins of the most sluggish."

In the 11 days of the meet \$141,520 was taken in on entrance fees, and \$4,000 for concessions to vendors

and “Midway Plaisance.” These stirring events led the Los Angeles Times to exclaim, “Vive Aviation! May untoward circumstances never clip its wings!”

The world breaking cross-country flight was won by the daring French aviator, Louis Paulman. He flew from Dominguez Field to the Lucky Baldwin ranch, 23 miles away, and returned – a non-stop of 46 miles in slightly less than one hour and three minutes. Upon his return “he was lifted up and borne over the field as a football hero would be treated after a Harvard-Yale game.”

Paulman also set an altitude record of 4,165 feet in his Farman biplane. An observer reported: “... the excitement of the crowd increased. Women gave vent to hysterical laughs that changed into sobs and in the eyes of men were tears of excitement.”

Glen Curtiss won the speed prize of the meet at an average speed of 40.71 miles per hour. The endurance flight was won by Paulman – 75.77 miles in one hour, 58 minutes, 32 seconds.