

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

February 2, 1966

The Del Monte Express

The Trailblazer, published by the California Pioneers of Santa Clara County, incorporated in 1875, has an article, written by Arthur M. Fisk, concerning the Del Monte Express which should be of interest to all persons here at the end of the line.

October 11, 1965 the Interstate Commerce Commission turned down a request of the Southern Pacific Company to discontinue the Del Monte between San Francisco and Monterey. A similar request was denied the Southern Pacific by the State Public Utilities Commission in March 1964.

The Del Monte is the oldest named train in the United States in continuous service.

The Del Monte Limited was inaugurated April 28, 1889 as trains number 13-12 between San Francisco and Monterey, in June 15, 1890 the train numbers were changed to 15-14 and the service extended to Pacific Grove, and in June 25, 1899 the train numbers to 2-4. In April 1903 the name was changed to Del Monte Express and the train numbers to 27-28. In June 1927 the word Express was dropped and it became Del Monte. In April 24, 1932 the numbers were changed to 35-36. In July 10, 1947 the Del Monte again changed train numbers to 77-78, and in February 1955 the Del Monte became powered with diesel-electric locomotives and maintained the fastest mainline scheduled in this district.

"I can't help but reminisce a little bit as I was engineer on the local Del Monte for five years, 1954 through 1958. It was a three hour run from Pacific Grove to San Francisco. Around the beautiful Monterey Bay with its fleet of fishing boats, and out into the sun between the still inlets of Elkhorn Slough where the big white cranes walking on stilts, pick up a morning frog for breakfast. Out amongst the apple blossoms in Pajaro Valley, up through Chittenden Pass and out in the open once more among the prune and apricot blossoms of the beautiful Santa Clara Valley. On through the traffic congested San Francisco Peninsula to the city by the Golden Gate." That is a very true description of a very early morning ride on the Del Monte.

Mr. Fisk goes on: "Everybody knew everybody else on the Del Monte and coffee was a must in the club car. At

4 o'clock in the afternoon the Del Monte returned with the same passengers and everybody knew if you left the spoon in the coffee cup, the coffee wouldn't slop over the edge.

"Before World War II the Del Monte was curtained and tasseled and boasted of green plush seats with antimacassars. All the Big People rode down to the magnificent Hotel Del Monte. Presidents and bankers and stock brokers. The ambition of every small boy was to be the engineer on the Del Monte, with a striped cap, a hand on the throttle and the lonely whistle blow for all the grade crossing."

For anyone interest in railroads or railroading I recommend "Nevada County Narrow Gauge" written by Gerald M. Best with 284 photographs, maps, diagrams and rosters. If you are a railroad enthusiast this experience may never be surpassed. If you are a historian you have glimpsed, in action, a facet of westward expansion which had great impact on civilization in the last century.

The NCNG was a short line which served California's northern mines. It had the highest bridges, most spectacular trestles, and the most dedicated supporters any line could want. It was as beloved during its long life as it is today in memory. Track diagrams and maps are also included.

The NCNG was first run by a benevolent dictator, then by a woman, and then enjoyed its most prosperous days when it was saved by an unusual community effort. This book gives an endearing short line, mainline coverage the NCNG deserves.

"Nevada County Narrow Gauge: by Gerald M. Best, was published by Howell-North Books of Berkeley, California in 1965.