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STEAM RAILROADS OF SAN JOAQUIN COUNTY -- PART II

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On the evening of June 11, 1880, there had been a big railroad meeting in Stockton, with an ambitious proposal to build a narrow gauge railroad from Stockton to Bodie, over the Sierra via Big Trees. There was plenty of enthusiasm, so following the meeting a gentleman named A. C. Pausell spent three weeks trying to get subscriptions to finance a survey, but met with no success.

The seed of an idea had been planted, however, and the need for a railroad from a river port to the foothills was on the minds of many grain farmers in the area. Railroad rates to San Francisco were too high, and the City of Stockton, where the farmers stored their grain, was about to pass an ordinance charging a storage tax.

Some years before, Jacob Brack, a wealthy farmer, had purchased 10,000 acres of mostly swamp and tule land west of Lodi from the old Fisher Estate with the idea of providing his own river port. Jacob Brack then set about the task of reclaiming much of the land and building a fifty foot-wide ship canal from the South Fork of the Mokelumne River, up Hog Slough to high land, a little over two miles in total length. The project involved what was then a vast sum of money, but in 1881 the canal was completed and the first steamer, the S. S. Caroline, arrived at the eastern terminus of the canal which had been named Brack's Landing. The canal could take vessels up to a draft of 25 feet, and boats stopped every other day taking all grain offerings at cheap rates for either San Francisco or Sacramento.

Meanwhile, to the east, James B. Sperry, the owner of the Calaveras Big Trees, was dreaming of bringing tourists to his wonderful grove by railroad instead of over fifty miles of rough and dusty stagecoach road. While the season for stage coaches, and for Sperry's resort, was only about five months of the year, a rail entry, as Sperry envisioned, would make the Big Trees both a summer and a winter resort. Then too, extensive timber interests would become valuable with a rail outlet to markets.

These needs brought Brack, Sperry, and the farmers together and they in turn interested a Sacramento capitalist and promoter, one Frederick Birdsall, in the project of building a railroad with, of course, Birdsall himself as president. A number of routes were considered, but the one chosen was from Brack's Landing

through Lodi to Wallace, with extensions later to Calaveras Big Trees and a branch to Stockton. Mr. I. Wallace was the engineer who located the line, and the town of Wallace was named in his honor. Actually the line was built in two directions from Lodi, which was located on the line of the Southern Pacific. The narrow gauge construction went westward to Woodbridge and then jogged slightly northward for about five miles to Brack's Landing. Eastward the line was built to Lockeford and Wallace, with grain warehouses at both locations.

The line was opened from Lodi to Woodbridge on July 7, 1882, and to Brack's Landing a few days later. In the other direction the three-foot-gauge line was completed to Lockeford in August, 1882; Clements in September, 1882; and to Wallace in October, 1882. Despite considerable difficulty, work on the line was completed to Burson in September, 1884, and to Valley Springs in April, 1885. This was as far as the San Joaquin and Sierra Rail Road was ever destined to go.

The road received its charter on March 28, 1882, a month after the arrival of its first locomotive, SJ&SN #1, the "Ernest Birdsall", named after the young son of the president. The road started service with two daily trains between Brack's Landing and Wallace connecting at Lodi with the Southern Pacific passenger and express trains. Steamers ran every other day between "The Landing" and San Francisco, and took barges as tows during the busy periods.

A strong bid was made to Stockton moneyed interests to secure capital to build a connection from Woodbridge to Stockton. In fact, a booklet, "San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada Rail Road Guide", was issued for distribution as a means of securing support for the Stockton extension.

No funds were forthcoming, however, and the railroad found it difficult to pay the \$9,000 annual interest on its bonds. Also, Frederick Birdsall, the president and leader of the project, passed away, and his widow, along with the directors, decided it would be best to sell the railroad. On May 15, 1888, the line was sold to the Northern Railway, a subsidiary of the Southern Pacific.

Jacob Brack went back to his "Landing" and decided to make the best river port in the area. He built a dredger at the cost of \$20,000, with which he commenced the reclamation of further land and building levees. It progressed rapidly until the spring of 1890, when the dredger was completely destroyed by fire. Not to be daunted, Brack built another dredger, at a cost of \$17,000, with which he completed the work and made a straight canal about sixty feet wide from the Mokelumne River and terminated it with an excellent harbor. A wharf forty feet wide was to be constructed around the harbor, a total distance of about 1200 feet. Sheds roofed with corrugated iron were planned, as was the construction of a number of spur tracks.

However . . . with the Southern Pacific now operating the narrow gauge, the freight didn't go to the Landing, but was placed on standard gauge cars at Lodi for the trip to San Francisco or Sacramento. Soon only an occasional train made the trip out to Brack's port on the river, and in 1897 the track from Woodbridge to Brack's Landing was abandoned and torn up.

As with all narrow gauge lines, the trans-shipment of freight to standard gauge was a costly item, and the San Joaquin and Sierra Nevada was no exception.

The Southern Pacific, then in the process of standard-gauging its other narrow gauge lines, undertook the rebuilding its Woodbridge-Valley Springs branch. On August 31, 1904, the job was completed and the last narrow gauge train made its final run.

Passenger traffic on weekdays never amounted to much, but on Sundays and holidays during the summer the Lockeford Picnic Grounds proved quite an attraction, with special trains coming from as far as Stockton and Sacramento. This spot was situated on the original Locke estate just south of the old Lockeford School, in a beautiful oak-wooded area. There was a racetrack, dance pavilion, band stand, and complete facilities for picnicking. With the passing years, time took its toll, and the Picnic Grounds fell into disuse, until it was finally closed in 1930.

Freight consisted of wheat, wine, mine products, and general merchandise, not in great quantities, but enough to keep the branch in operation. Then came cement, to bring unexpected traffic to the branch. It was the discovery of William Macnider in 1922 of enormous quantities of high grade limestone and shale suitable for the manufacture of cement in the area around the Kentucky House Inn. The Kentucky House had figured in Mother Lode history as a trading post and center of mining activities. It was a routine stopping place for stagecoaches because of its strategic location at the third crossing of the Calaveras River between Stockton and Murphys. The old frame landmark had for many years dominated a little valley bounded by rolling hills near the confluence of the Calaveritas Creek and the south fork of the Calaveras River.

The discovery of a William Wallace Mein, who had offices adjoining those of Macnider in San Francisco. Mein acquired a half interest in the property, and then set about to secure capital to work the deposits. In a short time he had acquired two million dollars in capital to start operations.

Transportation to and from the proposed site of the cement plant presented the first problem. After lengthy negotiations the Southern Pacific consented to extend its tracks from Valley Springs eight miles to North Branch, on the Calaveras River, with the condition that Mein and his associates would build the remaining five and a quarter miles to Kentucky House. Construction started on May 1, 1925, and on December 24, 1925, the first trainload of equipment arrived at the site of the new Calaveras Cement Company.

Officially the line did not open until January 20, 1926, but the big day was Sunday, May 9, 1926, when the formal opening of the plant was observed with an open house and barbecue attended by some 15,000 guests, the largest gathering ever held in Calaveras County, and two and a half times the county's population at the time.

On June 14, 1926, the first carload of cement left the plant consigned to the Lodi Lumber Company in Lodi. It was the beginning of a new era of business for the branch, for in the years that followed, Calaveras cement went out over the line for the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, McClellan Air Field, O'Shaughnessy Dam, and numerous other projects.

Any doubts in the minds of the Southern Pacific regarding the success of the Calaveras Cement enterprise were dispelled by the large shipments during the first two years. The S. P. agreed to purchase the five and a quarter miles built by the cement company at actual cost - \$255,000. The transfer of ownership was made on

April 28, 1929.

On January 21, 1932, hearings were held in Lodi on the application of the Southern Pacific to abandon passenger service on the branch, which was then in the form of mixed trains. The S. P.'s case presented to Albert Johnson, hearing the case for the State Railroad Commission, was simple enough. In a twenty-three-day period the Lodi-Valley Springs train carried only 35 passengers and the Lodi-Wood-bridge line a total of 7. Soon there-after the Railroad Commission granted permission for all passenger service to be discontinued.

The Alameda and San Joaquin Railroad was organized May 1, 1895, and completed July 1, 1896. It ran from Stockton west to Tesla, California, a distance of 36 miles. It was built for the specific purpose of hauling coal from what were thought to be fine deposits in Corral Hollow Valley. The present Western Pacific purchased this line July 25, 1903, and the portion of the road from Carbona to Ortega on the southern edge of Stockton is the main line of the Western Pacific today. From Ortega the A&SJ went along what is known today as Hunter Street to Hazelton Street and turned west until it reached Mormon Channel, and followed Mormon Channel to Stockton Channel. At this point the coal was transferred to barges and river boats. The distance from Carbona to Tesla was 13 miles, but the branch has been cut back to a point 2.3 miles from Carbona. Poor's Manual of Railroads for 1900 states that the A&SJ had three locomotives, of which two became, until they were scrapped, Numbers 121 and 122 of the Western Pacific.

As is probably commonly known, the Western Pacific is the youngest of the so-called trans-continental railroads, having been organized on March 3, and incorporated March 6, 1903. Construction began in Oakland, California, and at Salt Lake City, Utah, in January 1906. The last spike was driven on a high bridge in the California mountains at Keddie, near milepost 281, on November 1, 1909. The first passenger train arrived in Oakland August 22, 1910, although the road was not formally turned over to the operating department until July 1, 1911.

It will be of interest to note here that many eastern railroads had at various times shown an interest in building into California through the Feather River Canyon. However, they were always discouraged or thwarted in some way by the Southern Pacific.

Now the original builders of the Alameda and San Joaquin Railroad, merely by projecting their 36-mile railroad eastward to Salt Lake City and westward to San Francisco, and by registering these maps and surveys in the courthouses of the counties involved, won incontestable franchises.

They took these franchises east, and interested Jay Gould, the railroad financier, in their project. As a result the Western Pacific Rail Road was organized March 3, 1903.

The S. P. at this time tried one more little trick. The pioneer railroad between Sacramento and Oakland, completed in 1869, had also been named the Western Pacific, and the S. P., which had taken it over, still claimed the rights to the name. It took some strong threats of court action to persuade the S. P. to withdraw its objections.

The Stockton Terminal and Eastern is a small industrial railroad that serves the east side of Stockton. The line leaves Stockton, after passing over Highway 99,

and meanders through the countryside, terminating at a spot known as Bellota.

The S. T. & E's only claim to fame is the fact that as of 1953 it was operating the oldest steam locomotive in the United States. The road's #1 was purchased from the Southern Pacific in 1914, and had been built for the Central Pacific Railroad in 1867. In 1953 this locomotive was retired after 86 years of continuous service, and was donated to Travel Town in Los Angeles, where it can be seen today.

This small discourse makes no claims to being a scholarly study. It is merely a perusal of the highlights of the history of steam railroading in San Joaquin County. It is hoped that persons who are interested in this Valley and our County have had a few minutes of enjoyment in remembering with us the colorful past of it's railroads.

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SOCIETY NEWS

A bus tour arranged by Hazel Pampel was enjoyed by members on May 24. They went to see the Bidwell Mansion and Park in Chico, and to Oroville to see the Chinese Temple, the old Lott Home, the Pioneer Museum, and Oroville Dam.

The Society has established the San Joaquin County Museum Development Fund, to which checks payable to the society, marked as a donation to the museum, may be made and as such are deductible from income taxes. Memorials should give name of person memorialized and to whom notice should be sent.