

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **The Old Del Monte Express**

While I take a brief vacation and travel by motor to Nevada City to talk and show the Monterey History and Art Assn. slides of historic adobes in Monterey to the Nevada County Historical Society, we will have a substitute, editor in the person of Malcolm W. Steel of Carmel, who will tell a delightful story about the old "Del Monte Express," in which we are all interested just now.

The meeting of the Nevada County Historical Society will be held at - Rough and Ready, a gold-digging community not far from Nevada City, Ray Polk is the president of the group and one of the leaders of preservation and restoration of sites and buildings in the county. I plan to do my best to make known to the membership what the Monterey History and Art Assn. means to Monterey, and what we have accomplished here to save history for future generations.

Mr. Steel always interested in the history of railroads, writes those entertaining facts concerning the "Del Monte Express" and the happenings along the route from San Francisco to Pacific Grove.

Whenever the subject of railroads and ships becomes conversation, I automatically enter into it. This time it happens to be in connection with the decision on the part of the Southern Pacific Co. to discontinue the old "Del Monte" or the "Del Monte Express," the story of the hearing appearing in The Herald on Sept 21.

Taking the story back to the days prior to the great San Francisco disaster of 1906, the Del Monte Express followed the original route out of the city through the Mission District with a stop at Valencia Street Station before climbing to the high point of some 300 feet at Ocean View.

From there on, it was easy sailing to San Jose and into the large, covered train shed, fashioned after those of Europe but somewhat cruder. Perhaps San Jose was the longest stop, for any rail trip of 50 miles or more was something which was planned long in advance, therefore entailed the problem of the loading and unloading of much baggage. Again, as rail transportation was the only means of travel, stations were always filled with people arriving or departing.

Moving slowly through San Jose with warning gongs ringing at every street crossing, it was always a must to look for the giant tower on Santa Clara avenue, bearing a powerful electric arc light. It was the city's version of the Eiffel Tower, no doubt and which to the best of my recollection, was made away with by old man earthquake which spared nothing in its path.

Arrival at Gilroy seemed to call for a delay for no apparent reason. Perhaps it was a coffee break for the train crew or perhaps the Southern Pacific simply wanted the passengers to become well acquainted with Gilroy. If anyone was entitled to a coffee break on every rail trip in the country in those days, it was the fireman in the engine cab who, with a soot-covered face, had a real job shoveling coal into a hungry furnace and the heat of the Santa Clara Valley in the "summer months did not ease this task.

Old, old-timers recalled a popular play at the California Theater in San Francisco, entitled "Hole in the Ground," based upon a washout somewhere south of the city. To break the monotony of the delay to the progress of the train, one of the passengers read the timecard on the station wall aloud, making a little poetry of it, e.g.: "From San Francisco to San Jose, from San Jose to Monterey, on the Southern Pacific Railway," etc. Presumably, it was the Del Monte Express which was delayed by the hole in the ground.

If the Del Monte Express was delayed in theory by the "hole in the ground," no doubt it was unable to make its scheduled trip from Pacific Grove to San Francisco on the morning of April 18, 1906, a date never to be forgotten by old-timers living in the area from Santa Rosa to Salinas.