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Little Histories of the Road

San Anselmo

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The top picture shows San Anselmo when railroad service was first established; the lower one shows San Anselmo as it looks today.

Train Service

The North Pacific Coast Railroad Company built a narrow gauge line from Sausalito to Tomales, and from San Anselmo to San Rafael, which was opened to the public January 11, 1875. This was the first railroad, which served San Anselmo with train service. The San Rafael and San Quentin Railroad Company in October 1869 built a broad gauge line of railroad from B Street, San Rafael to San Quentin, and operated ferryboats to San Francisco. In March 1875 the North Pacific Coast Railroad Company took over this line and this company, having its own track from San Anselmo to San Rafael, operated both ferries, thus giving San Anselmo a double train service. The doubled service continued until April 1884, when the Corte Madera tunnel was built and then the San Quentin ferry line was abandoned in favor of the Sausalito terminal.

San Anselmo was the name first given to the station. In July 1875 it was changed to Junction, and in April 1883 the former name of San Anselmo was restored. The first depot was built in 1875 (a small shed), and J. Stewart Jr. was installed as agent in March 1875. A new depot was constructed in 1911, replacing the old shed. In 1908 a transfer station was built so that the contents of narrow gauge freight cars could be transferred to broad gauge cars. This feature was changed in 1920 from San Anselmo to Pt. Reyes Station.

Important Physical Changes

Changes in track and train operations took place in 1903, when third rail electrification was installed from Sausalito to San Rafael via San Anselmo. Standard second track had been built to San Anselmo in 1901. Automatic signals governing train movement were installed by the Union Switch and Signal Company. The Alto Power House was constructed in 1903 to operate the suburban line by electrically operated trains.

The San Anselmo substation was originally built in 1905 as a storage battery house; this battery was discontinued, the building enlarged, and two 500 k.w. motor generator sets installed in 1908. In January 1912 there was placed in service one more 500 k.w. motor generator set. The third, or power rail, was extended from Mill Valley Junction to San Rafael through San Anselmo on October 17, 1903.

The Signal Tower at San Anselmo was erected in 1911.

“THEN AND NOW”

The pictures printed on the cover page of this issue are the stimulus for the article entitled “Then and Now.”

My entry into the service of the Northwestern Pacific Railroad Company dates from 1903, but I have lived in Ross Valley since 1910, and have watched San Anselmo grow from a mud hole, with a few scattered houses and one grocery store, into one of the most beautiful spots in Marin County.

In the march of progress and our greed for better conditions we are prone to forget our kerosene lamps, our muddy roads that were called streets, our plain board houses that

were called homes, until by chance we stumble across a picture such as the one entitled "Then."

In viewing this picture, my memory goes back to the San Anselmo of 1910, but the spirit of development and progress was fast unfolding, and today finds us enjoying every modern convenience, consisting of markets, shops, dry goods and grocery stores, theatres, hospitals, churches, schools and seminaries, within an hour's ride of San Francisco.

In 1911, the Northwestern Pacific built a most attractive station surrounding it with flower gardens and concrete platforms. Following the completion of the station came our macadam streets and concrete sidewalks, some of them being partially financed by the Northwestern Pacific, and advice and help administered through the surveying and engineering department whenever solicited. Then came the homebuilder, and again the railroad company proffered its aid in assisting home-seekers to secure suitable sites through an advertising medium instituted in their general office in San Francisco under the supervision of F.B. Latham, known as the North Shore Land Company.

Additional train service was provided with station stops, to accommodate our patrons, enabling them to choose their home site wherever it most appealed to their particular fancy, until today, we enjoy an approximate population of over 11,000 comprising the towns of Ross, San Anselmo, Yolanda, Fairfax and Manor.

I am an ardent supporter of education, and I find the schools centering in and around San Anselmo supreme, therefore I shall take them in location order and attempt to explain their particular advantage. Tamalpais Union High School is located on the main line of the Northwestern Pacific about half way between Sausalito and San Anselmo. This school was opened eighteen years ago, with twenty students in attendance. Today this plant is valued at over one-half million dollars. There are forty-five teachers employed. Its present enrollment exceeds eight hundred and fifty students, and the territory from which this school draws, is valued at thirteen million dollars, comprising the town from Sausalito to Mill Valley, thence to Manor inclusive.

The Northwestern Pacific deserves a great deal of credit in helping to maintain this splendid institution in arranging the transportation problem for the students. There is a special steam train provided which leaves Manor at eight o'clock each school day, stopping at every station along the line, picking up these children and taking them to the very doors of the school. In the afternoon, the train is again brought to the school doors, and the children dispatched to their respective homes without the necessity of having to ride on the regular passenger trains and mingle with transient travel, which helps the train crew in looking after the safety of the children exclusively.

On March 26, 1926, the establishment of a Junior College for this district was determined by a vote of approximately two to one. Dr. George Rodden of San Rafael acted as chairman for the general committee, which promoted the formation of this institution, and on August 30, 1926, Junior College, opened its doors to ninety-two enrolled students for the first semester, and one hundred and forty special students (men and women) enrolled for one or two courses per week

Today finds this institution one of the most important assets to Marin County. Recently, twenty-six acres of land at Kentfield, that was formerly held by the Tamalpais Center, was deeded to this college. This places within their possession an excellent and artistically constructed building, which will form a splendid nucleus for future buildings. It is generally understood this plan was proposed by William Kent, and is a gift to the college on the part of the well-known and benevolent Kent family.

At the opening of the coming term, it is estimated the 1926 enrollment will be increased to three hundred students, which will double the teaching staff. Considering its newly acquired acreage, its increased scholarship, it is evidencing a more rapid growth than any junior college in the State, and it is believed that ultimately the local school will be one of the largest in California.

In 1922, the Katherine Branson School, a branch of the well known Bryn Mawr College, opened in Fernhill Park, Ross, where the beauty and seclusion of the grounds offer unusual advantage for both resident and day pupils. This school occupies an estate of eleven acres. Although secluded in its setting among the hills, it is within a ten minute walk from Bolinas Avenue Station, San Anselmo, and within easy walking or driving distance of Ross. There are one hundred students enrolled in this splendid institution, which needs no other recommendation outside its name.

In the month of August 1924, the Sisters of Loretto came from Louisville, Kentucky, to open a school in San Anselmo. It was the first foundation in Northern California of this century-old distinguished order, which was named Saint Anselms Parochial. The new school opened with two hundred children, seven grades were taught that first year. A grade has been added each year, so in August of last year the high school opened with the first year.

In three years from now, it is hoped that the four years, commercial and academic, will be in operation. This is San Anselmo's first high school, and because it is the first high school, and because the sisters are so thorough and so sincere in their teachings, it deserves more than mention. It deserves the backing of every citizen within its district.

It is maintained by monthly collection in Saint Anselms Church without charge to the pupils. Three hundred and twenty-five were registered this year, of whom sixty take lessons in violin and piano. An autobus makes three trips morning and afternoon to Fairfax, Lansdale and Kentfield in connection with this school, and the Northwestern Pacific takes care of the children who attend from out of town points.

In 1922 a Seminary, very new to this part of the country, was established by the Dominican Fathers of the Roman Catholic Church, known as Saint Thomas Priory and College, where boys in the first year of high school are accepted as students for the priesthood. It is the first foundation in this part of California of this distinguished order. This seminary is located between Ross and San Anselmo on the site formerly occupied by the Hund Sanitarium, which provides an elegant home and beautiful grounds for these students, numbering around fifteen.

Within the immediate town of San Anselmo, there are four public schools, namely, the Main School, which claims an enrollment of three hundred pupils; the Robert Dollar, a

school instituted and maintained for the Presbyterian Orphanage and Farm, by the well-known and philanthropic Robert Dollar. This school houses about seventy little tots, special teachers being provided in order to keep these little unfortunates within their own grounds, and altogether, under the splendid care granted through this institution.

Then comes the Yolansdale School, which comprises the combined enrollment of grammar grade children within the town of Yolanda and Lansdale within the corporate limits of San Anselmo. This school claims an enrollment of 180 pupils.

The San Francisco Presbyterian Theological Seminary, located in San Anselmo, deserves creditable mention. The organization dates from October 1871, when it was decided that there was need for a school of theology on the Pacific Coast. Actual work of the Seminary began in November of the same year, the first classes being held in the rooms of St. John's Church and the City College of San Francisco and the first professors being ministers of that city and Oakland. In 1890, the site in San Anselmo, upon which the seminary now stands, was presented by A.W. Foster, who at one time was president of one of the predecessor companies of the Northwestern Pacific, and a man well known for his acts of benevolence throughout Marin county. In 1892, through the munificence of Alexander Montgomery, the present buildings were erected as the permanent home of the Seminary.

In a recent interview with one of the professors of this Seminary, the question arose as to why San Anselmo was chosen as the spot in which to permanently locate this institution. His reply, which follows in substance, was very pleasing indeed.

San Anselmo is close to San Francisco, and yet it is in the quiet of the country. Our Seminary is built upon, and around, a detached hill, where three valleys meet, in full view of Mount Tamalpais. Among educational institutions its situation is unsurpassing in beauty, serenity and salubrity. The conformation of this part of California is very like that of Palestine. The hills have the same rounded aspect, broken here and there by rugged ravines. The climatic conditions are much the same, except the high sierras protect the western state from the inconvenience of such hot desert winds as those that sweep across the Holy Land. Even in the flora of the two countries, there is a wide range of similarity, and due to perfect climatic conditions, the grounds of the Seminary have been laid out with the plan of introducing here all the plants, shrubs and trees of Palestine. San Anselmo is the only spot in this part of the country where the contrast of wet season and dry season, land and sea is the same." This institution claims an enrollment of seventy-five students, coming from all parts of the United States.

San Anselmo territory comprises some very interesting charitable institutions, namely the Cedars, a home for subnormal children, located between Ross and San Anselmo. Here excellent buildings and beautiful grounds are provided.

Hillside Farm, an institution for undernourished children, and Arequipa, a sanitarium for tubercular women are located about three miles from San Anselmo and occupy the same grounds, which are elevated and protected from the north side, commanding a most beautiful view of Mount Tamalpais and the surrounding valley.