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### UPCOMING EVENTS:

**Friends Presentation "Air Base Branch"** Hosted by the Santa Maria Valley Railroad Santa Maria Library Shepard Hall April 10, 2019

**Friends Annual Dinner Gala** Santa Maria Fairpark May 18, 2019

**Annual BBQ at SMVRR** August 2019

**Field Trip - Pacific Coast Railway Through Santa Maria** Fall 2019

### Friends Presentation "The Airbase Branch - Railroad's oldest line" Wednesday April 10 6:00 pm Shepard Hall Santa Maria Public Library

This Friends presentation Rob Himoto, President of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad, will be talking about the Airbase Branch, originally built by the Pacific Coast Railway in 1883.

Captain Hancock purchased the line in 1941 and it continues to be a thriving line today. Join us on Wednesday April 10 at Shepard's Hall at the Santa Maria Public Library. Doors open at 5:00 pm and presentation starts at 6:00 pm. For those who would like to have dinner, the Moxie Café next door will be open for dinner.



### THE 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL DINNER GALA AND SILENT AUCTION

YES, this is our FIFTH ANNUAL fundraising dinner and silent auction! Please join us for a fun filled evening and support the Friends as we continue our efforts to preserve the history of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad and the greater rail story here in the Valley. We had a great turn out last year, so help make the Fifth annual the biggest yet! It will be held on **Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup>** at 5:30 p.m. in the Fountain Pavilion at the **Santa Maria Fair Park**. The Santa Maria Valley Railroad will present the annual Public Safety Award and the Friends of SMVRR will present the annual G. Allan Hancock History Award.



The dinner will be Tri Tip, Chicken, and Ribs catered by Cool Hand Luke's and a no host bar. You can purchase tickets online, \$75 per person or \$600 for a reserved table of 8, at [www.friends-smvrr.org](http://www.friends-smvrr.org) or by check to Friends of SMVRR, P.O. Box 1031, Santa Maria, Ca. 93456-1031. **PLEASE RSVP no later than FRIDAY May 10<sup>th</sup>.**



Photo SMVHS

*Friends Presentation*  
*"The Airbase Branch"*  
 Wednesday April 10  
 at 6:00 pm in Shepard Hall  
 Santa Maria Public Library



Photos SMVHS

## From the Vault - Airbase Branch World War II

This is an excerpt from Hal Madson's Book "The Railroads of the Santa Maria Valley" (used with permission).

When we entered the war, the SMVRR had three locomotives, two 2-6-2s and a 2-8-2.

Three more 2-8-2s were added during the war, two in 1942 and the third in 1944. The head lamps were equipped with blackout shields for night-time operation and their silver faces were painted black. The railroad operated twenty-four hours a day and hired off-duty soldiers and local women to fill in. Captain Hancock, now in the sixties, put in many double shifts at the throttle, as all the line locomotives were working overtime, hauling oil, lumber, and produce in support of



Photo: SMVRR

our war effort. By March 1942, survey parties were mapping out a "bomber base" just south of the city limits. There were fears that a base on the coast would be vulnerable to attack from carrier-based planes. The army felt that the large number of eucalyptus trees would aid in the camouflage of the revetments. The army ended up building a fighter base, and Santa Maria became the home of a squadron of P-38 *Lightnings*. Their training flights became a common sight over the valley.

In May, 1942, under army contract, the SMVRR built a branch from a point where the main line crossed the old PCRY, two-and-a-half miles south on the old PCRY roadbed, to the site of the new U.S. Army Air Corps base. A siding served several U.S. Army warehouses located on the western edge of today's Waller Park. The west leg of the wye connecting the Airfield Branch was wide enough to accommodate the Pullman coaches carrying the soldiers to the area.

## SPONSORS



**G. A. Hancock  
 Family**

We are always looking for sponsors to expand our programs and tours and fund educational activities.

Historic Photos are from the archives of the Santa Maria Valley Historical Society ([santamariahistory.com](http://santamariahistory.com)) unless otherwise noted.



## SANTA MARIA VALLEY'S ELECTRIC RAILROAD FIELD TRIP

An interesting aspect of our rail history here in the Santa Maria Valley was the electrified rail operations. These were branches of the Pacific Coast Railway built between 1906 and 1911 primarily to haul sugar beets to the Union Sugar Refinery at Betteravia.

Electrifying these branches would offer several advantages over operating them under steam. The cost of producing electricity for this purpose is very inexpensive. Operationally, switching beet dumps where wagons from the fields would unload beets into rail cars means a locomotive would have considerable idle time in the field. An electric loco only uses energy while operating, versus a steam loco that continues to burn fuel and consume water while it's standing idle. In addition, the maintenance for an electric locomotive is virtually nonexistent when compared to a steam engine.

Electrified railways in the U.S. are generally standard gauge of 56.5" between the rails, or the more common and familiar 42" gauge trolley systems that were found in metropolitan areas. The Pacific Coast Railway was a 36" gauge, making their electrified branches quite unique.

The Union Sugar Refinery at Betteravia had its own uniqueness in regard to rail operations. After the



Photo SMVHS



construction of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad in 1911, the refinery was served by the Southern Pacific Railroad, the Pacific Coast Railway, and the Santa Maria Valley Railroad. The plant had standard gauge, narrow gauge and dual gauge track, some having overhead trolley wire on which the electric locos could operate. A rail fans dream come true!

One of the electrified branches of the Pacific Coast Railway went along Main Street in Santa Maria to beet fields west of the city. It was eventually extended further west to Guadalupe

and east from the PCRY depot on west Main St. to downtown Santa Maria just east of Broadway. This gave Santa Marians their longed for opportunity for passenger service to connect with the Southern Pacific in Guadalupe. The passenger service ran from 1909 until 1928 when it had finally succumbed to the automobile.

On Feb. 23, 2019 the Friends of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad conducted a field trip to visit some of the former locations of the electrified branches of the Pacific Coast Railway to try and get some insight to the rail activity of the past. Photos from the field trip

can be found on our web site at [www.friends-smvrr.org](http://www.friends-smvrr.org).

To learn more about the electrified branches of the PCRY, detailed information can be found in "The Pacific Coast Railway" by Kenneth E. Westcott and Curtiss H. Johnson, "Railroads of the Santa Maria Valley" by Hal Madson and "Ships and Narrow Gauge Rails" by Gerald M. Best. The San Luis Obispo Railroad Museum also has a comprehensive exhibit about the Pacific Coast Railway.

## From the Vault -- Diesels Come to Santa Maria Valley Railroad

This is another excerpt from Hal Madson's Book "The Railroads of the Santa Maria Valley" (used with permission).

The first General Electric, 70-ton diesel electric locomotive arrived on the property in August, 1948. The 600 horse-power switcher was considered ideal for the railroad's needs. Another tug-o-war ensued, this time between No. 21 and the new locomotive, and the diesel won the contest. From 1948 to 1952, five of these new locomotives were purchased from the factory. Original livery was dark green with the GE stripe pattern in yellow. The colors were reversed, becoming the now familiar yellow and green stripes.

These locomotives could be used in multiple units, and crews could adjust needs to the job at hand. Most of the time they were used in pairs, but in the 1980s triple units were used during beet season and, between 1982 and 1993 after Union Sugar purchased the cars, as many as five were used to move the stored beet cars east of Rosemary.

When the line started to dieselize, a decision was made to preserve the remaining steam locomotives still in service. Only No. 150, which had been wrecked in 1948, would meet the blow torch.



Photo SMVRR



Photo SMVHS

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