

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Iron Horses

The Academy Guild of Fresno, California, has been most generous to us recently and sent a very large package of their most recent publications. Among the books were "Short Line Junction," a collection of California and Nevada Railroads by Jack R. Wagner; "Christ and the Sailor," a study of the maritime incidents in the New Testament, by Peter F. Anson; "The Mystery of the Trinity," by Al. Janssens, and "Where Love Is, God Is," a true story of the tragic crash of an American B-29 in a lonely mountain ravine of Japan.

Today, we will try to tell our readers' something of the story of "Short Line Junction." It is the story of seven of the most picturesque little railroads in California and Nevada. They are perhaps, in a way, typical of the Short Line Railroads throughout the country, although these particular railroads have distinct personalities of their own that have been colored by the territories through which they operate, according to the information on the jacket cover.

The author is quoted as saying that he does not submit this as a book with a message. He prefers to think of it as a collection of his favorite western railroads. But if a message is to be read into it, the message is a real American story. It is the story of free enterprise and opportunity . . . of small business in a field of giants, competition and government regulations. It is a story of towns and industries built and kept alive by tiny locomotives and the commerce they brought in from the "Junction."

J. M. Hood, president of the American Short Line Railroad Association, says in a foreword: "This is obviously not a book written in the back room of a library. True, much of his information did come from old books, files and company records, but much more came from personal contact with railroad officials and railroaders alike. Some of the incidents told here were related across the desks of executive offices, while others were told over a tin cup of caboose coffee or hollered across the cab of a swaying locomotive."

There are fascinating stories of the Redwood Route, known as the California Western; The Siskiyou Short Line, sometimes called the Yreka Western; The Quincy Railroad: another affectionately remembered as the

steel trail of the Mother Lode was the Sierra railroad; the Ely Route which was the Nevada Northern; and the End of the N.C.B., known as the Nevada Copper Belt.

Throughout the 266 pages which comprise the "Short Line Junction" there are numerous photographic illustrations of railroads, engines, stations, scenery along the lines, firemen and engineers in their cabs, wrecks, lumber by the trainloads, winter snows along the tracks, cabooses, passenger trains and many other interesting and historic pictures as photographed by the author himself.

Perhaps one of the most interesting pictures is that of the big snow of 1937-38, the winter that tied up the road so completely that every locomotive on the line east of Shasta and every available man was drafted into a gigantic battle with the elements.

Of course, there are stories and pictures of cattle loading in both Nevada and California, loading of ore in Nevada, Arizona and California, and railway stations in the gay nineties with all the gingerbread trimmings of that era.

When the "Steel Trail of the Mother Lode" was about to enter the country made famous by Mark Twain, the editor of the Sonora "Democratic Banner" felt called upon to write a few remarks on that timely subject as follows:

"Eventually there will be heard the snort of the Iron Horse in this county, but we believe that the time is some distance away." Regarding the economics involved the editor continued to comment in a carefully worded manner no doubt designed to keep himself well outside the shooting:

"Our opinion, after mature consideration, is that the benefit of a road into this county will be immense to certain channels of business and be an injury to others."

"However, when capitalists see that a road here will be a paying institution it will come." As a whole the popular feeling was antagonistic toward the rails. The railroad was built after New Year's Day 1897 when the promoters arrived on the scene to look over the situation. During the next month, a survey was made and by February the property rights had been secured. March saw the beginning of grading at the Oakdale end of the line.