

THE DOWSING OF ORANGE COUNTY*

by

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Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. I would like to thank Chapman College and our moderator, Steve Donaldson, for the privilege of speaking here today.

My remarks are entitled "The Dowsing of Orange County," the reason for which will, I hope, become obvious as we continue. I would like to report that the Santa Fe's arrival in Orange County was occasioned by the area's rich shipping potential. However, history would not support this line of thinking.^{1,2,3} The Santa Fe line through Orange County was, in fact, a second choice.

The Company's original quest was for a west coast seaport; a role that San Diego fulfilled admirably. Two routes north were examined by the California Southern, a railroad acquired by the Santa Fe in 1885, which had been chartered to build north from San Diego toward a connection with the Santa Fe's Atlantic and Pacific Railroad at or near Waterman, presently known as Barstow. The first, an inland route, reached San Bernardino by coming up the coast to Oceanside and then turning east up the Santa Margarita

River and Temecula Creek canyons to the community of Temecula; then northward via Elsinore, Box Springs, and Colton, to San Bernardino. The second was a continuation up the coast from Oceanside, past Capistrano, through the Santa Ana Valley and Riverside to Colton and San Bernardino. The latter route was considered to contain too many risks of construction. This translates to being too expensive. The line through the inland valley was, therefore, adopted with

track arriving in San Bernardino in 1883. Subsequently, the line was completed through Cajon Pass to the Atlantic and Pacific connection in 1885 (See Figure 1).

During this period, the spring rains of 1884 washed the line in Temecula Canyon out to sea, as it was built to close to the summer low water level. Presented with this set of circumstances, the California Southern's officers determined that the coastal route should be re-examined and, if feasible, pursued with all possible haste while the line through Temecula Canyon was restored.

When the coast route had been certified as feasible, the Riverside, Santa Ana and Los Angeles Railway Company was chartered on September 29, 1885 to build a railroad line from San Bernardino to Los Angeles via Riverside and the Santa Ana Valley.⁵ The principals were: J.N. Victor, for whom Victorville was named, Moses A. Luce, George H. Fullerton, after whom Fullerton was named, Byron Waters and Fred T. Perris, for whom the town north of Elsinore and Pinacate had just been named.

Surveys for the new line began in Citrus, now Highgrove, in September, 1885. Grading starting in October followed by track laying in November of that same year. The line was completed to Rincon, a point in



San Bernardino County just east of what was to become the eastern boundary of Orange County, on June 27, 1887. Rincon is Spanish for corner, a term which describes the route of the Santa Ana River at this point. Here the door opens on the Santa Fe's entry to our county, even though at the time it was still officially a portion of Los Angeles County.

The crossing of the Santa Ana River was accomplished just west of Rincon Station and north of the river's corner. The line then proceeded westward along the north face of the canyon. With the lessons of the Temecula Creek fiasco indelibly etched in their minds, the builders located the new line well up the hillside. The area around Horseshoe Curve was, until the last few years, one of the last areas in the county still given to citrus cultivation. After passing the small community of Yorba, the line again crossed the Santa Ana River southwest of the area, which would become known as Richfield and subsequently, Atwood. Heading south, the line passed Burrel's Point, now Olive, and the short-lived township of St. James. The

line was completed to Orange in August 1887. Orange had been slighted by the Southern Pacific Railroad some 10 years earlier when the SP located its line more than three miles west of town. Apparently the citizens of Orange could not raise the dowry required by the SP before it would marry its line with the community. The routing of the Santa Fe subsidiary was, reportedly, influenced by a similar dowry.⁶ The railroad's arrival in Orange prompted the Orange Tribune to report that Orange was "as independent of the S.P.R.R. as was the S.P. of this locality."⁷

Santa Ana was apparently able to raise a sufficient dowry to entice both lines to locate there. The Santa Fe's line south from Orange was completed to the future county seat on September 15, 1887 (See Figure 2).

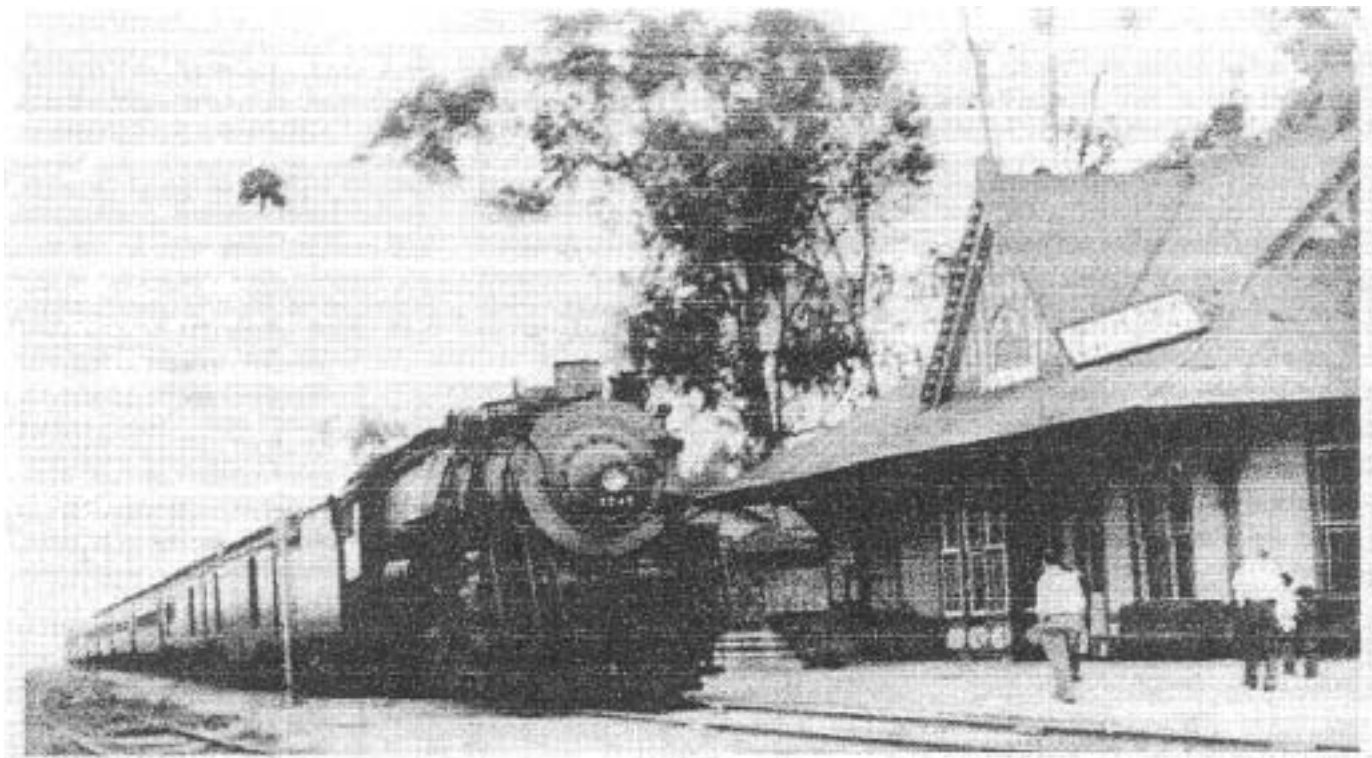
With the arrival of the Santa Fe in the North County,

the land boom that was sweeping all of Southern California swept the area like the rush of a passing freight train. Reasonable transportation to the seats of government and ever more distant market places greatly stimulated the local economy, making the area even more attractive to settlement.

Having connected two of its namesake cities, the Riverside, Santa Ana and Los Angeles Railway turned its attention to the construction of the line south from Los Angeles toward a junction with the newly completed line near Orange.

To connect the line of the Riverside, Santa Ana and Los Angeles Railway with that of the California Southern, the San Bernardino and San Diego Railway Company was chartered November 20, 1886 by Santa Fe interests, and quoting here from an internal, unpublished Santa Fe history, to "build a line from a junction with the line of the railroad of the Riverside, Santa Ana and Los Angeles Railway Co. at or near Anaheim, via San Juan Capistrano and Oceanside to the City of San Diego."⁸ The





principals were George H. Bonebreak, C.W. Smith, a vice president of the Santa Fe, F.C. Howes, and Fred T. Perris. Surveys began in November 1886 with the first grading starting in December. Track laying, however, did not commence until August of 1887. Whether the delay was caused by the Engineering Department, the Santa Fe's consolidation of several of their Southern California railroads into the California Central Railway Company in Mid-1886, the lack of experienced work forces to pursue construction on so many fronts, or some of each, is not recorded. The line was routed south from Santa Ana across the lower Santa Ana Valley and Santiago Creek flood plain toward the Laguna Hills. The "Surf Line," as it was and is known, reaches its highest point of 449 feet above sea level just south of El Toro before diving down Oso Creek Canyon toward the coast.⁹

The line was completed to San Juan, 2.6 miles south of Capistrano, on November 30, 1887 and opened for service on January 1, 1888 (See Figure 3). The line between San Juan and a point 2.1 miles north of Oceanside was completed in early August 1888, departing Orange County southbound in the first quarter

of the year. The last construction on the "Surf Line" was completion of 80 feet of timbering on the bridge over Canon Inferno, 10 a point thought to be approximately 1.5 miles north of the intersection of El Toro Road and the Santa Fe tracks. The Canon was formed by a tributary of San Diego Creek. The bridge which carried the rails across the chasm was 100 feet high and 250 in length, a marvel of "modern" engineering skill, and a stop was made on the inaugural trip so that all might view and appreciate the accomplishment.¹¹ The Canon has subsequently been filled in the development of the Lake Forest Area. The spring 1891 rains once again took the Temecula Creek Canyon track out to sea. This prompted the abandoning of the line in the canyon and left the "Surf Line" as the only Los Angeles- San Diego rail corridor. Being cut off from reasonable transport to the county seat at San Diego

fueled the inland area's demands for the creation of Riverside County.¹²

Not recounting of the Santa Fe's construction in Orange County would be complete without relating the Modesta Avila story. In approximately June 1887, the California Central line in Oso Creek Canyon was built across land just north of the original Capistrano depot (which was 0.1 miles north of the present depot-restaurant), belonging to a 20 year-old Mexican woman named Modesta Avila. For the right to build across her land, the California Central promised compensation and she concurred. Almost two years later, when the trains were rolling by regularly and the promised money was not, Modesta's plea's for payment grew louder, but fell on deaf ears. To stop the railroad from corssing her property, popular legend has her hanging was across the tracks. History, however, suggests that she, with the strength of anger, dragged a discardd railroad tie and placed it across the tracks. Realizing that her actions may not have been prudent, she notified the station agent who removed the tie before the train arrived. Modesta was subsequently

arrested for the equivalent of today's charge of interfering with Interstate Commerce. She was tried, convicted and sentenced to three years in San Quentin as Orange County's first convicted felon. Two years and five months after beginning her sentence, she was "discharged" from San Quentin; feet first wearing a pine overcoat.¹³ She had reportedly, died of pneumonia.

As shown in Figure 4, the Riverside, Santa Ana and Los Angeles Railway line to Los Angeles branched off of the existing line just north of Orange and struck out to the north. The SP spurned community of Anaheim was of sufficient size in 1887-1888 period to be attractive to the Santa Fe as a source of freight revenue and the line was laid to pass through that community en route to Northam.

In the first half of 1887, Edward and George Amerige purchased nearly 400 acres of Northwest County land from the Miles Estate with the intent of establishing a township.¹⁴ The success of the Amerige township would be totally dependent on their enticing the California Central Railway to town. To this end, the Ameriges entered negotiations with George H. Fullerton who, you will recall, was a principal of the Riverside, Santa Ana and Los Angeles Railway, predecessor of the California Central and was now president of another Santa Fe subsidiary, the Pacific Land Improvement Co. Fullerton extracted a gift of land for right-of-way and station grounds from the Ameriges in return for diverting the route from the Anaheim Northam straight line route under consideration. Gifts of land and often money, to bring the railroad to

town were a common practice of the day and frequently comprised the major portion of the dowries previously mentioned.

After turning to the northwest at Fullerton, the line exits the County northwest-bound at Northam. Northam was a small community north of Buena Park. The latter was already served by the Southern Pacific. The Santa

the railroad to seek the higher ground of Northam.¹⁵

Looking at the map of Figure 4, the shape of the Santa Fe lines in Orange County at the end of 1888 form the outline of a crude divining or dowsing rod; a wooden stick used by early settlers as a method of locating water which the Santa Fe did in the Pacific Ocean between San Juan and the Southern County border at Point San Mateo. It is from this route shape that the title of these remarks is taken.

The year 1898 brought the discovery of oil in the Yorba Linda hills and a spur line was built from Richfield to Olinda to carry in the materials incident to oil exploration and carry out the tank cars of crude oil. St. James faded and neighboring Olive became the growing community. Irvine was added as was a siding at Mateo to serve the livestock shipments to and from Rancho Boca de la Playa.

In 1910, the Placentia cutoff between Richfield and Fullerton was built to serve citrus interest at Placentia. For a short time, trains originating at Santa Ana made unusual movements over the Orange-Fullerton -Richfield Triangle.¹⁶ The San Bernardino train backed from Santa Ana to Fullerton Then headed to San Bernardino via Richfield and ran forward to Fullerton and

Los Angeles. The local ran forward to Fullerton, backed to Richfield and then ran forward back to Santa Ana. By 1913, citrus production on the Irvine Ranch developed to the point that the packing houses of the San Joaquin Fruit Company warranted the Venta Spur being built to serve them. A short leg of the spur crossed Redhill to a packing house and lumber yard at Tustin.

Browning was a siding where the two legs split and was named for a



Fe line bypassed Buena Park in much the same manner as the SP had bypassed both Orange and downtown Anaheim a decade earlier. The City Fathers and their citizenry could not provide a dowry of a size sufficient to entice the Santa Fe to marry its rails to their town. The 1886 flooding of Buena Park and the memory of Temecula Creek Canyon also influenced



local citrus grower.¹⁷ Myford, Frances and Kathryn were packing house sidings, each named for a member of the Irvine family.¹⁸ See Figure 5.

On November 12, 1905, the railroad changed the name of Capistrano to San Juan Capistrano and San Jan became Serra.¹⁹ By 1930 Buena Park had overrun and absorbed Northam, and the post Office requested that the name of Richfield be changed and Atwood was chosen. Rincon, the corner, became Prado, the meadow, after having held four intermediate designations. Ole Hansen's San Clemente replaced Mateo and was showing steady growth until the stock market crash of 1929 killed the real estate market.

In many respects, the Santa Fe played the role of "The People's Railroad" in Orange County. This is a role it would continue in the San Joaquin Valley in the late 1890's. the arrival of the Santa Fe released the county from the monopolistic hold established by the Southern Pacific here. The competition assured that the farmers, merchants and

manufacturers forever had competitive rates to national markets and an enhanced opportunity for economic achievement. The Santa Fe also provided the people of Orange County with a significant improvement in passenger transportation, for it put the county on the mainline of frequent, first class service between Los Angeles and San Diego, as well as several transcontinental passenger trains which continued long after the Southern Pacific discontinued passenger service on its local lines.²⁰

Today the basic "dowsing rod" main line remains as shown in Figure 6. a realignment of the track was forced between Prado and a point well east of Horseshoe curve by the creation of the Prado Dam Flood Control Basin.²¹ The dam was built following the 1938 Spring

floods, which had devastated large sections of Orange and Los Angeles Counties. The railroad was displaced to the south side of the canyon at the east end. Portions of the original right-of-way are, however, still visible from the freeway. Urbanization and improved roads spelled the doom of the Olinda Spur in 1945, and of the citrus groves and the Venta Spur in the late 1970's. In 1965 the Venta Spur became the Irvine Spur when the Irvine station became Valencia.²² Five miles of new spur tracks were built into the industrial park south of the mainline and east of the Costa Mesa Freeway south of Edinger²³

Amtrak operates eight passenger trains per day in each direction to San Diego (now nine per day plus a Metrolink commuter train in each direction between San Juan Capistrano and Los Angeles - ed) and two East-West trains between Los Angeles and Salt Lake City through the North County.²⁴ The Santa Fe operates one freight train per day to and from San Diego, mostly at night, and twenty or more

trains per day on the East-West line between Los Angeles and San Bernardino; several of which stop to pick up or set out cars at Fullerton.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is the dowsing of orange County. Thank you.

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ORANGE COUNTY UPDATE

In the Spring of 1993 the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) purchased the Santa Fe right-of-way between Fullerton and the Orange/San Diego County line on the San Diego Subdivision and from Placentia to Orange on the Olive Subdivision. This is part of a program by the Southern California Regional Railroad Authority to provide commuter rail throughout the area. Santa Fe will continue to operate freight trains on the lines acquired by OCTA.

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