

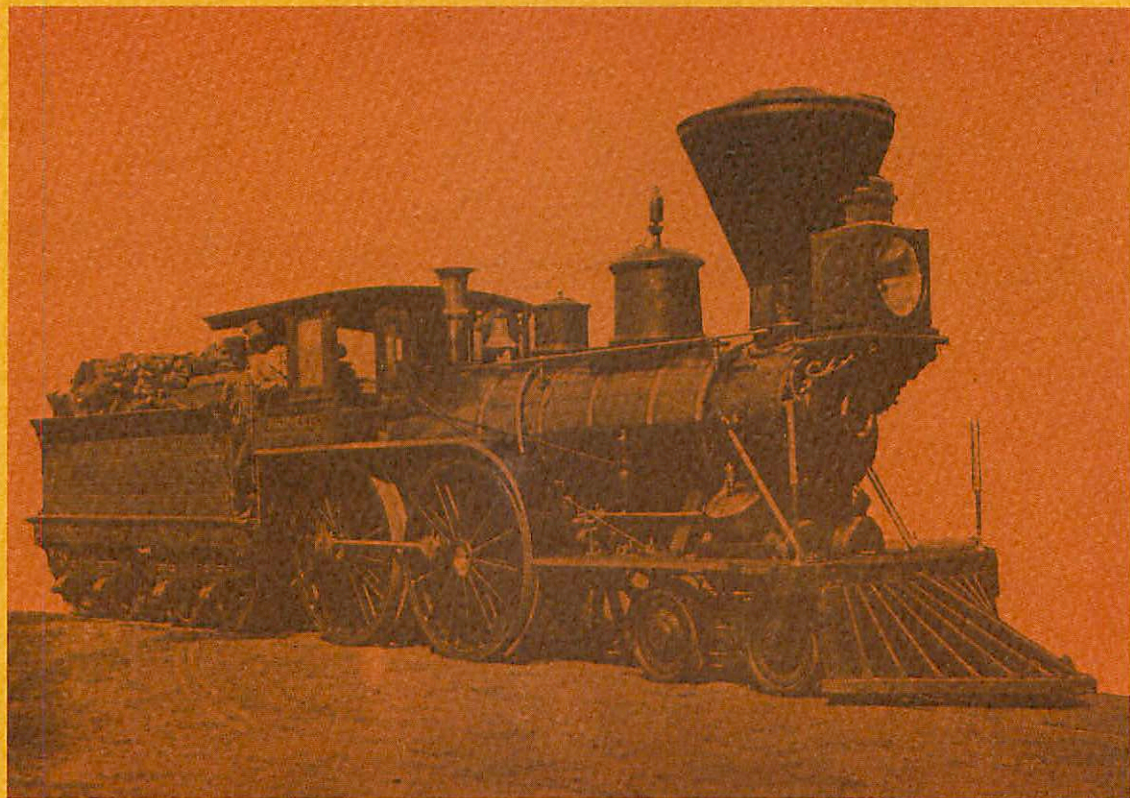
Sacramento County
Historical Society

GOLDEN NOTES

VOL. 17

APRIL 1971

NO. 1



SACRAMENTO VALLEY RAILROAD LOCOMOTIVE

*SOUVENIR RENO RAILROAD TRIP
APRIL 24, 1971*

THE FREEPORT RAILROAD 1863—1865

by

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A TEXT WITH FOOTNOTES IS IN POSSESSION OF THE AUTHOR IN SACRAMENTO

PREFACE

THE 1860's witnessed several conflicts between men striving to fulfill their own ideals or to establish themselves in positions of leadership and wealth in the newly emerging economic world of the United States. The Civil War and the building of the first transcontinental railroad have almost monopolized public interest in this decade. But there is an important although little known story concerning the struggle of four Sacramento merchants to overcome the ambitions of San Francisco capitalists in obtaining their first transcontinental railroad. It is the story of the Freeport Railroad, a line which extended from the small station at Perkins east of Sacramento to the Sacramento River, and connected with the Sacramento Valley Railroad (S.V.R.R.).

The S.V.R.R. had been completed from Sacramento to Folsom in 1856, largely with the aid of San Francisco capital. It was the first commercial railroad west of the Mississippi and, like so many other similar proposals of the 1850's, its promoters held high hopes that it would become the western leg of the first transcontinental railroad when it would be built. Plans called for extensions from Folsom to Marysville and to Auburn. However, since the road was not a financial success until after the discovery of the Comstock Lode in Nevada in 1859, construction of these extensions was postponed. Eventually Charles Lincoln Wilson began to build the California Central north from Folsom, a line which ran out of money when it reached the modern town of Lincoln, named after its promoter. The extension to Auburn eventually followed the ridge north of the

American River to its terminal station at Wildwood, six or seven miles south of Auburn, in 1864.

The heavy traffic required to supply Virginia City in the Comstock breathed new life into the Sacramento railroad. Goods and provisions from San Francisco came up river on schooners and steamships to Sacramento where they were transferred to the S.V.R.R. or freight wagons for the haul to the Sierra Nevada and beyond. Cobbles and granite from the Folsom area were carried by the S.V.R.R. to Sacramento, where they were loaded on ships and sent down stream to be used in constructing the streets and buildings of San Francisco. Even silver from the mines of "Washoe" was carried to Folsom by wagon and from Folsom to Sacramento on the S.V.R.R. before being reshipped to San Francisco.

This was the situation when the great floods of 1861 and 1862 swept everything before them. The levee along the American River broke at the foot of 28th Street, allowing the turbulent waters to swirl southward and eventually back up behind the levee-like trestle that supported the tracks of the S.V.R.R. along R Street. The flood also pitted crossings and city streets along which the railroad ran, a fact which became the occasion for a death struggle between the S.V.R.R. and the newly incorporated Central Pacific Railroad whose officers, mostly Sacramento merchants, also hoped their line would become the western leg of the first transcontinental railroad.

Although the S.V.R.R. was an important asset to Sacramento commerce, its management had frequent conflicts with the City officials over what appeared to be unreasonable restraints. As early as January 1855, the City had passed an ordinance which prevented the S.V.R.R. from laying permanent tracks from the river along R Street to Twelfth Street, a condition which prevailed until December 1862. On July 20, 1857, the City enacted an ordinance requiring the S.V.R.R. to plank all street crossings in the City. Five years later, in the flood of January 1862, the City filed suit against the S.V.R.R. when one of the companies' road bed earth fills blocked a slough draining the area, causing the property of several hundred people in the vicinity of R Street to be flooded.

The year 1862 brought the conflict with the City to a climax. The City charged levee dues and drayage fees on goods being transferred from steamers to the railroad, which tended to increase shipping costs. Finally on December 21, 1862, Sacramento passed an ordinance which required the S.V.R.R. to remove its tracks along R Street from First to Sixth Streets. The railroad refused to comply

with the ordinance since such an action would deprive it of access to the river where freight was transhipped to San Francisco. Consequently the City and County of Sacramento filed suit for removal of all track lying west of Sixth Street.

Although this conflict between the city of Sacramento and the S.V.R.R. may have been triggered by legitimate civic needs, it is impossible to forget that the United States Congress had just designated the Central Pacific Railroad to build the California portion of the transcontinental line; that the president of the company had just been elected governor of California and that other officers were among the most prominent citizens of Sacramento.

To avoid continued conflict with the city, major stockholders of the S.V.R.R., most of whom lived in San Francisco, decided to build a branch line from Brighton Station, near modern Perkins, to a point on the Sacramento River, nine miles south of the city. As the first step, George W. Mowe, a trustee of the S.V.R.R., on December 11, 1862 bought in his own name 359 acres of land along the river from Tobias Kadell, for \$3,900. Six days later, Mowe and another trustee named J. H. Carroll, purchased in their own names an adjoining 368 acres from George and Caleb Gosling for \$6,000, and 319 acres from John Rooney for \$2,700. Mowe and Carroll then owned 1045 acres, valued at \$12,600, land on which they planned to lay out a new townsite. Later these trustees deeded this property along with the other land purchased for a right of way to the Freeport Railroad Company. With a terminal site on the Sacramento River secured, Mowe set about acquiring a right of way. He filed twenty-two deeds with the County Records' Office in Sacramento on March 16, 1863. Each deed was for a small tract of land along the survey line of a proposed railroad.

Meanwhile the Sacramento *Union* in December, 1862 published rumors that San Francisco capitalists were planning a railroad to the Comstock to by-pass Sacramento. It was said they were going to build a new river port below town. The *Union* assumed that the S.V.R.R. directors were behind the scheme. The Freeport Railroad was not actually incorporated until March 24, 1863, when papers of association were filed in the Secretary of State's office. It was authorized to issue capital stock worth \$150,000. The board of five directors were also trustees of the railroad. They stated that the object of the new line was the construction, equipment and maintenance of a railroad from a point on the S.V.R.R. near Brighton Station to Goslings' Ranch near what was known as the Russian

Embarcadero on the Sacramento River. The length of the railroad was to be about ten miles. The *Union*, on May 5, 1863, charged that the purpose of the Freeport Railroad was to injure Sacramento.

Meanwhile the state legislature had supported the Central Pacific by authorizing Sacramento County to buy \$300,000 worth of Central Pacific Railroad stock if local tax payers so voted. The S.V.R.R. and Freeport Railroads openly opposed this subsidy, and according to the *Union* of May 6, 1863, posted fake posters near the polls reading "Railroad Proposition NO." J. P. Robinson of the S.V.R.R. and Freeport Railroad Companies attempted to get an injunction preventing county subscription to Central Pacific Railroad stock but failed.

The conflict between the C.P.R.R. and the S.V.R.R. was now openly joined. Construction of the Freeport Railroad started on May 8, 1863, when one hundred workers closed the mouth of the slough near Goslings' Ranch. Railroad agents then bought title to the land along its proposed right of way from George W. Mowe.

The river site selected for the terminus of the railroad was not due to chance. A sand bar had developed opposite Edward's Ranch about four miles above the bend of the river near Russian Embarcadero preventing steamboats from reaching Sacramento during water and until high water at noon of the next day. River boats could reach the new town in either high or low water. It was to be called Freeport, since goods bound for Folsom and Washoe would be transferred to rail at that point without charges for levee dues, drayage fees or other handling costs usually charged at Sacramento. Goods shipped by this route would arrive at the Comstock twelve hours earlier than if they had waited for high water to reach Sacramento.

The Freeport Railroad was built westward from Brighton since the S.V.R.R. was supplying all equipment. For this reason it was also necessary to build the railroad on the five foot gauge used by the S.V.R.R. Railroad ties and iron rails began arriving daily by steamer from San Francisco by August 4, 1863. On September 14, the schooner *Anna H. Johnson* arrived at Sacramento with eighty tons of iron rails for the new railroad. When track laying was completed about the tenth of October 1863, the railroad was leased to the S.V.R.R. as a branch line for a period of ten years for a payment of \$15,000 per year.

Facilities for handling passengers and freight were rapidly built at Freeport. The new wharf, 250 feet long and 140 feet wide,

supported a storehouse, offices and accommodations for company agents and passengers. Two large derricks were built opposite the warehouse entrance on the wharf, and a third, larger derrick was constructed to hoist cobble stones and granite from the cars to river boats. By February 1864, Freeport had six buildings, and by August included a wharf and warehouse. One of the buildings was an old tavern that Gosling had built years before he sold the land to Mowe and Carroll. Total cost of construction for the track, wharf, buildings, and loading facilities was three hundred thousand dollars. The line between Brighton and Freeport was completed in December 1863.

The struggle with the C.P.R.R. became acute when construction of this railroad reached the tracks of the California Central at a place called Junction, now Roseville. Then freight for Folsom and the Comstock could be routed via C.P.R.R. and Junction, thus by-passing the S.V.R.R.

As if this competition were not enough harassment, the City of Sacramento found cause to continue its pressure on the S.V.R.R. Because of the great floods of 1861-1862 it was necessary to raise the level of levees along Front Street. After the S.V.R.R. refused to remove its tracks from Front Street, so that the contractors could start work, the latter on April 23, 1864 dumped dirt on top of the tracks. When the rail gang attempted to prevent the dumping of more dirt, a fight broke out. A mob armed with crow bars and picks supported the contractors and tore up and scattered the tracks and ties along Front Street from P to K Streets by early evening. As a result the S.V.R.R. announced that no more freight trains would leave Sacramento until further notice. Although the S.V.R.R. and the City of Sacramento agreed to the rebuilding of the Front Street railroad only four days after the fight, court arguments over how much of the original road bed was to be rebuilt lasted until mid May. Judge McKune finally declared that the tracks west of Sixth Street could remain, but that no steam locomotive could be used on Front Street because the smoke and noise of the locomotive annoyed residents and merchants.

With increasing competition from the Central Pacific and pressure from the City of Sacramento, the S.V.R.R. sought to employ its Freeport branch in a more competitive manner. It attempted to get the California Central Railroad to coordinate its schedule from Folsom to Lincoln with their own rather than with the Central Pacific, thus providing service from Lincoln to Freeport. In another move, the S.V.R.R. obtained the Red Bluff and Marysville steamer

trade, for on August 19, 1864, the *Sacramento Daily Union* announced that:

William Gilman, who has for many years been in the employ of the Steam Navigation Co. and for the last three years, the agent of the Co. at Marysville, has been advanced to the post of General Agent at Freeport, at which port, it is rumored, an important part of the Co., up-river business is proposed to be transferred from and after next Monday.

Meanwhile the Pioneer Stage Company, which connected Latrobe, the terminal of the S.V.R.R., with Virginia City, supported the Freeport Railroad when it advertised in August 1864, in the *San Francisco Bulletin*:

San Francisco to Virginia City in 24 hours via the California Steam Navigation Company to Freeport; Sacramento Valley, Freeport, Placerville and Sacramento Railroad to Latrobe, then on the Pioneer Stage Line to Virginia City.

The railroad did its part to promote traffic by increasing its departures from Freeport to three times a day, at 6:30 a.m., 4:00 p.m., and midnight.

The Freeport and S.V.R.R. was making such a strong bid for the Sacramento trade by August, 1864, that the Central Pacific challenged it to a race to Virginia City, in an effort to demonstrate publicly the speed of its own service. The challenge was accepted, and the date for the race set for August 22, 1864. At that time the Central Pacific tracks ended at Newcastle where mail was transferred to stage for the overland trip to Virginia City. The S.V.R.R. extended from Freeport to Latrobe, where mail was transferred to the Pioneer Stage Company for the trip to the Comstock. The Sacramento Valley locomotive left Freeport at 11:15 p.m. on August 22, while the Central Pacific locomotive, *Atlantic*, left Sacramento at 12:04 a.m. on August 23.

Apparently the race was not entirely honest. The Central Pacific had a horseman waiting at the Freeport Dock, so that it would not have to wait for high water to bring the steamboat to Sacramento. Although the Freeport train carried its usual freight, express, and twenty-three passengers in addition to the mail, the Central Pacific put on a special train which consisted of a locomotive and tender carrying only the mail, an engineer, a stoker, and a Pony Express rider for the specific purpose of moving the mail as rapidly

as possible. According to the *Union*, it took the Freeport train one hour and thirty-seven minutes to traverse the thirty-seven miles to Latrobe, where the Pioneer Stage took over the mail and some passengers. The Central Pacific locomotive, *Atlantic*, used forty-two minutes enroute from Sacramento to Newcastle. There was a rumor that the Pony Express rider on the Central Pacific train had been given orders "to ride like hell from Newcastle and at the last chance hook up to a coach and drive into Virginia City." The Central Pacific won the race with a total time of thirteen hours, while the Freeport and S.V.R.R. required twenty-two hours. The driver of the Pioneer Stage reported unusually heavy traffic between Latrobe and Virginia City. Although the race failed to prove the S.V.R.R. claim to twenty-four hour service between San Francisco and Virginia City, the company persistently continued to run an advertisement claiming that speed.

Almost immediately after the race the S.V.R.R. diverted all mail and passenger traffic for San Francisco from Sacramento to Freeport. However, officials of the California Steam Navigation Company told the railroad officials that trains must connect with steamships at both Freeport and Sacramento or the steamships would not stop at Freeport. It was rumored that both the Central Pacific and Sacramento City interests were behind this pressure. It appears as though both of these parties, while claiming that the Freeport Railroad was a failure and had done little damage to Sacramento trade, secretly had thoughts along other lines. The Central Pacific for example, requested additional rights along Front Street so that it could extend its tracks and offer more competition to the Sacramento Valley and Freeport Railroad. The *Union* of September 28, 1864, by objecting to the S.V.R.R., seemed to support the C.P.R.R. It editorialized:

A few months ago, it was rumored that the Sacramento Valley Company was prepared to abandon the Freeport enterprise if such privileges as were asked from this City [Sacramento] could be secured. The present negotiations, [improvement of Front Street facilities] however, contemplate no such concession on the part of the Railroad Company. On the contrary, while one or two of their agents are working industriously to secure the City Front, others are energetically engaged in laying their plans for carrying around the City, by way of Freeport and Latrobe, or Lincoln, all the freight and all the travel which can be diverted from their regular and ordinary channel. They are constantly setting forth, by

advertisement and otherwise, the advantage of Freeport over Sacramento in consequence of freedom from the levee dues, etc., and yet ask for control of a large portion of our City Front. All that our Sacramento Valley Railroad men want is to control both the Sacramento and Freeport harbors in order to force trade over routes in which their exclusive interests lay. If additional privileges are granted to railroad companies, the grant should be made to those who will use them for the benefit of the City and not against it.

The Freeport road appeared to be on its way to success, when the *Daily Alta California* announced on June 2, 1865, that "Freeport is becoming a prominent passenger and shipping point." The same paper carried an advertisement of the *CADUC Schooner Line* offering delivery of goods at Lincoln from San Francisco, via the *CADUC Line* and the Freeport and Sacramento Valley Railroad for five dollars a ton with "no charge for drayage, handling, levee dues or forwarding."

Although the S.V.R.R. had tracks only to Latrobe by 1865, apparently the Central Pacific feared that they could be extended over the Sierra and become a competing line. Consequently steps were taken to remove this threat. The beginning of the end of the Freeport Road came on the first of August 1865, when George F. Bragg, President of the Sacramento Valley Company, purchased the entire stock interests of three other directors valued at nearly four hundred-thousand dollars. Shortly thereafter, Bragg sold all of his stock to the principle stockholders of the Central Pacific Railroad Company, thereby eliminating this competition. Although the S.V.R.R. still held the lease on the Freeport Road after the transaction, the Freeport Company remained a private concern and was not purchased by Central Pacific interests.

The *Daily Alta California* of San Francisco loudly protested the sale of the S.V.R.R. to Leland Stanford and others:

The whole transaction is so mean, its policy so corrupt in its purposes, so contrary to public policy, that the courts should interfere to prevent (...) schemers from carrying out their plans.

The same paper persistently set forth the argument that the Central Pacific, or the "Dutch Flat Railroad" as they called it, had been a failure, and that the purchase of the S.V.R.R. was an attempt to correct the mistake. "The apparent plans of the new stockholders is

to abandon Freeport and reduce the Placerville route to El Dorado County trade and divert the Washoe trade." The final blow to the Freeport line came on August 28, 1865, when Leland Stanford ordered the suspension of all passenger traffic to and from Freeport.

Although the Freeport Road was not used throughout the last part of 1865, it was not torn up until May 1866, when the owners sold the track and ties to the Central Pacific. On May 26, 1866, the large steam derrick at Freeport was purchased for the new Sacramento wharf between L and M Streets on the levee. It was to be used for loading schooners with granite and cobbles brought to Sacramento by the Central Pacific Railroad.

In June of 1866, a notice appeared in the *Sacramento Daily Union* that the Central Pacific Railroad was interested in the stock of the California Steam Navigation Company. When the stock was finally purchased in 1871, it completed the Central Pacific's attempt to monopolize the route to San Francisco Bay. The "Big Four" now controlled wagons, railroads, and steamships on that route.

The projected town of Freeport was reduced to the status of farm land and assessed by the acre. A few buildings did remain but were considered private residences rather than a town site. Although the license tax for the charter of the Freeport Railroad Company was paid until December 13, 1905, the railroad right of way ceased to be company property long before that date. Under the *General Railroad Laws of California*, a railroad company can own or hold real estate only for the length of time tracks or buildings are maintained. In the event that tracks have not been maintained for five years, the right of way property reverts to the original owners of that property.

Although popular opinion usually set forth the conflict between the S.V.R.R. over taxes alone as the reason for the birth of the Freeport Road, it was tax pressure together with the Front Street branch line issue, and the planking of rail crossings, that brought about the Freeport Railroad venture. The whole history of the Freeport Road was that of a struggle for survival on the part of the S.V.R.R. against the Central Pacific and the City of Sacramento, a struggle which the S.V.R.R. lost.

The new railroad was identified with San Francisco capitalists, *The Alta California* and the attempt to maintain the Placerville route to Washoe. The Central Pacific, on the other hand, was identified with Sacramento residents, the *Union* and the Donner Pass route to the east. It was a struggle for survival between the first railroad in the west and one favored by the federal government. The Central

Pacific won out and insured the survival of Sacramento as the western terminal of the transcontinental railroad.