

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Freight Rates In Old Days

Old timers will recall, according to Jeffery Wetmore of Monterey, that the present Pacific Coast Railway (no longer in existence) originally known as the San Luis Obispo Railroad, was built in 1873 between San Luis and Port Hartford, but it used horsepower until 1874, the year of the completion of the Monterey and Salinas Valley Pike. Thus the emphasis on steam operation in establishing the Salinas Valley lines is its unique distinction in California Railroad history.

The Handbook of Monterey, 1873, reports "The road, warehouses, wharfs, cars, engines, etc., everything included, cost \$357,000."

Edward T. Planer of the Railroad Historical Society, writes in the Monterey & Salinas Valley Railroad (Boston 1945), Bulletin 66: "Not only is it the first narrow gauge in California, but (says the Monterey newspaper of Oct. 10, 1874) according to the opinion of some of the railroad men of out-of-state whose opinions are to be relied on, it is one of the best constructed railroads on the coast."

There is also a brief history of the line in an article written by the public relations bureau of the Southern Pacific Company, 65 Market St., San Francisco. (Anonymous, The Western Railroader, "The Del Monte Limited: Southern Pacific's Oldest Train." November 1953).

The story of the Monterey and Salinas Valley Railroad as written by Edward Planar is an interesting one to be sure, in the opinion of Mr. Wetmore. It contains many old family names of this area and the names of many familiar locations.

Weighing, loading, freight, and wharfage from Salinas to San Francisco, by Monterey and S.F.R.R. and G.N.P. Steamers, was \$3.75; by M.&S.V.R.R. to Monterey was \$1.75. In other words it cost \$3.75 to get the grain (when not stored) to deep water shipping, by S.P. to San Francisco, and \$1.75 to deep water shipping at Monterey; if the grain was stored for the season, \$1 per season.

In an historical volume published by J.M. Guinn "Our Yesterdays" we find this reference to the Monterey – Salinas Railroad "...a proposition was made and endorsed to build a narrow gauge railroad from Salinas

to Monterey and ship wheat by sailing vessel to foreign ports. The estimated cost of the railroad was \$250,000 and for the purpose of building the railroad a meeting was held in Grange Hall, Salinas, February 26, 1874; \$20,000 was subscribed and the following directors elected: Alfred Gonzales and Robert McKee of Monterey; Carr S. Abbott and William Robertson of Salinas; and A.L. Boggs and Thomas Hildreth of San Jose. Grading was begun in Monterey and on that day a number of people visited the old town anticipating a celebration.

"The railroad, 18 miles in length, cost \$352,450. Including 1,100 feet of trestle, a 300 foot bridge over the Salinas River. The road was completed September 4, 1874, and it was a financial failure from the start, earning only \$1,037 in the first year ending June 30, 1876. The cause of the failure was due to 'the shortsighted policy of the farmers in whose interests the road had been built,'" according to Guinn's opinion.

As soon as the Salinas-Monterey railroad was ready for business, the Southern Pacific Railroad lowered prices for passengers and freight. The farmers continued to patronize the monopoly and the narrow gauge immediately saw its finish with Carr S. Abbott and William Robertson losers: The road was finished in January, 1880.