

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Narrow Gauge**

"Whatever may be the fate of this road in the future, it will always be memorable in the commercial history of California as the first narrow-gauge railroad built in the State; and also as a road built by the people for the people. To contend with a great and powerful monopoly, and to save the grain growers of the district no less than \$200,000 a year."

The above is quoted from the "Hand Book of Monterey" in 1876. This railroad was commenced in April, and finished in October, 1874. All interested in it devoted their time and means without stint, especially C. S. Abbott the president; David Jacks, the treasurer; and John Marley, secretary. J. F. Kidder was the chief engineer and superintendent of construction. The iron came from the Pacific Rolling Mills in San Francisco, and Falkner & Bell & Co.'s place. The locomotives, "C. S. Abbott," and "Monterey" from the Baldwin Locomotive Co. in Pennsylvania. The cars which were superior in every respect, were built in Monterey by Thomas Carter.

We have before us a letter from Jeffery Wetmore, a confessed rail enthusiast or railfan, who was interested in recent report in the Diary head "Dining on a Flat Car."

Mr. Wetmore adds more information to that material regarding the first railroads in Monterey and the State.

Gilbert H. Kneiss, now assistant to the president of the Western Pacific Railroad Company, states that "...the Monterey & Salinas Valley Railroad was the first narrow gauge in the State ..." (Bonanza Railroad, Stanford University Press, 1946.)

Fredrick Shaw, Clement Fisher, and George H. Harlan state "...Kidder's (John F.) greatest job thus far had been the Monterey & Salinas Valley Railroad, California's first steam operated narrow-gauge railroad. This slim-gauge pike, eighteen miles long and connecting the towns of Monterey, on the Pacific Coast, and Salinas, trading center for the great interior Salinas Valley, was completed in October 1874. It was highly important at the time because it gave the wheat farmers in the valley an easier and cheaper route to the deep-water shipping lines out of Monterey Bay."

"Not as the Monterey & Salinas Valley Railroad did this line come into being," continue Shaw, Fisher and

Harlan, "even the paper stage through which all the railroads passed in their early beginnings. The road was first called the Monterey & Natividad Railroad in 1868. Kidder was employed by a San Francisco steamship company to run a survey of the line which he proceeded to do in less than two months. Nothing further came of the matter after Kidder had filed his report."

"In 1872 the Southern Pacific Railroad, building south, reached Salinas, but kept building south. The deep-water port of Monterey to the west was of no interest to the larger company. Back to their plows and harrows went the farmers but not for long. Two years after the Southern Pacific bade them hail and farewell at Salinas, the valley farmers and the businessmen met on February 26, 1874, to unite for action. So great was the interest in the projected railroad that only one month was required to compose the articles of incorporation, to budget the finances, and to solicit sales and pledges of stock. Then began the actual work of grading and laying the rails, work beginning from the Monterey end of the line. Heading the construction was John F. Kidder in his newest assignment as chief engineer and superintendent."

"Of the eighteen miles of main line, only that portion crossing the Salinas River presented any real obstacle. In the main, the railroad followed the rolling terrain of the Salinas Valley from the shores of the Monterey Bay on the Pacific Coast to the important inland farming center of Salinas. At this point, a large warehouse was constructed for the sacking and storing of grain prior to eventual shipping into ocean-going holds. At the Monterey end of the line, a 1000-foot wharf was constructed from logs which grew in the nearby stands of timber in Santa Cruz County." Quotes taken from Shaw, Fisher, and Harlan. "Oil Lamps and Iron Ponies", Bay Books, Inc. San Francisco, 1949.