

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Dining On The Flatcars

Mr. E. J. Bolce of Pine street in New Monterey expresses the wonder if many of our readers know about the various railroad lines that operated in the Salinas area in bygone days?

First there was the Narrow Gauge from Salinas to Moss Landing. This line had its starting point on the right side of the county road going toward the river and about halfway between the river and Salinas. It hauled wheat on flat-cars for water shipment from Moss Landing which was the terminal. The rails extended right into the warehouse so the wheat was always protected from the weather. "Whenever we had a picnic at Moss Landing we used flatcars for the dining room table," Mr. Bolce recalls.

Next we find in 1897 a rail line was built from the proposed site of Spreckels Sugar factory to the rock quarry below Alisal and hauled rock used at the factory site.

On the left side if the road going toward the river, a passenger line operated form Salinas to Spreckels. "When that train came a tooting along South Main street in Salinas how the horses did scatter," Mr. Bolce remembers.

When summer school vacation came around Mr. Bolce would hook up two or four horses to a wagon and take the schoolchildren and their parents for a hayride and picnic in the Gabilan canyon. They would take along rope for swings, sacks for sack races and a baseball for games. The late Mr. R. A. Stirling, supervisor, and his wife Mabel, former owners of the Natividad Boys' Ranch, would attend the picnic. Mr. and Mrs. Charles Curn, former owner of what is now the Sheriff's Posse headquarters, would also be present at this big event of the summer.

Mr. Bolce also recalls that long before the Flag was raised on Fremont's Peak, his sons would make the ascent to the top of the mountain from the San Benito side on motorcycles. Gabilan creek has its source in Gabilan canyon on the western side of the peak which was named for Gen. John Charles Fremont of the hard-riding California Battalion who carried on his campaign In Monterey and California in 1846-47.

Another of E. J. Bolce's recollections is that of a one-man outfit, about 1914, with a tractor and long wagon hauling rock from the hills where Permanente is now working and making one or two trips each day to the railroad in Salinas for shipment. These heavy loads and steel wagon tires certainly cut up the roads and made a bumpy ride for the others using this road.

Mr. Bolce described Lagunita during our interview with him. "When I took charge of Lagunita it was owned by a San Jose businessman, Mitchell Phillips. When I first saw Lagunita as a child it owned by Hon. J.R. Hebbbron, a member of the State Board of Equalization. There was a depression near the house that filled with water during the rains in winter, forming a pond or lagoon – hence the name Lagunita. This was also part of the Battle of Natividad. The Hebbbron boys had built a flume from farther up on the creek and ran fresh water into the lagoon, forming a lake of about five acres. The house was of adobe construction with a second story of wood added. The lake had two boats and was stocked with carp.

"At the entrance of the driveway Eucalyptus logs were set vertically in the ground with longer logs set horizontally on them and here the name 'Lagunita' was cut. The ranch consisted of 1,250 acres. The ranchers above used a dairy road when they went to town with 'right of way' privileges. The state finally bought the road and extended it to San Juan making a concrete highway from Salinas to all points north. This road was in use until the present 101 was completed.

Mr. Bolce was a trustee of the Natividad School District for 17 years, part of the time as clerk. One year a teacher was needed and his niece was just graduated for San Jose Normal, so he got the job for her. She was there four years and had the privilege of signing the diplomas for three of her uncle's sons, "Ethel Irving, a cousin."