

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Early Monterey Railway

The "Handbook of Monterey," in describing the railroad built in 1874 between Monterey and Salinas to provide shipping facilities by water from the Monterey port, states: "Although the road is a narrow-gauge with only three feet between the rails, the cars are so designed that the passengers hardly realize any difference from those of the broad-gauge, and have ample room and accommodation."

The early railroad commenced running Oct. 28, 1874, too late to carry much grain from the valley but its early completion had been a fact in August, thereby compelling the S.P. to make a reduction from \$5.50 per ton to \$4.25 for freight on grain to San Francisco. The M.S.V.R.R. carried about 6,000 tons in 1874, loaded by H. L. Richardson at Monterey. The freight on merchandise from San Francisco to Salinas was \$7.20; the S.P. reduced to \$6. Salinas was supplied with redwood lumber from Watsonville and pine from San Francisco. Later redwood was brought from Santa Cruz and pine from Puget Sound, which came to Monterey as cheap as to San Francisco, and only had to be freighted 20 instead of 120 miles.

Among the 72 stockholders in the railroads company were the following landowners and farmers: David Jacks, C. S. Abbott, A. and M. Gonzales, Robert McKee, Frances Doud, P. Zabala, Jessie D. Carr, James Barden, John Abbott, J. B. H. Cooper, Charles McFadden, J. M. Soto, B. V. Sargent and Charles Underwood, all still prominent names in Monterey and the county.

In June 1874 the work began on the wooden wharf extending 1,000 feet northwest the water level to accommodate ship's boats, small craft and, whether planned or not, fishermen. The Monterey Democrat predicted that the wharf would be "a famous stand for fishermen, who will be able from it to indulge their taste as thoroughly as if they were out in boats, but without danger of seasickness!"

By the middle of July the wharf was out 624 feet, with the planking and trackage into Monterey Bay. Piles were brought in by schooner, and some were obtained from the pine forest behind town. A piledriver was assembled and on June 18 the 2,900-pound hammer dropped the first pile. "The problem from then on was

whether or not the carpenters would be able to keep up with the pile driver," reports Edward T. Planer in Bulletin No. 66 of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society, "The Monterey & Salinas Valley Railroad," Boston, 1945.

Planer goes on to say: "As with many railroads, the Monterey & Salinas Valley Railroad suffered from a shortage of laborers. Like the Central Pacific, it sought to solve the trouble by importing Chinese workers. The management of the railroad however, pointed out very patiently that the Chinese had been brought in only after an insufficient number of workers had signed up. There was still plenty of work for all who wished it, concluded the announcement. That finished the controversy."

On October 9, 1874 the first train poked into the yards at Salinas, exactly seven months from the beginning of work on the line.

Edward T. Planer Jr., now secretary of the Pacific Coast Chapter, Railway and Locomotive Historical Society, states that, "In August 1879, the Southern Pacific purchased the M.&S.V.R.R. for an undisclosed sum. During the fall, that section from Castroville Junction to Monterey was broad-gauged so that trains could run through from Santa Cruz and points north directly to Monterey. In the reconstruction, the original line's Salinas River Bridge and roadbed was used. The portion into Salinas from Castroville was abandoned. The broad-gauge section was opened to traffic in January 1880."

Thus passed California's first steam-operated narrow-gauge railroad.