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STEAM RAILROADS OF SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY

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In the beginning of things, man left very few traces of his comings and goings on the area that we call the Old West. The Indian left a scattering of arrowheads, and here and there the coals of a burned-out campfire. Then the white man came, and his wheels cut wagon trails and stagecoach roads, some of which are now ambiguously preserved in the form of super-highways. He built settlements and set about the business of living on a frontier. He produced goods, and he needed other goods. Inevitably he began to concern himself with the establishment and improvement of trade routes in all directions. There were, of course, the wagon routes, and there were rivers and canals. But it was only with the advent of the railroads that the West stepped into its rightful place of importance in the nation.

Situated as it was in the center of the great surge of migration and commerce, San Joaquin County felt in a singular way the impact of the railroads on its life and economy.

With the discovery of a large deposit of copper at Copperopolis in 1860, Stockton became the city of export for impressive amounts of copper ore, most of which went to supply northern industries manufacturing war material for the Union Army. In one month 6,000 tons of ore were produced and hauled to Stockton by teams of horses, at a monthly cost of \$33,000 in freight rates. In Stockton it was loaded on river boats and shipped, at additional cost, to San Francisco. Obviously, a railroad from Copperopolis to Stockton would greatly reduce the cost of transport.

A company called the Stockton and Copperopolis Railroad was organized in 1865, with a capital stock of \$1,500,000 and with E. S. Holden as president. In March, 1867, the company obtained from the United States Government a right-of-way over public land and a land grant of 200,000 acres, with the stipulation that the road must be completed in two years. By 1870 the railroad was in operation on tracks laid down the center of Weber Avenue to a depot located on the levee near the head of the channel. The Stockton and Copperopolis never completed the line to Copperopolis, but terminated at Peters, some fifteen miles east of Stockton. Because of reduced demand for copper after the war, the mines were closed, and the Stockton and Copperopolis found itself on the verge of bankruptcy. To remedy this the directors transferred their rights and property to another corporation, the California Pacific Company, which completed the rail line to Milton, about fifteen miles west of Copperopolis. The first locomotive passed over the line to the waterfront on December 13, 1870.

In 1874 the railroad was leased to the Central Pacific Company, and was purchased outright by the Southern Pacific in 1888. Trains ran down Weber Avenue until the rails were removed in 1901, with the Southern Pacific depot becoming the terminous of the line. The twelve-mile section from Peters to Milton was abandoned in 1940.

The Stockton and Visalia Railroad, an extension of the Stockton and Copperopolis, was built from Peters to Oakdale, a distance of nineteen miles, in 1871, and operated as an independent company until December 1874, at which time it was leased to the Central Pacific Railroad and consolidated with the Stockton and Copperopolis.

The Western Pacific, a subsidiary of the Central Pacific, built a railroad line from Sacramento to Stockton in 1869. The line reached Lodi on August 4, 1869, and Stockton on August 12, 1869. The company had been organized in 1862 to build a railroad from Sacramento to San Jose by way of Stockton. The company had wanted a right-of-way along Sutter Street in the heart of the city, with the privilege of erecting a depot and warehouse, but the citizens fought these plans and forced the company to come in one block east of the city limits, which was Aurora Street. The depot was established on Sacramento Street between Market and Washington. Leland Stanford, president of the Central Pacific, threatened to "make the grass grow in the streets of Stockton", because of the opposition of the citizens, and located the division terminal at Lathrop rather than in Stockton. However, this threat was never accomplished because of Stockton's position at the head of river shipping bound for the southern mines of the Mother Lode.

The arrival of the first train was the cause for a tremendous celebration and at least 4,000 people were present for the event. Condy's Cornet Band was on hand to greet the visitors who were loaded on a handsomely decorated forty-two-car train which was pulled by the locomotive Governor Stanford. Two bands from Sacramento joined in a parade, as did eighty firemen and their hand fire-engine-pumper from Confidence Company No. 1. As the train pulled into the depot, Army Captain Robert Hanks of the Union Guard fired a thirty-gun salute, and all the bells in town rang. Almost all of the merchants closed their stores for the occasion. The large parade down Weber Avenue was led by Grand Marshal George S. Evans, a Mexican War veteran. The Fire Department, the Union Guard, and the Pioneers were given a banquet at the Eureka Engine House, and the Pioneers were entertained at the Yosemite House. So many visitors were in town that all the restaurants ran out of food, and the grocery stores did a thriving business in crackers, cheese, and sardines. At five o'clock the fire bell atop the courthouse was rung as a signal that the train would leave for Sacramento in one hour.

The railroad was completed to Oakland on September 7, and the first train was run on September 10. However, the bridge over the San Joaquin River at Mossdale was not finished until November 10. A ferry was used to transfer the passengers and freight across the river until the bridge was completed.

When the first depot was erected in 1869, a dirt fill was used to level the walk along the track from Market Street, and during the first winter the mud was unbearable for man and beast. The dust during summer was just as bad. Eventually complaints from the customers forced the company to put in a plank walk. Later on, gravel was hauled in and a path widened for vehicles. A new Southern Pacific depot was built in 1892 between Main Street and Weber Avenue, and the old one moved to West Main Street to be used as a warehouse. The present Southern Pacific depot was completed about 1930.

In February, 1868, the San Joaquin Valley Railroad Company was incorporated. This was the name under which the Central Pacific built south from Lathrop into Stanislaus County. The road had not been placed in operation when it was consolidated with the C.P.R.R. in August, 1870.

Cracking the monopoly of the Southern Pacific in the San Joaquin Valley was a formidable task. The valley shippers refused to wear the yoke of the Southern Pacific, and waged war against the railroad, and its president, C. P. Huntington, by organizing the "people's railroad". Widespread dissatisfaction with the Southern Pacific showed itself in persistent complaints against local freight rates which were held to be highly discriminatory in character. The monopolistic tendencies of the powerful corporation and its alleged domination over the political life of California were hard to fight. Shippers claimed that a car could be sent from California to New York more cheaply than from the same shipping point to Bakersfield or San Francisco. Many charged that pack animals were cheaper than the Southern Pacific, and pack trains were often seen working between towns of the San Joaquin Valley served by Southern Pacific rails. The only way to fight the Southern Pacific at its own game was to build another railroad down the San Joaquin Valley and connect with the New Santa Fe.

In June, 1893, a committee of shippers was appointed to solicit subscriptions for the San Francisco & San Joaquin Valley Railroad. The line would begin at Stockton and proceed due south to Bakersfield. Passengers and freight destined for San Francisco and other bay region ports would be transferred at Stockton to a steamer. Subscriptions were few at first, many shippers fearing the long arm of the Southern Pacific. Another meeting of the committee was held during January 1895, and it was decided that once and for all the railroad was to be built or the idea given up completely. All agreed that the railroad was sorely needed. But the money required kept voices weak. The success of the meeting can be credited to Claus Spreckels, leading sugar refiner on the Pacific coast, who subscribed half a million dollars, augmented by a hundred thousand from each of his sons, John D. and Rudolph. This brought swift changes to the whole enterprise. Wide publicity was given to the new railroad, and large numbers of small and fractional subscriptions came from farmers up and down the San Joaquin Valley. As a result, to employ the words of one historian, Professor Stuart Daggett, "It may be said that there has probably never been a commercial enterprise launched on the coast so advertised, praised, and predicted about as was the projected San Francisco and San Joaquin Valley Railroad. Participation in the movement became a test of local patriotism".

Actual construction began at Stockton July 22, 1895, when a shipment of rails and ties arrived by steamer. Grading, bridging, and track-laying moved quite rapidly, as the route was almost at water level in many areas. The line was completed from Stockton to Fresno early in October 1896. A mammoth celebration barbecue was held, and festivities lasted several days. The occasion was more like a fair than like the opening of a new railroad. The celebration marking the completion of the line into Bakersfield took place on May 27, 1898, and the scene duplicated the Fresno event.

While the Valley Road failed to fulfill the hopes of its projectors, and while from a purely financial standpoint it did not justify its organization, it may nevertheless be deemed justifiable on the grounds of local rate reductions and subsequent development of the entire San Joaquin Valley.

Steps were continually being taken to prevent stock from being purchased by the Southern Pacific or their agents. When the Santa Fe began negotiations for the purchase of the Valley Road, a few brows were raised, and many shippers looked

forward to the eventual sale and another route east. The Santa Fe had given assurance to the owners that the competing line would be preserved at all costs. The story that Santa Fe President Ripley called on S. P.'s Huntington to tell him of the completed sale. Huntington is said to have remarked, "Yes, I knew you had bought it. This is a sad day for me and the Southern Pacific. I had longed for the time when Spreckels would come and beg me to take the white elephant off his hands."

Completion of the final link between Stockton and Point Richmond involved a series of engineering feats. One was the crossing of the tule swamps between Stockton and the San Joaquin River where living and dead tule plants reached a depth of 10 to 25 feet. Canals were dredged on each side of the proposed right-of-way for a distance of sixteen miles. As the muck was removed, it was piled high in the middle to form a base some 100 feet wide. After water had been drained and a crust formed, clay, rocks, and sand were added in alternating layers, and thus a firm foundation was formed upon which tracks were laid.

May 1, 1900, found the first freight train making its way over the new line between Stockton and Point Richmond. Passenger service followed on July 1. Locomotive #250 and a string of polished cars left Richmond and passed through Franklin Canyon and over the tule bogs into Stockton. The last obstacles had been conquered in building the line from Stockton to San Francisco.

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This article on Steam Railroads of San Joaquin County will be completed in the May issue of the San Joaquin Historian.