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The Automobile in San Mateo County

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Front Cover: Highway One at Devil's Slide with visible remnants of Half Moon Bay-Colma Road and Road Trail. Photo by John Gorman.

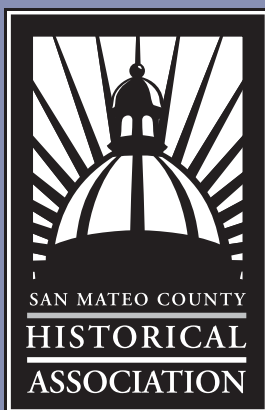
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San Mateo County's

Love Affair with the Automobile

by Joan M. Levy



During California's first automobile meet in 1902, people drove horseless carriages from San Francisco to Crystal Springs Dam.

A. Origins of the Automobile

San Mateo County and the automobile are inseparable. There are out-of-the-way spots of incredible scenic beauty here. There are completely contrasting weather conditions in all directions. A multitude of cultural activities are available to experience. All are within easy reach if you drive a car. It didn't take the residents of our County long to realize this. In addition to the locals, there is an abundance of drivers who travel into our County for these same reasons or are just passing through on their way to other destinations.

The driving experience of the early 20th Century was very different from what it is today. In 1893, only four horseless carriages were registered in the United States.¹ By 1900, there were 8,000 cars, and after installment payments were introduced in 1905, 77,000 autos were registered nationwide. By 1915, this figure reached 8,132,000.² In February 1913, auto registrations in California alone totaled 96,588. At

Joan M. Levy

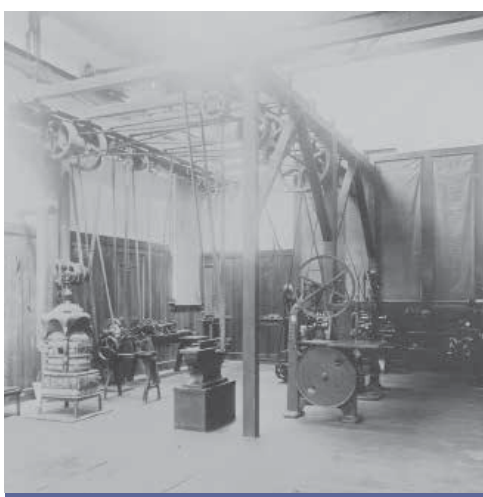
Joan M. Levy is a member of the Board of Directors at the San Mateo County Historical Association and volunteers in the Archives at the History Museum. In the past, she had also been a volunteer docent at the Sanchez Adobe. A third generation Californian, Joan has always been interested in California history. After retiring in 1989, she returned to college to complete her B.A. in American History with an emphasis on California and Latin America. She has a specific interest in Northern California in 1846. For five years she contributed local history articles for the *San Mateo Daily Journal*.



Fire truck at Flood Estate.



Some of the cars stored inside the Flood garage.



Equipment inside the Flood machine shop.

1 car per each 28 Californians, this was the highest ratio in the nation.³

The first highways in California were horse trails and wagon roads. After statehood was granted, Californians immediately began to complain about the condition of our roads. The Office of Surveyor General was created in 1850. Part of his duty was to suggest routes for roads. There was a clamor for a good road between Sacramento and Carson City in 1855 and the Legislature passed a bill to have the Surveyor General plan a road over the Sierra Nevada and to take bids for its construction.

Unfortunately, the Legislature neglected to appropriate the funds for this project. Instead, private individuals received a franchise to build a toll road, called the "Lake Tahoe Wagon Road," which was completed in 1858. Another wagon road was constructed over the summit by the railroads in 1864. It was also a toll road. A policy of granting franchises for building toll roads and bridges in lieu of the State actually building them was common until 1880.⁴

In 1895, the Bureau of Highways was created with the appointment of Lake Tahoe Wagon Road Commissioner and Commissioners of Bureau of Highways. They studied the highway needs and made recommendations for a State Highway System.⁵ The three commissioners traveled by buckboard across the state, surveying roads and mapping out proposed routes during 1895 and 1896.⁶ A map of the proposed system was drawn, showing two basic north-south routes and east-west feeders designed to connect the County Seats of the various Counties.⁷

Not much was apparently accomplished as a result of the efforts of these Highway Commissioners. In 1907, the Department of Highways and the Lake Tahoe Wagon Road Commissioners were placed under the control of a newly created State Department of Engineering.⁸

From the earliest days of the automobile, San Mateo County residents have had a special connection with those machines. It started when the wealthy occupants of the country estates here had to have at least one of the new-fangled things.

In 1909, James L. Flood spent \$24,558 to construct a garage at his estate at Linden Towers (at today's Menlo Park) to accommodate his collection of 15 automobiles. The fleet even included a Model T Ford fire truck to serve the estate.⁹

Flood commuted daily to work in San Francisco from his country home. He could either take the train or have his chauffeur drive him. El Camino Real was not completely paved in 1918. The trip by automobile took two hours. It was made part way on the Old County Road and

part way on the new parts of El Camino Real. Old County Road was covered with red rock and was dusty, bumpy and full of potholes. It was necessary to cross the railroad tracks several times where the road was not finished. Most cars then had solid rubber tires and they bounced roughly in the ruts. Rain made the mud almost impassable, which is why most estate owners spent winters in the City.¹⁰

Automobiles require decent roads. In 1900, a group of enthusiastic “automobilists” met at the Cliff House in San Francisco and formed the California Automobile Club whose purpose was to promote comfort and safety of motorists.¹¹

San Francisco interests such as the Commonwealth Club and the California Auto Club along with Governor James N. Gillett pushed hard for the construction of a state highway system patterned after the 1896 plan. They wanted two north-south trunks roughly parallel to the railroad lines and laterals to connect major cities and county seats.¹² Political opposition called for the highways to be built by the counties under the supervision of the State or to be funded on a fifty-fifty basis with the counties.¹³ This opposition was overcome when the Legislature passed the Governor’s State Highway Bond Act in 1909. The issue was put on the ballot for voter approval in 1910.¹⁴

The election that November not only approved the State Highway Bond Act, but it elected Progressive Hiram Johnson as governor over incumbent Gillett. Johnson had run on an anti-Southern Pacific platform, and toured the state by auto. He had campaigned in San Mateo County June 24 and October 17.¹⁵ Governor Gillett, although also a strong proponent of the Highway Act, had well-known ties with Southern Pacific Railroad which had hurt his bid for reelection.

In his final message to the state legislature, the outgoing governor advised on the matter, “the Highways to be selected and improved should be chosen with great care and by those with no direct interest in such choice....”¹⁶

San Francisco, which had been a major force behind the Highway Act, wanted better links to its market area. Free roads were to be the central aspect of the new highway system.¹⁷ Also at this time, the United States was planning to commemorate the completion of the Panama Canal with a world’s fair. San Francisco was chosen in 1911 to host the Panama-Pacific International Exposition to be held in 1915. Roads for access to the City as well as touring the Bay Area provided further impetus for action.¹⁸

Almost immediately, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties formed a tri-county committee dedicated to setting routes for



El Camino Real before it was paved, c. 1910.



Car in front of Harry and Dorothy Regan's Burlingame home, c.1910.



Traveling an unpaved country road in a Studebaker. Photographs of automobile excursions on this page from a family album donated by Cliff Kieley in 1973.



Family on the road to Yosemite.



Visiting the Crystal Springs Watershed.

the new Highway System through their counties.¹⁹ They backed up their proposals with convincing statistics showing that these three counties represented the largest population area of the state and that they paid over one quarter of the state's taxes, entitling them to have their demands met.²⁰

The state's original three man Highway Commission was expanded to seven men who would have the say on spending \$18 million authorized by the Highway Act.²¹

Throughout 1911, the tri-county committee pushed for the State Highway to follow the El Camino Real route from San Francisco through San Mateo County and into Santa Clara County. Even Monterey County endorsed this proposal.²² El Camino Real was part of a "wishbone plan" to join later with an Alameda County road at San Jose.

One critical issue was whether the State would build through incorporated cities, or leave those sections to be financed by the local governments. San Mateo County, along with cities within the County, deferred much of their own work awaiting a decision on this point. Finally, on January 27, 1912, the *San Mateo Times* announced that incorporated cities must maintain roads within the cities, and counties must provide any bridges where needed. This would allow the State to get the most from the \$18 million with which they had to work. It also meant that the cities and counties could proceed with their own independent projects.

The first Highway Engineer was Austin B. Fletcher. He determined the best materials and equipment needed. Actual construction began a year after he started. Although Fletcher himself was from San Diego, the first contract for a segment of highway was to be in San Mateo County at San Bruno.²³

The decision to start here seems to have been influenced by the efforts of the tri-county committee demanding that work commence with El Camino Real and the fact that San Bruno was as yet unincorporated. Since no work would be done in incorporated cities, San Francisco itself would not participate in the State funds, but the opening of the route into the City was still of paramount importance to San Francisco boosters.

The Pacific Highway Association held a three-day convention in San Francisco in 1912. This group included representatives of car dealerships, auto clubs and officials from many Oregon, Washington and even Canadian cities. They concluded their final session on August 7 with an excursion to San Bruno, where the Chairman of the State Highway Commission, Burton A. Towne, turned the first shovelful of



Ground breaking in San Bruno for the first section of paved highway in California, August 1912. Chairman of the State Highway Commission Burton A. Towne is in the center with the shovel.

earth for the five and four-fifths mile segment of road.²⁴ Automobiles for the out-of-town visitors were provided by the Motor Clubs of California, and after the program and barbecue, they were given a scenic tour of the County before their return to San Francisco.²⁵ The 100th anniversary of the beginning of the California State Highway System was celebrated in 2012 in San Bruno.

In his first Biennial Message before the Senate and Assembly on January 6, 1913, Governor Hiram Johnson said, "I have been compelled to adhere to the almost inflexible rule, that where commissions composed of men of high repute, in matters within their jurisdiction after careful deliberation have reached a conclusion, that conclusion should be final, and should not be interfered with by the Executive of the State, save in the most exceptional cases....The commissioners have proceeded therefore in the selection of routes and in the determination of matters relating to our highways, and have surveyed more than one thousand miles of roads...." ²⁶ As a Progressive Party governor, Johnson agreed with former Governor Gillett on the matter of having the best men direct the Highway Construction with great care and impartiality.



Automobile race at Tanforan Race Track. Courtesy California Historical Society.



Racing at Tanforan Race Track, 1909.

B. The Need for Speed

Early on in the Peninsula's Automobile Era, there developed the "need for speed," and special places for auto racing appeared. In 1907, auto races began to be held at the horse track at Tanforan. They were sponsored by San Francisco's Olympic Club. The cars had approximately 70 horsepower engines and could race at breakneck speeds of up to 60 miles per hour.²⁷

In 1921, the San Carlos Speedway hosted the 250-mile International Auto Race. The speedway was built on 90 acres of land near today's San Carlos Airport. It was a saucer track, described as being like the brim of a derby hat. It was one and one quarter miles in length with no straight-aways. The 50-foot wide track was made of wooden two by threes laid on edge. Jack Prince designed it, as he had designed many great speedways throughout the country. He declared the San Carlos structure to be his masterpiece and predicted it would be the fastest track in the world.²⁸

The grandstand was built to accommodate 45,000 people. Life memberships to the speedway were to be limited to only 1,000 people who would then be entitled to free tickets for all races. Peninsula estate owner James Flood was one of the individuals who took a box at the speedway to entertain parties of friends.²⁹

Internationally known race drivers participated in the opening day race. Ralph de Palma, Italian "speed king," and his entourage made San Francisco their temporary home in preparation for the event. In

addition, Roscoe Sarles, Eddie Hearne, Harry Hartz, Jimmy Murphy and Tommy Milton were among the luminaries to race on opening day. Fourteen entries were vying for a purse totaling \$25,000. It was expected that de Palma in his French Balot Eight would break the world speed record. American racing pioneer Barney Oldfield visited before the race and declared that the drivers were suffering under the nervous strain of the final championship race of the year, the prestige involved in this important event and the huge purse at stake.

Alas, de Palma was not destined to set a new record, or even to win the race. It was Jimmy Murphy who took the \$7,000 first prize. Although de Palma passed Murphy in the twentieth lap, recurring brake problems caused him to lose time to pit stops, and he finished some 9 minutes behind the winner. Jack Prince was disappointed that the track did not prove to be faster, as the average speed was only 111 miles an hour for the first 200 miles. He attributed it to the drivers' lack of enough time to practice on the new track. Murphy did set a new speedway record in his Duesenberg Eight.³⁰

In the months following the opening, several other events were held at the speedway, including some motorcycle races. On June 18, 1922, a grass fire spread to the wooden bowl of the speedway and destroyed three-quarters of the grandstand and half of the track. The dry boards, filled with pitch and soaked with oil from the cars, made ideal fuel for the fire. In addition, it was found that there was a lack of adequate water supply in the area for fighting fires.³¹ Although Jack Prince announced that the track would be rebuilt in time for October 1922 races, a January 30, 1923, news article reported that the land had been sold, and the remains of the fire damaged structure would be razed.³²

At one time, San Mateo County even had its own local racecar designer and driver, Sterling Edwards. The E. R. Edwards Wire Rope Company produced wire rope in South San Francisco during World War I clear to 1977. The 10-acre site of the company at 601 Gateway Boulevard was purchased by Homart Development Company in 1980. A portion of the site was eventually acquired by Genentech.

Along with other industries in South San Francisco such as Bethlehem Steel and US Steel, Edwards Wire Rope helped build California's modern transportation and communication infrastructure.

In 1918, head salesman E. H. Edwards made his business trips in the company bi-plane.³³ Young Sterling Edwards earned his pilot's license at the age of seventeen in 1935, and bought his first plane a year later. He began designing modifications for his aircraft because he was concerned with private aviation's dependence on a single-engine

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aircraft. He spent some time working on development of a dual-engine model. During the World War II years he flew as a test pilot for Lockheed.³⁴

In 1948, Sterling Edwards attended the Winter Olympics in Switzerland. He became enamored with a cute Italian sports car there and became a racecar enthusiast. He won the first bona fide sports car race staged on the West Coast after World War II. Edwards was able to combine his enthusiasm for sports cars with his wealth and the facilities of the family business, E. R. Edwards Wire Rope Company, in designing his own car. The first Pebble Beach Road Race and Concours d'Elegance in 1950 drew a crowd of 10,000 spectators. Sterling Edwards, with his 1950 Edwards R-26 Special Sport Roadster, won one of the four preliminary races.³⁵ Edwards' car was named Best of Show.³⁶

Edwards turned his attention to high-quality consumer road cars. His team of designers produced production cars utilizing fiberglass in the bodies. Edwards estimated they would sell for around \$6,800, but by the time they were completed, the price was \$8,000, rather too steep for that time. Only five "Edwards Americas" were ever completed around 1954. In 2010 one of these cars was sold at auction in Florida for \$110,000, at what was considered a bargain.³⁷

The heyday of drag racing was not to be ignored by San Mateo County, either. In 1942 the State Highway Department had constructed an airport at Half Moon Bay. At the end of World War II it was turned over to the Navy. In 1947 it was acquired by the County.³⁸

In 1957 the Half Moon Bay Drag Strip was started by an auto club at the airport. It suffered from financial woes, but was reborn in 1958 by street racers Don Smith and Jim McLennan. It was the largest drag strip in Northern California at the time. It had bleachers on both sides and the latest in timing and starting equipment. It even had safety nets.³⁹ In drag racing, two cars compete on a straight course from a standing start over a short distance, usually one-quarter mile.⁴⁰ The sport's Golden Age ran roughly from 1959-1974.⁴¹

At Half Moon Bay, Smith and McLennan used radio and television ads for their events. The bumper-to-bumper traffic caused by their drag races tied up Highway 1.

Don "Big Daddy" Garlits and Don "The Snake" Prudhomme raced for a \$5,000 purse and a trophy on January 23, 1966. The event lasted 7 seconds to cover the one-quarter mile strip.⁴² While Prudhomme was favored to win, Garlits defeated him. This put Half Moon Bay on the map as far as drag race history is concerned.⁴³

Smith and McLennan sold the strip in 1968 and it soon closed down. The Half Moon Bay Bakery on Main Street still displays old photos and memorabilia from this era.⁴⁴ Efforts have been made from time to time to revive the strip, but so far none have been successful.

While no major auto racing takes place in San Mateo County any more, a view of rush hour on our freeways can attest to the importance of automobiles that still exists here.

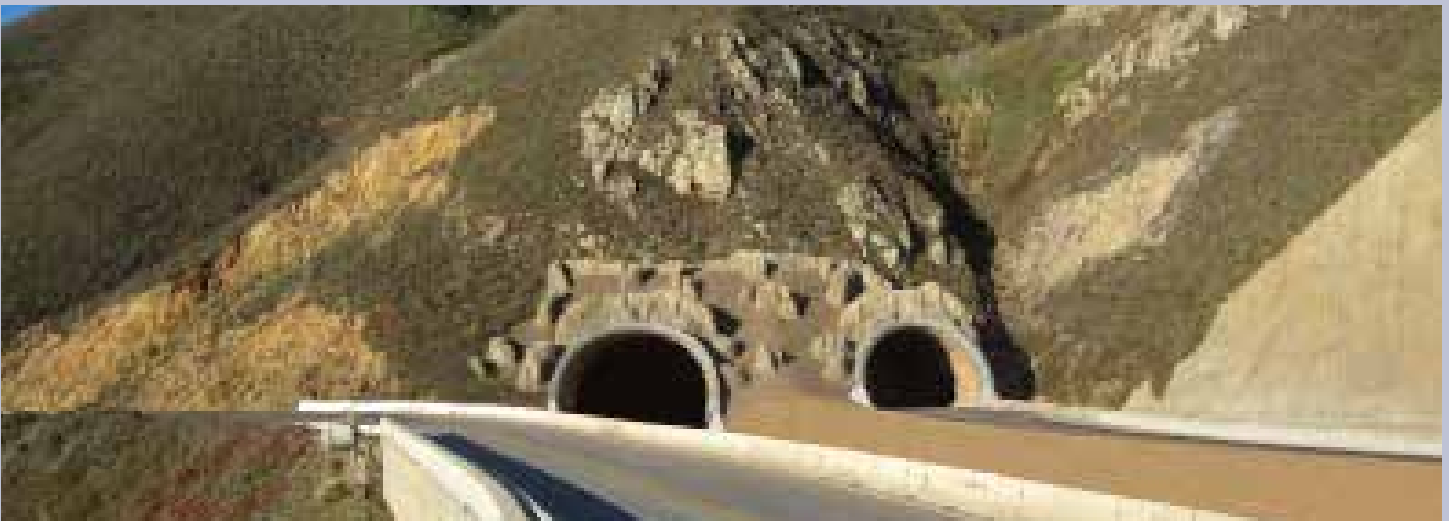


Drag Racing in Half Moon Bay. Courtesy Mark Andermahr, owner Half Moon Bay Bakery, Half Moon Bay & Fremont Drag Strip memorabilia collector.

San Pedro Point, Devil's Slide and the Transportation History

of the San Mateo County Coastside

by Mitchell P. Postel



South portals of the Tom Lantos Tunnels at Devil's Slide. The tunnels opened on March 25, 2013. Photo by and courtesy of Mitch Reid.

Mitchell P. Postel

Mitchell P. Postel has been the Executive Director/President of the San Mateo County Historical Association since 1984. He has taught history at the College of San Mateo, and is a frequent speaker on San Mateo County history. Postel is a member of the San Mateo County Historic Resources Advisory Board and Treasurer of the San Mateo County Visitors and Convention Bureau. He is the author of seven books on local history, including *San Mateo County: A Sesquicentennial History*.

Editor's Note

The Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) commissioned the San Mateo County Historical Association to create a history of San Pedro Point. This article is a section of the GGNRA study.

A. Early Roads

The recent completion of the Caltrans tunnels, built to bypass Devil's Slide, marks a new era in the history of transportation for the San Mateo County Coastside. For the first time a reliable link to the Coast, circumventing the imposing barriers at San Pedro Point, has been accomplished.

Since Spanish colonial times, the Coastside has been isolated from the rest of the world by the Pacific Ocean, with lack of an adequate harbor to the west, the coastal mountains proceeding down the middle of the Peninsula to the east, the cliffs separating San Mateo County and Santa Cruz County to the south and San Pedro and Montara Mountains acting as barriers to the north. As visitors experience hiking the trails of San Pedro Point, they can view its transportation history by looking at abandoned roadbeds of the past.

Looking southeast, from different vantage points, three old roads can be seen at various levels cut into San Pedro and Montara Mountains. The road usually seen as in the middle of the three is referred to by

locals as Road Trail. The scar slashing below it is the Half Moon Bay-Colma Road. The road at the highest elevation is what is left of Coastside Boulevard.

Road Trail is the oldest. This route was probably in use during Ohlone, Spanish and Mexican times. It ran from Martini Creek through Saddle Pass, separating San Pedro and Montara Mountains (now part of McNee Ranch State Park), and then on to the Sanchez Adobe. Into American times, Road Trail was barely passable on horseback. In 1856, Edward McGowen traveling from the *Mision San Francisco de Asís to Rancho Corral de Tierra* wrote of this passage: "We had to traverse a rugged mountain road, bad enough in the day-time, but at night, except on surest footed beasts, almost impossible."¹

It was not until 1879, that the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors recognized the need for a better road, that could accommodate wagons and stagecoaches, and authorized construction of what was called the Half Moon Bay-Colma Road. The new single lane road, cut at a lower elevation, was adequate enough between Martini Creek and Green Valley, but between Green Valley and San Pedro Valley it wound around San Pedro Mountain with an average grade of 18%. Clearly this was not the answer, and Coastsiders continued to complain about the lack of adequate transportation. A San Francisco newspaper in March of 1912, described an automobile excursion using the much maligned road:

Leaving peaceful Pedro Valley, one immediately commences the ascent of the ridge just back of Point Pedro. For two miles the car winds up the side of the mountain over as treacherous a piece of road as can be found. Death stalks in front and lurks behind in every foot of the climb to the summit....²

Because of the growing popularity of the automobile, increased pressure was brought to bear on the Board of Supervisors for yet a third road. This one was called Coastside Boulevard. It is in many places the highest of the three roads and twists and turns around Montara Mountain. It opened to hundreds of auto enthusiasts on October 31, 1915. The Half Moon Bay-Colma Road, now obsolete, was abandoned in 1917. While the new Boulevard was paved and its views were spectacular, it was still difficult to drive. There were on the order of 250 curves. Terrible accidents occurred. Erosion, drainage problems, landslides and thick fog plagued the new road. By 1920, Coastsiders were once again complaining about the need for a new highway, this one at sea level.³ In the meantime, on the west side of the Point, a railroad had been built.



Remnants of the Half Moon Bay-Colma Road and Road Trail visible on the right. Photo by John Gorman.



Ocean Shore Railroad at Devil's Slide, c. 1910s.

B. The Ocean Shore Railroad

For the Ocean Shore Railroad, the construction at San Pedro Point and Devil's Slide represented the most challenging aspects of building the railroad. Here it was necessary to create a tunnel, build several wooden trestles and cut into the sides of cliffs in order to lay the track.

The idea to establish a railroad to stretch from San Francisco down the San Mateo County Coast goes back at least as far as 1879.⁴ Nothing passed beyond the discussion stage until May 18, 1905, when the Ocean Shore Railroad Company was organized in San Francisco.⁵ The original plan was to link the City with Santa Cruz following the shoreline. Commute transportation and freight from farmers, loggers and fishermen would be augmented by real estate sales, as the railroad would open the coast to suburban development. It was to be a double track, high-speed electric operation. Most of the approximately 80 miles of track would traverse private property, requiring the purchase of right-of-ways from numerous individuals.⁶ At San Pedro Point, the Tobin and Kirkpatrick families cooperated to move the project along.⁷

The San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 significantly hurt the Railroad. Track and equipment were destroyed. Investors shrank away. Therefore plans were cut back. In most places the double track line

was changed to single track. The electric power idea gave way to old-fashioned steam locomotives.⁸ Because of declining interest, a crucial 26-mile gap between Tunitas Creek and Swanton was never completed.

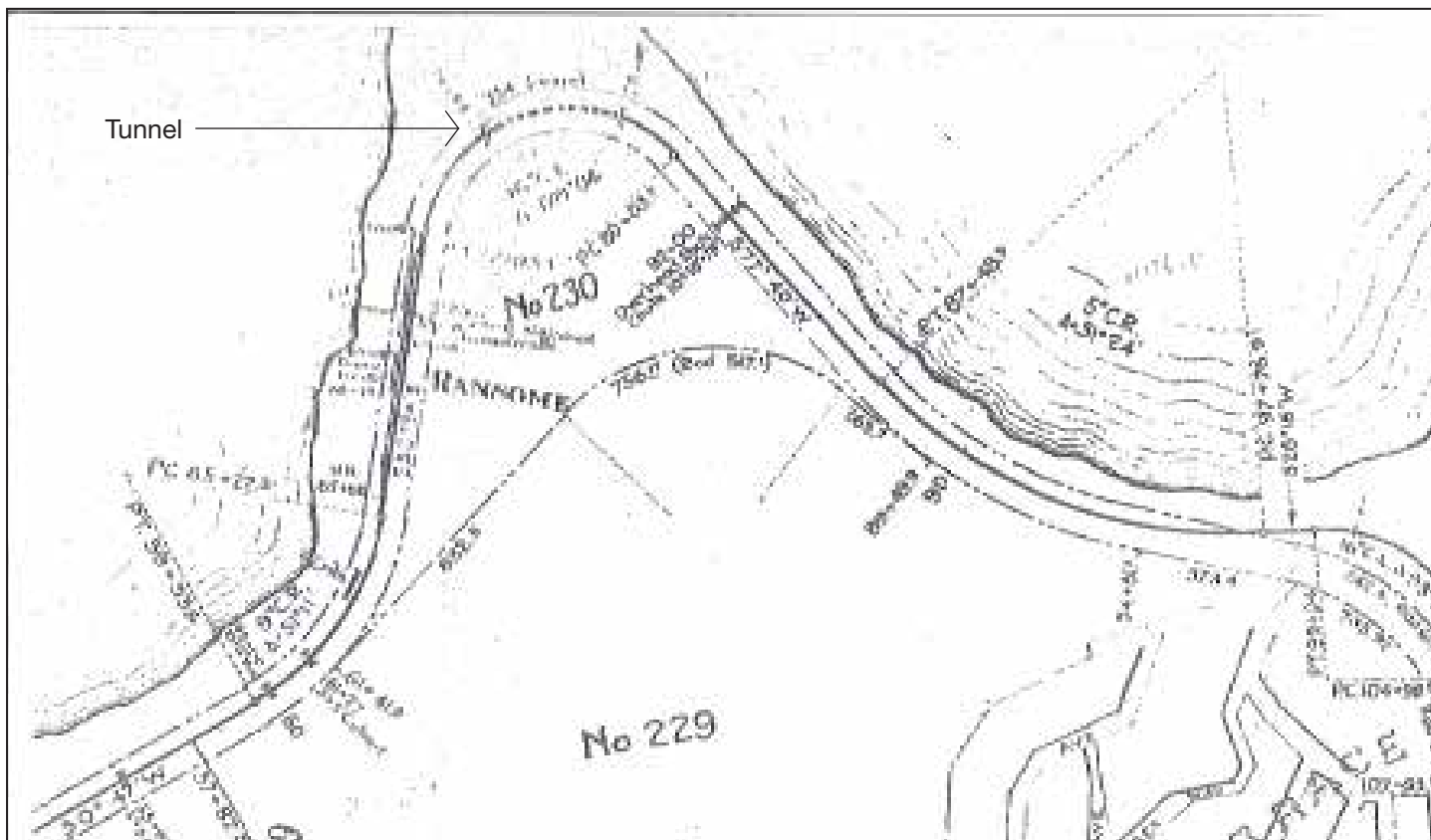
However, in 1907, construction was still advancing and was, in fact, approaching San Pedro Point. In a July 16, 1907, report, the Chief Engineer of the Railroad, John B. Rogers, highlighted the progress. The roadbed from the waterfront in San Francisco to San Pedro Mountain had been accomplished, and Rogers confidently expected “to have this section of road in operation before the first of September....”⁹ The amount of money spent on right-of-ways, terminal properties, material and equipment had come to \$4.5 million. He estimated another \$1.75 million was needed for completion of the railroad.¹⁰

Indeed, by September, track had reached Rockaway (at today’s Pacifica), and on September 27, 1907, the *San Francisco Chronicle* announced that the first passenger trains were scheduled to connect with the San Pedro Valley within days. The *Chronicle* explained:

Realty agents and owners of lots in the various prospective resorts that dot the route of the Ocean Shore have been after the company for months seeking an excursion train. It is said that no less than 10,000 suburban lots have been sold on the section of the line [to San Pedro Valley]..., and that many of the purchasers have never had an opportunity to inspect the route they will traverse to their future residences along the shore.¹¹

By October, the tracks had reached what the Railroad termed the Village of Tobin (later renamed San Pedro Valley) where a wall-less station had been built. This Tobin Station still stands, as it has been converted into a small house. It is located just east of Little Pedro Point, the spit of land at the northern end of Shelter Cove. One can make out the railroad roadbed here. Trains eventually rounded Little Pedro Point, then hugged the east wall at Shelter Cove and passed through a tunnel. The station was named for the influential San Francisco family that owned surrounding properties.

Passing through San Pedro Point was clearly the most difficult engineering project facing the Railroad. Plans had originally called for seven tunnels. A camp for 250 men would have to be established. Equipment and supplies would be brought in by seagoing vessels that would link the shore with an “aerial tramway.”¹² However, the economizing forced upon the company by the Earthquake required a scaled-down strategy. One tunnel would have to do, with open cuts in the cliffs south of it toward Devil’s Slide.



Part of the Right-of-Way and Track Map, Ocean Shore Railroad Company, June 30, 1916.



First phase of tunnel construction, 1907,

The tunnel (see map above) started at the south end of Shelter Cove, by-passing the western most portion of the Point, and emerged 354 feet later, facing Devil's Slide. See the photos on these pages that show construction starting on the north side (p. 16), the tunnel's appearance from the south side (p.17), and a train having just left the tunnel, chugging down along Devil's Slide (p.14). Nothing can be seen of the tunnel today, but the roadbed is visible from Shelter Cove on the north end and from the higher elevations of San Pedro Point on the south.

Gangs of men created the tunnel by boring into the solid rock. The *San Francisco Chronicle* of December 11, 1907, explained that: "The completion of San Pedro Point tunnel, heavily timbered, double tracked, twenty-eight feet wide, twenty-three feet high... [with] the completion of the difficult cliff grading for several miles beyond the tunnel represent the most expensive and trying work on the line...."¹³

After the roadbed emerged from the tunnel, shelves had to be cut by men who were suspended by ropes and lowered over the side of the cliff. While hanging in midair, they drilled holes into the rock and filled these with blasting powder. In this manner footholds were created so that the graders could carve out the rest of the roadbed.

The most difficult point of this shelf work occurred at Saddle Cut, just beyond Devil's Slide. Here 3,500 tons of solid rock had to be removed. Before the completion of the tunnels, this cut was visible to travelers on Highway 1 just before the Slide. Hikers can view it today. It marks the place where the old railroad roadbed met the highway. South from this point, the Ocean Shore Railroad and Highway 1 share the same footprint down the Coast. The map (right) shows Saddle Cut on the south end of what is labeled "Summit." To create Saddle Cut, a narrow tunnel, 70 feet long, was driven into the cliff. Over three days, the tunnel was stuffed with nine tons of black powder. A large portion of San Pedro Mountain was thus blown into the Pacific Ocean.

As mentioned, today's visitor to the higher elevations of San Pedro Point can see the Ocean Shore's roadbed looking west, down to the coastline. Visible is the shelf where the tunnel emerged going south toward Devil's Slide. Again, the tunnel itself is not discernible. It was filled and covered-up long ago. As discussed the old Tobin (San Pedro Valley) station exists as a private home on Shoreside Drive, as the street approaches Shelter Cove (see photo of it in the 1930s below). Recent storms have made it impossible to follow the railroad roadbed from the old station to Shelter Cove (now a private community). Erosion has left not even a trail to maneuver around Little Pedro Point, where railroad trains had passed for the last time 93 years ago.

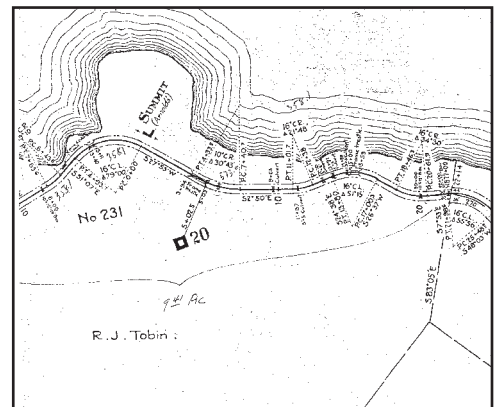
But in 1907, optimism ran high that the railroad would be a success. On October 2, the first train consisting of one engine and two coaches carried 125 passengers to the San Pedro Valley Station.¹⁴ On November 22 of that year, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that the Ocean Shore had two trains running regularly each weekday to San Pedro Valley.¹⁵ By early December the tunnel had been accomplished, and on June 23, 1908, the rails had reached Granada (El Granada, today). Before November, Half Moon Bay had been connected and before the end of 1908, the railroad reached Tunitas Glen. Sadly, despite the energies of its proponents, the Ocean Shore would never get any farther. Its southern builders had linked Santa Cruz to Swanton, but the 26-mile segment of the route between Swanton and Tunitas would not be completed.¹⁶

Nevertheless, passenger and freight transportation was initiated. On May 28, 1908, first service through the tunnel at San Pedro Point to Montara began.

In an Ocean Shore brochure from 1908 promoting its passenger business, the scenic beauty of the trip from San Pedro Valley to Montara was extolled. The advertising piece depicted "Pedro Point Rock"



South end of San Pedro Tunnel, 1908.



Part of the Right-of-Way and Track Map at Devil's Slide, Ocean Shore Railroad Company, June 30, 1916.



San Pedro's Tobin Station in 1937. Photo by Francis Guido.



San Pedro Rock and San Pedro Tunnel.



Ocean Shore Railroad at Pedro Point.

as “More Wonderful than the Sphinx.”¹⁷ In a 1913 publication, the company’s promoters wrote:

Wonders on this Ocean Shore excursion never cease! Leaving Tobin, the railroad is built on great cliffs for several miles around Pedro Mountain, feats of engineering that amaze one. Far below, the tireless breakers dash with tremendous force against the cliffs, throwing great volumes of water skyward. Here we pass one of the most interesting objects of the trip, Point Rogers,¹⁸ great rock of many colored strata, rivaling in beauty the world-renowned Rock of Gibraltar. Then comes the only tunnel on the line, which is broad and has a double track, bored through four hundred feet of solid rock.

The eerie sensations experienced while riding around these few miles of bluff-built railway leave us when we swing in from the shore line for a short distance to enter a succession of deep rock cuts, after which come the rolling foothills of the Coast Range mountains and the resort cities of Montara, Farallone, Moss Beach and Marine View.¹⁹

On September 28, 1917, Madge Morris Wagner, writing for the San Mateo County newspaper, *Coast Side Comet*, described a ride on the Ocean Shore:

“Pedro,” sang out the brakeman. And apparently we were at the end of the land, and maybe the world too. A great headland

jutted into the ocean. But the train nosed its way safely around the first point, and there straight up toward heaven stood the mountain wall and flat below lay the ocean stretched into limitless space, till sea and sky blended into the horizon of the world.

Zip - - we went into a tunnel, and out of it in almost no time, and then the country was too rough for townsites, but masses of yellow lupine spread their glory upon it [San Pedro Point tunnel and Devil's Slide]. It was a world for the geologist and the botanist to revel in.²⁰

Unfortunately, while Devil's Slide was certainly scenic, it continued to give the Railroad engineering difficulties. Landslides were a continuous problem as illustrated in the photograph to the right. Sometimes during the rainy season the railroad would be shut down for months at a time because of them. These kinds of issues, coupled with other business predicaments, labor strife and the 26-mile gap resulted in the Ocean Shore ceasing to deliver service in 1920.

However its legacies are many. Among the reminders of the past are the suburban developments that the railroad inspired at San Pedro Point - Shelter Cove and, above it, San Pedro Terrace. A 1935 history of San Mateo County explained the local post office, named Pedro Valley, served "the rugged point and the small, sheltered cove beneath it." These communities "have attracted vacationers for many years."²¹

A quandary for local historians is to figure out what had happened to the tunnel. Today, it is buried and invisible. How did this come about and when?

Local tradition has it that bootleggers used the tunnel to hide illegal liquor during Prohibition times, and that federal law enforcement agents had it dynamited. A popular book²² and a spokesman for the Pacifica Historical Society²³ feel this is the case, although no real record has yet been located of such developments.

Lenore Lafayette, who frequently visited Shelter Cove during the 1930s as a child, wrote a book about the Cove, in part based on her early experiences there. She reported that some of her family had surmised that the tunnel had "collapsed on a trainload of people," but there is no record of this (and surely there would have been). She continues:

The old tunnel had a dark, foreboding, mysterious air about it that was frightening to me as a child. I had no desire to explore such a place, and my Dad had also warned us to stay away



Rockslide south of San Pedro Tunnel, c. 1910s.

Endnotes

¹ Barbara VanderWerf, *Montara Mountain* (El Granada, CA: Gum Tree Lane Books, 1994), 121.

² *Ibid.*, 127.

³ *Ibid.*, 145-146.

⁴ "Street Railroads," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 10, 1879.

⁵ Jack Wagner, *The Last Whistle* [Ocean Shore Railroad], (Berkeley, CA: Howell-North Books, 1974), 17.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁷ Right-of-Way and Track Map, Ocean Shore Railroad Company, 1916, and Blue Print Profile of Oceanshore Railroad, June 30, 1916. Both are in the archives of the San Mateo County History Museum, and "Preliminary Report," Chicago Title Company, Title No.:09-40701860, September 30, 2009, 4.

⁸ Mitchell P. Postel, *Peninsula Portrait*, (Northridge, CA: Windsor Publications, 1988), 53.

⁹ John B. Rogers, Chief Engineer Ocean Shore Railway Company, Report, July 16, 1907, 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹ "Ocean Shore to Have Excursion," *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 21, 1907.

¹² Wagner, *Last*, 39.

¹³ "Ocean Shore Finishes Tunnel," *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 11, 1907.

¹⁴ Rudolph Brandt, "Ocean Shore," *The Western Railroader*, vol. 15, no. 7, issue 151, (1965), 7.

¹⁵ "Ocean Shore Now Has Daily Trains," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 22, 1907.

¹⁶ Brandt, "Ocean," 9.

¹⁷ Ocean Shore Railroad, "Ocean Shore Breezes," 1908, 39.

¹⁸ The Railroad attempted to rename many places along the San Mateo Coast. Rogers Point is actually San Pedro Point. The Railroad wished to have it named for its chief engineer John B. Rogers.

¹⁹ VanderWerf, *Montara*, 135.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

²¹ Frank M. Stanger, *History of San Mateo County*, (San Mateo, CA: San Mateo Times, 1938), 188.

from that part of the Cove.²⁴

From that passage, it might be inferred that while closed to any type of transportation usage, people may have been able to access the tunnel in the 1930s and 1940s. However Charlise Heiser, whose Pavka Family came to own Shelter Cove in 1949, and began visiting there herself in the early 1940s, remembers it always completely sealed. In fact, she insists she could not even make out its entrance. She also contends that any dynamiting would not have been allowed during the World War II years given military restrictions. Besides, as she had frequent stays at Shelter Cove in the 40s and lived there from 1949 until 1975, she recalls no sealing operations during all those years.²⁵

This account is somewhat supported by an article in the *Redwood City Tribune* of December 28, 1946, which described the tunnel as "filled with rock and earth."²⁶ However a Pacifica pioneer recently recalled that sometime after Pacifica's incorporation (1957), one of its early mayors proposed using the tunnel for city storage. (Our summer 2012 *La Peninsula* tells a similar story concerning Milagra Ridge on page 11.) After consideration of this plan, the City Council felt this a bad idea, and they initiated the final sealing of the tunnel.²⁷ Charlise Heiser feels this account could not be the case, as she was living at Shelter Cove, private property at the time, and the work could not have been conducted without her knowledge.

C. Highway 1

The Ocean Shore's last passenger train commuted between the San Mateo County Coast and San Francisco on August 16, 1920. Coastsiders recognized the Railroad's passing a crucial loss. As discussed, Coastsiders had been no answer. The prospect of isolation from San Francisco and the rest of the Bay Area was a threat to the new agricultural markets and real estate schemes enabled by the Railroad. Thus Coastsiders began dreaming of a new highway, a "Sea Level Boulevard,"²⁸ that could utilize the right-of-way of the defunct Railroad. This idea resulted in the eventual creation of Highway 1.²⁹

Of major importance to the success of this idea was gaining the cooperation of the Ocean Shore Railroad and especially to utilize its tunnel at San Pedro Point and roadbed along Devil's Slide through to Saddle Cut. In 1928, San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Cruz Counties formed Joint Highway District Number 9 to create a new road using many of the ideas expressed by the proponents of Sea Level Boulevard.

The Ocean Shore Railroad was mostly accommodating except for three miles of roadbed from the old Tobin Station to Saddle Cut, in other words, the tunnel and Devil's Slide. The Railroad argued that if it or another company were to try to attempt rail service again they would need these right-of-ways. This portion of the Railroad had been the most difficult and expensive to build. They felt that for them to give up this San Pedro Point section, they ought to be paid \$1 million in compensation. The courts felt \$112,000 a fairer amount. The highway builders were only willing to offer \$25,000. No agreement was ever reached. In 1935, the highway's surveyors were instructed to layout a new route, on the east side of San Pedro Point. Captain George Lewis and his wife Lillian, sold the necessary acreage to the State of California in 1936.³⁰ With the exception of the tunnels, this is the roadway still in use.³¹

In the meantime, Coastsider Boulevard had realized a colorful history. During Prohibition it was known as a principle link between rumrunners and their customers operating speakeasies in San Francisco. In 1933, the State of California took over responsibility for it, designating it State Highway 56. Meanwhile the federal government accepted the responsibility of building Highway 1. Construction in the San Pedro Point area was completed in 1937. The new 5.9 mile stretch from Rockaway to Montara was hailed as a tremendous upgrade from the 10.6 mile Coastsider Boulevard that covered the same trip. Through this section of Highway 1, drivers still encountered 28 curves - but the old Boulevard had 250. The highest point of the Highway 1, in the San Pedro Point vicinity, was 465 feet; the Boulevard reached 922 feet at Saddle Pass. The new road was 26 feet wide: the Boulevard - 16 feet. Touted as one of the most beautiful highways in the world, even before it was finished, San Mateo County zoned this segment of Highway 1 "scenic" ³² in 1936, thus outlawing billboards and hot dog stands. Greyhound bus service began almost immediately and served the Coastsider until 1976, when SamTrans took over the route. Of course, Coastsider Boulevard or State Highway 56 had become obsolescent and was abandoned during World War II.

However, as any Coastsider knows, the saga continued. During the years 1938, 1942, 1951, 1952, 1982, 1983, 1995, 2006 and probably other years as well, landslides forced the closure of Highway 1 at Devil's Slide, in some cases for many months. During the slide of 1995, it sank eight feet. The plan to bypass Devil's Slide with a new tunnel was approved and ground was broken for its construction on September 17, 2007.³³ The project was completed March 25, 2013.

Endnotes

²² VanderWerf, *Montara*, p. 15.

²³ Jerry Crow of the Pacifica Historical Society, in conversation with Joan Levy, June 7, 2012.

²⁴ Lenore Lafayette, *Shelter Cove: The Early Years* (Los Altos, CA: Cherry Orchard Books, 1997), 36.

²⁵ Charlise Heiser, interview by Mitchell Postel and Therese Smith, Pacifica, CA, June 18, 2012.

²⁶ Don Allen, "The Saga of San Mateo County's Ill-Fated Ocean Shore Railroad," *Redwood City Tribune*, December 23, 1946.

²⁷ Nick Gust, interview by Chuck Gust, Pacifica, June 14, 2012.

²⁸ VanderWerf, *Montara*, 155.

²⁹ San Mateo County Historical Association, *Historic Resources Study for Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Mateo County*, 2010, 222-223.

³⁰ "Preliminary Report," Chicago Title Company, Title No. 09-40701860, September 30, 2009, 4.

³¹ VanderWerf, *Montara*, 157.

³² *Ibid.*, 161.

³³ "The Devil's in the Details," and "40 Years of Playing PingPong with the Thing," *San Mateo County Times*, September 16, 2007.



Driving Devil's Slide in 1970. Photo by Ken Lajoie, United States Geological Survey.

Highway One



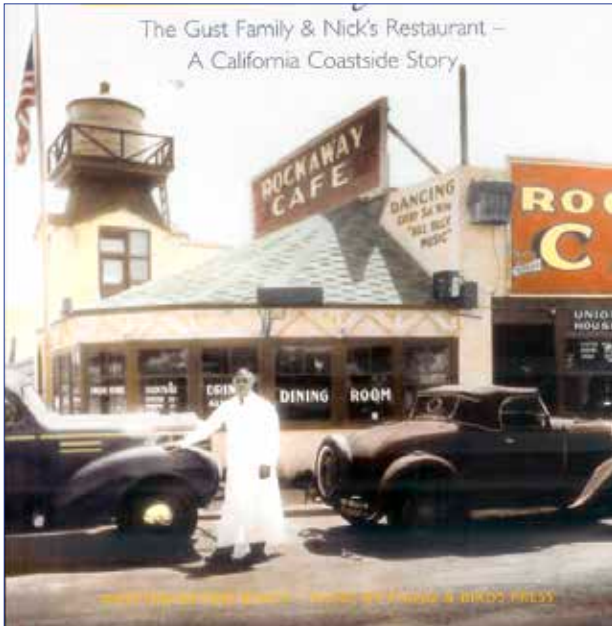
A Highway One construction at Devil's Slide, 1937. Copyright 1937 California Department of Transportation. All rights reserved.

B Highway One at Saddle Cut, 1937. Copyright 1937 California Department of Transportation. All rights reserved.

C Building Highway One with the Half Moon Bay-Colma Road in the background, 1938. Copyright 1938 California Department of Transportation. All rights reserved.

D Break in Highway One, 1983. Photo by Ken Lajoie, United States Geological Survey.

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Visitors drive to Rockaway Quarry in a 1920 Mitchell. Photo from Tom Gray, Barbara VanderWerf Collection.