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# *Sourisseau Academy*

*Smith-Layton Archive presents:*

## **Billboards on Wheels**

by Tom Layton

*Les Amis (The Friends)*

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[155] **Billboards on walls?** - Well before 1868, enterprising San Jose merchants along the east side of S. First Street were already slathering slogans across the fronts of their business establishments. They quickly realized, however, that messages painted on the sides of their delivery vehicles could reach a much larger populace.



[156] **Advertising Revenue for Early Transit?** Santa Clara Valley's first public transit system moved along the heavily traveled Alameda. Established in the mid-1870s by capitalist Samuel Bishop as the San Jose and Santa Clara Railroad Company, it merged when Jacob Rich organized a competing line as the People's Horse Railroad. The merger of the two resulted in the combined S.J. & S.C. H. R. R. by the 1880s, as revealed in the lettering. This little vehicle announces all its important destinations such as the San Jose depot. But it reserves its roof to advertise the BIG VALUES at Shively's Store on South First Street. Shively's sold dry goods and was known as The Nine Cent Store.



[157] **Hello FROM Aloha Ice Cream!** By the mid-1890s, unsightly billboard advertising was nowhere to be seen in the heart of Downtown. Here at the corner of First and Santa Clara Streets, even the signage of the First National Bank, located on the corner at the left, is very sedate. But the exuberant Aloha painted across a local delivery wagon suggests their ice cream sundae could be an exotic, Hawaiian adventure.





[158] **Sometimes Size Shows Efficiency...** This San Jose Transfer and Storage Company wagon was designed with small front wheels for ease of turning and oversized rear wheels to handle a very heavy load. The driver was seated well above the street for increased visibility. The Transfer Company signage on the side of the wagon suggests its competence by its large scale; it says this establishment thinks big and can handle an entire household no matter how large and weighty.



[159] **From Buggy . . .** The Troy Laundry Company, which originated in Troy, New York, was one of America's first nationally franchised businesses. Established in the 1870s, the company sold a complete line of laundry equipment, including washers, ironers, soap products and even yes... this buggy. Their 1891 equipment catalog notes it is their 8th catalog edition and lists the address of the San Francisco Sales Office. It was possible to establish an entire commercial laundry business using their hydraulic washers, drying racks, steam-powered mangles and collar starchers. Troy Laundry Companies could be found in most major American cities by 1900, including one on Almaden Avenue in San Jose.



[160] ] . . . **to Truck!** The success of the Troy Laundry Company had a great deal to do with their customer service and their willingness to upgrade and modernize, as evidenced by this image from 1916. Delivery trucks provided clean laundry to restaurants, hotels and other commercial establishments, as well as to residential customers. The Troy Laundry building, a San Jose Landmark, stood until the mid 1990s.



[161] **US Mail and Parcel Post** This spiffy 1914 Studebaker delivery van awaits a load of parcel post packages. At this time the San Jose Post Office building, located at the corner of S. Market and W. San Fernando Streets, had been newly rebuilt after the 1906 earthquake. Today, the building houses the San Jose Museum of Art.





[162] **Home delivery...a household necessity.** In the days before the two-car family, the Santa Clara Valley housewife depended on her telephone and the delivery services of her local merchants. Many grocery stores delivered, as did the butcher, the milkman and the baker. In 1917, the Sunnyvale Pioneer Bakery delivery truck was able to bring the yeasty odor of fresh bread from their ovens to your front door.





[163] **PG&E: Building Corporate Identity** By 1920, fully equipped, heavy-duty Pacific Gas & Electric Company trucks, chain-driven with solid rubber tires, were promoting reliable service throughout Santa Clara Valley. With their collection of ladders and a winch, this crew may be servicing the electrical lines. Pacific Gas & Electric was a relatively new company at the time; actually a consolidation of about 400 smaller California utility companies. The idea of combining an electrical service company with a gas utility was a new one, too. The company we know today as PG&E incorporated in 1905 and slowly began to replace San Jose's older gas and electric companies such as San Jose Light & Power and others.



[164] **Soda Pop - What Happened to *Wild Red* and *Blue Cream*?** By 1935, the Nehi Bottling Company delivery fleet was carrying soda pop from their warehouse at 67 N. San Pedro Street to help quench the thirsts of residents throughout the valley. The Nehi Company originated in Columbus, Georgia in 1905, according to *Wikipedia*. A local grocer bottled ginger ale and root beer, and then added orange, grape and other flavors in the 1920s. Reorganized in the 1930s, the company added more than ten new flavors including chocolate. Early advertising featured a pair of women's legs to promote the "knee-high" name. Today, the location of this distribution company houses several trendy restaurants and bars as part of San Pedro Square.





[165] **Mayflower across the Country** This vehicle is actually advertising two corporations, the Mayflower Moving Company, founded in 1927, and its local subsidiary operation for Mayflower Warehouses, the Security Warehouse Company on N. Second Street. Today, the warehouse and cold storage building has been converted to condominiums. The Mayflower name was acquired in the 1990s by a corporate group that apparently leases regional operators for moving, and it still uses local warehouses for storage. However confusing the internal operation might be, the name Mayflower was well chosen as a corporate symbol, suggesting safe transit over very long distances.





[166] ***Skirts AHOY!*** This 1947 Mercury station wagon, maybe a Navy-surplus vehicle, was drafted in 1952 to advertise swimming star Esther Williams and her new movie *Skirts AHOY!* World War II had been over for seven years, but former GIs and others were still interested in the more entertaining aspects of the war effort. Williams made films that featured swimming suits and bathing beauties. She began her career in stage productions and then movies, known as "aqua-musicals". By the 1950s when this film was made, she was billed as the "million dollar mermaid".



[167] **Recycle Those Cans!** There are all sorts of prohibitions about advertising tobacco products and alcoholic beverages where they might influence young people to take up bad habits. However, this San Jose city bus, shown facing N. First Street in the early 1960s, was participating in a socially redeemable form of advertising. Who could complain about recycling aluminum — even if the Coors beer name was featured.