

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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On the Waterfront

In the last issue of the Diary, we told you about the old wharf which was known as the "Depot Wharf" directly across from the Southern Pacific depot in Monterey, and which was torn down in the latter part of 1940. For many years it had been there but during the passage of time, even the oldest residents were not sure how it had originated, nor did they remember who had owned it. A roving reporter went hunting for information when the demolishing began and discovered a bit of Monterey history during his travels.

The late W. E. Parker, Monterey's fire chief for many years, reported definitely "that little pier which is now being torn down is the remains of the old Monterey and Salinas Valley Railroad Company's pier."

There had been considerable rebuilding and repairing, to be sure, but the pier had been on the one site since the narrow-gauge firm put it there in 1874. Yes, the outer part of the pier had been destroyed by the elements and the shore end of it had been rebuilt using railroad iron (rails) for pilings. Although Parker did not remember just to whom the structure had belonged or who maintained it, he knew it had been used by everyone in town who had any use for a pier and there had been no wharfage charges. It was known to all as "the depot wharf."

Parker's first acquaintance with the local waterfront began in 1889, the year the Hotel Del Monte burned down for the first time, when he was sent here by the Wells-Fargo Express company to handle the firm's local business. His office had been in a little building about 100 yards east of "the depot wharf."

In years gone by, Mrs. Birks reports, there was an enclosure in which were several locked compartments where fishermen kept their supplies of boxes for shipping fish to San Francisco.

Marketing of fish in those days was "absurdly simple." The general idea was that a fisherman shipped his daily catch to some firm of his choice in San Francisco. On Monday checks came via mail. If a fisherman was discontented with his returns from one firm, he would choose another buyer for the next week. There was probably as much discussion among the hook and line

fishermen of those days as there was later when sardines were plentiful and on the market.

Boats were handled by sail power till the early days of this century when small, powered gas boats began to be used. It was probably around 1915 that the city government decided to move the whole fish business over to Fishermen's Wharf.

We found in "Monterey Guide Book" published in 1875 that the Monterey and Salinas Railroad was destined for a place in history, because it was the first narrow gauge in California. Moreover, it was a "people's movement" directed against a monopoly which was not doing right by the public. The Southern Pacific terminus on the coast was at Soledad. There was no line into Monterey.

The Guide Book tells this story: "With view of making better shipping facilities for Salinas Valley grain growers some 72 stockholders formed the narrow gauge railroad company and, between spring and fall of 1874, built the track and wharf. The route from Salinas was through the area where Blanco now is to the coast near Prattco and so to Monterey. Beside the two terminals Bardin was the only station, out where the track crossed the River. First train in public service made the run on Oct. 28, 1874."

The narrow-gauge line's life was short. It went out of business in 1876 and some of its equipment went to the Mother Lode gold mining country where J. F. Kidder built a narrow-gauge railway. He had been one of the stockholders in the local venture.

Reason for the failure of the narrow gauge was that the Southern Pacific extended its line to Castroville. But the narrow gauge had accomplished its main purpose. It had forced a reduction of freight rates to San Francisco. The freight from the narrow gauge had been picked up by the shipping firm of Goodall, Nelson and Perkins, who sent their steamers into Monterey to pick up general cargo.

It is interesting to note that two of the small engines used on the narrow gauge were named "C. S. Abbott" and "Monterey." So, the narrow gauge wharf had a long and checkered career. The wrecker paid the City of Monterey \$50 for the material in it in 1940.