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Sourisseau Academy

Smith-Layton Archive presents:

Santa Clara Valley's Railroad Lines

by Michael Pearce

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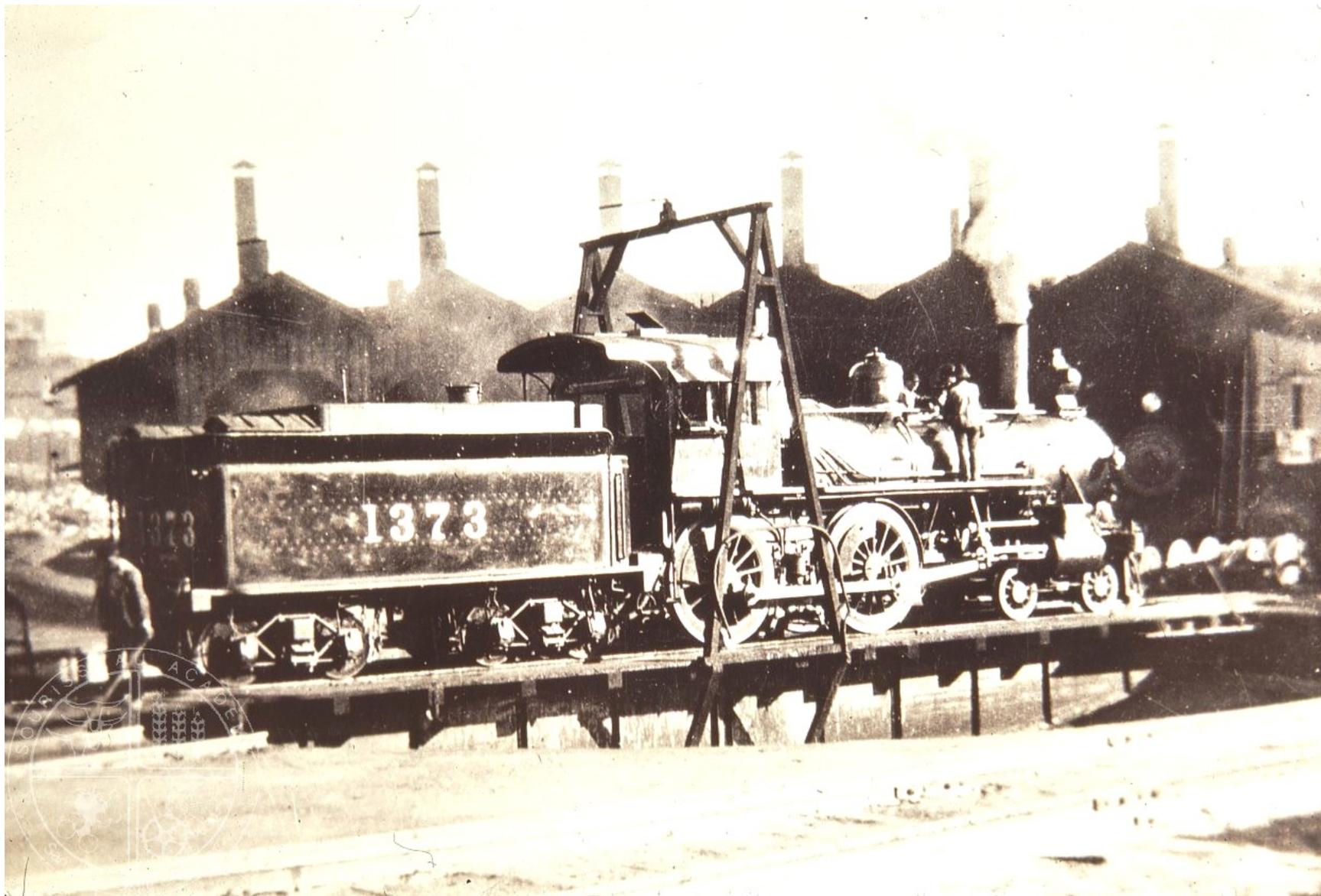
[83] **Bassett Street Depot.** San Jose's first railroad station was located near San Pedro and Bassett Streets. This station formed the southern terminus of the San Francisco & San Jose Railroad, which began passenger service on January 17, 1864. The railroad cut down what had been an eight-hour trip from San Francisco to San Jose to three-and-a-half hours. The photo above shows the station in its first year of operation.



[84] **Railroad crossing near El Palo Alto.** El Palo Alto - the tall tree - was an early railroad landmark near San Francisquito Creek. The first train to reach Santa Clara County arrived at the Mayfield (now Palo Alto) Station of the San Francisco & San Jose Railroad on October 17, 1863. Among its passengers were California Governor Leland Stanford and Oregon Governor A. C. Gibbs. One half of the twin tree, unfortunately, was lost in a storm in 1886.



[85] **Bridge to the Nation: Howe Truss Bridge along Central Pacific Line in Niles Canyon.** Niles Canyon was the Central Pacific Railroad's route through what is now Altamont Pass. Leland Stanford, then the former California governor, drove the Golden Spike on May 10, 1869, connecting the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific railroads. By September 6, 1869, the first eleven transcontinental passengers to reach the San Francisco Bay area by rail arrived at Niles Station. Regular passenger service from San Jose to Sacramento began the following day.



[86] **Lenzen Street Turntable.** The first “roundhouse” for the Southern Pacific standard gauge railroad line was in fact a square house with four stalls located near its Bassett Street Station. A competing railroad, the South Pacific Coast Railroad, which was a narrow gauge line, had a three-stall station on The Alameda. After the two railroads were merged, this nine-stall, dual gauge roundhouse built in 1893 on Lenzen Avenue replaced both structures.



[87] **Gilroy Station, 1930.** In early 1868, the Santa Clara & Pajaro Valley Railroad was incorporated to extend rail service south of San Jose through Santa Clara Valley. The line traveled along Fourth Street to the San Jose city limits, and freight and passenger service to Gilroy was inaugurated on April 8, 1869. Later in the year, the Central Pacific had ownership of all railroads in the region, including the Santa Clara & Pajaro Valley, the San Francisco & San Jose, and the Southern Pacific. Central Pacific was subsequently acquired by Southern Pacific Railroad. Southern Pacific replaced the early depot with this building in 1917 and it was closed in 1985. After restoration in 1998, the station is now the cornerstone of Gilroy's transit center.



[88] **Southern Pacific Train Rolling Down Fourth at Santa Clara Street, Circa 1935.** The Fourth Street alignment of Southern Pacific Railroad caused significant back ups of traffic at crossings and substantial noise in adjacent neighborhoods. A small passenger depot was located on Fourth near San Salvador Street. This portion of the line was closed in 1930, when the line was relocated to the west side of San Jose.



[89] **South Pacific Coast Railroad Station.** In 1876, Senator James G. Fair and Alfred E. Davis, both wealthy from the Comstock Lode silver strikes, established and incorporated the South Pacific Coast Railroad (SPCRR), a narrow-gauge line to compete with the Southern Pacific Railroad line in the South Bay. Construction on the SPCRR in Santa Clara County began at Dumbarton Point. The line continued down through Agnew and the city of Santa Clara to San Jose, and then further south through Los Gatos and the Santa Cruz Mountains. The San Jose passenger station, pictured here, was located just south of The Alameda, close to the present day Diridon Station.



[90] **North Portal of Wright's Tunnel in the Santa Cruz Mountains.** The construction of the South Pacific Coast line on the section between Los Gatos and Felton in the late 1870s proved to be an enormously costly endeavor in terms of human lives. Dozens of Chinese railroad workers were killed in a series of explosions while boring Wright's Tunnel near the town of Wright's Station. Construction pressed on, and by 1880 the line connected with the Santa Cruz and Felton line. Passenger service between the town of Alameda in Alameda County and the town of Santa Cruz commenced on May 15, 1880, a distance of just over 77 miles.



[91] **Wright's Station During Its Prime, Circa 1900.** Wright's Station began as a small logging town and became an important freight point along the SPCRR line by the mid-1880s. In 1885, a fire broke out at Grant's Hotel and destroyed the entire settlement. The town was rebuilt and was later promoted by the Southern Pacific as a tourist destination known as Sunset Park. Wright's flourished until the closure of the station and Sunset Park due to the 1906 earthquake. Although Sunset Park reopened in 1909, it never regained its previous popularity. The station closed in 1934 when the rail line through the Santa Cruz Mountains was permanently closed.



[92] **Southern Pacific's New Almaden Station.** Before 1850, New Almaden in southern Santa Clara Valley was an important center for mercury mining. The South Pacific Coast Railroad built a line to the area in early 1886, constructing its terminal at Harry Road. Southern Pacific Railroad, then co-owned by Leland Stanford, initially ran its line to nearby Greystone Quarry in order to procure sandstone to build Stanford University. Later, that line was extended to McKean Road and a depot was constructed there. Ultimately, talks between the two companies led to the buyout of the SPCRR by the behemoth Southern Pacific in 1887. When the rail line was finally abandoned, the rail alignment between Campbell and Almaden Road became Camden Avenue, the name combining Campbell and Almaden.



[93] **Earthquake damage to Lenzen Roundhouse.** The catastrophic 1906 Earthquake affected nearly every aspect of commerce in the South Bay, including the region's railroads. Pictured above, the Southern Pacific's Lenzen Avenue Roundhouse and turntable suffered substantial damage. Originally nine stalls, the roundhouse was rebuilt with fifteen. Additionally, much of the track in the region, including the new standard gauge track of the South Pacific Coast line through the Santa Cruz Mountains, suffered extensive damage that required years of reconstruction.



[94] **Western Pacific Railroad, Gathering at East San Jose Depot.** On August 23, 1922, 200 members of East Bay Chambers of Commerce assembled at the new Western Pacific depot, located at Santa Clara and 27th Streets in East San Jose, and listened to master of ceremonies, Dr. W. C. Bailey. Members rode the train from Oakland to celebrate the start of passenger service to and from San Jose. Western Pacific's service between Niles and East San Jose commenced five years earlier in 1917. The WP freight line was designed to serve neglected industrial and business districts and to benefit the tax base of the town of East San Jose. Western Pacific extended their freight line through Willow Glen to a terminal on The Alameda in order to service the canneries and fruit packers located there. The WP could then offer a direct route for freight to the Port of Oakland and was able to compete directly with the powerful Southern Pacific.



[95] **Willow Street Railroad Overpass.** As San Jose continued to grow in the early decades of the 20th Century, the need to reroute the Southern Pacific line away from the busy downtown area became apparent. Seeking to reroute the line through Willow Glen neighborhoods, the irate denizens of Willow Glen responded by incorporating as the city of Willow Glen in 1927. Court battles over alignments of Western Pacific and Southern Pacific ensued. This photo of the railroad overpass on Willow Street shows part of the alignment of the new route just before the opening in late December 1935.



[96] **Newly built Cahill Depot, Circa 1936.** Following lengthy delays due to both the Southern Pacific's legal battle with Willow Glen and the economic conditions of the Great Depression, the Cahill Street Depot finally opened in December 1935. It has since served as the central rail hub for Santa Clara Valley. The station is known for its distinctive Italian Renaissance Revival architecture and was featured in the opening of Alfred Hitchcock's film *Marnie*. In 1994, the depot was renamed San Jose Diridon Station after former Santa Clara County Supervisor Rod Diridon, a longtime transportation advocate.



[97] **Coast Daylight at Cahill Depot, Circa 1939.** In 1922, the Southern Pacific began a weekly passenger service between San Francisco and Los Angeles known as the Daylight Limited. This service was expanded to a daily, 12-hour trip each way. For a period in the 1920s, the Coast Daylight ran the longest nonstop route in the world. Pictured at the Cahill Depot in the late 1930s, the Coast Daylight would later be taken over by Amtrak in 1971, and its route merged into what is now the Coast Starlight service from Seattle to Los Angeles. Missing from the photo is the distinctive red, orange, and black color scheme of what was advertised as “the most beautiful passenger train in the world.”