

Friends of the

Santa Maria Valley Railroad



NEWSLETTER SUMMER 2021

SMVRR 110th Anniversary July 11, 2021

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

Friends Annual BBQ

Pick-up BBQ & Drive-thru Tour
Osburn Railroad Yard
August 21, 2021
12 noon to 3 pm

Caboose #210 Open House Guadalupe Amtrak Station

City of Guadalupe 75th
Anniversary Celebration
August 8, 2021
10 am to 5 pm

September Friends Zoom Meeting

Railroad Photo Contest Winners
September 16, 2021 at 6 pm
Check our website for
Zoom details

Sunray Oil Refinery Fire

North of the Midco Pass railroad siding and north of the Osburn Yard is an open field today. Previously in the 1960's and 1970's, H.Y. Minami packed fresh vegetables using rail served packing sheds. In fact, the remnants of the H.Y. Minami spur exist today just a couple hundred feet west of the west Midco Pass switch. You can see remnants of the spur in the 2002 aerial photo shown below.

Before the Minami packing sheds, this area was once the Sunray Oil Refinery. Originally built in 1939 - 1940 as the Mid-Coast Refinery, hence the name of two sidings still in existence today - Midco Storage and Midco Pass, the refinery processed 7,000 barrels a day. The plant was acquired by Alphonzo E. Bell of the Bel-Air Oil Company and the Bell Oil and Refining Co. in 1941. Bell was simultaneously negotiating for the purchase of the old Pacific Coast Railway. The refinery was then known as the Bel-Air Oil Refinery.

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View of SMVRR Offices (former Sunray Office) on right and former Sunray Refinery site in background to left.



Current day view of switch that previously lead to Minami and Sunray



Aerial photo from 2002 of Minami Packing Sheds - note the spur coming in from lower left of photo



Current aerial view of Sunray Refinery site and SMVRR Osburn Yard

Gala Fundraiser a "VIRTUAL" Success !



Thanks to all the participants, donors and sponsors, this year's Gala was a success in raising much needed funds for the Friends of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad. Friends Chairman Jeff Karsh was the event M.C. (left and right photo) and SMVRR President Rob Himoto presented awards (center photo). We would like to thank the following people and businesses for their generous support of the Annual Gala and Auction Fundraiser this year.

Title Sponsor

Santa Maria Valley Railroad

Supporting sponsor

Kevin and Celia O'Roark

Table Sponsors

Dottie Lyons Hancock Family

Event Sponsor

Santa Maria Fairpark

Auction Item Sponsors

Norman and Cheryl McDonald

Santa Maria Valley Railroad

Breakaway Tours

Rob Himoto

Linda Rodrigues

Friends of the Santa Maria Valley Railroad

We would also like to thank the participants and bidders for their generous and continued support of the Friends.

We will see you all next year IN PERSON at the Santa Maria Fair Park for our 7th Annual Fundraiser Gala Dinner and Silent Auction on May 21, 2022.

Friends Annual BBQ

The Annual BBQ and Osburn Yard Tour at the Santa Maria Valley Railroad will be on Saturday, August 21, 2021 from 12:00 noon to 3:00 pm. Due to Covid Rules for Transit Companies, we will have a take-out only BBQ and drive-through tour.

Our pickup BBQ will be Santa Maria Style Tri-Tip, beans, garlic bread, and a green salad for only \$20.00 per person. It will also include a drive-through tour of the Osburn Yard. All BBQ Lunch and drive-through tour tickets must be prepaid by Saturday August 14.



OUR SPONSORS:

We welcome new sponsors to expand our programs and tours and fund educational activities.



**G. A. Hancock
Family**

Where Are They Now?

SMVRR Caboose #200

Santa Maria Valley Railroad caboose #200 arrived in Santa Maria along with its' sister #210 in 1962. They were built in July 1959 by the International Car Company for the Rutland Railroad as caboose #50 and #51. Rutland Railroad was in bankruptcy and had returned the cars to the manufacturer. SMVRR purchased them for \$16,694.57 each, about \$145,000 in today's dollars.

Referred to as an extended vision caboose, due to its' wide cupola, #200 served on the SMV from 1962 until it was retired in 1991. The caboose then made its' way to Train Mountain, a railroad park in southern Oregon where it was put on static display. In the photo you can see it sitting among the pines still in SMVRR livery. It has since been repainted and sadly no longer wears the SMV colors.



Early photo at Rutland as #50
(Photo from *Remembering the Rutland*)



#200 in Santa Maria in 1975
(Photo by Steven Vincent courtesy of RR Picture Archives)



Early Train Mountain - still in SMVRR livery
(photo by Harry Harlow)



Two photos of #200 at Train Mountain as it appears today

RAIL PHOTOGRAPHERS! WIN CASH!

Here's your opportunity to showcase your favorite Santa Maria Valley Railroad photographs and win cash prizes! A winner and runner up will be selected in each of the following three categories.

- ❖ SANTA MARIA VALLEY RAILROAD PAST
- ❖ SANTA MARIA VALLEY RAILROAD PRESENT
- ❖ CENTRAL COAST U.P. MANIFEST FREIGHT TRAINS SERVING SMVRR

THEME of this contest is **"SERVING THE CENTRAL COAST"**

WINNER IN EACH CATEGORY RECEIVES \$100
RUNNER UP IN EACH CATEGORY RECEIVES \$25

Photos must be submitted by September 1st. Winners will be announced and photos displayed on September 16th during the Friends of SMVRR ZOOM meeting.

For complete submission details, go to our web page at www.friends-smvrr.org or our Facebook Page.

Caboose Open House - Guadalupe Amtrak Station



SMVRR Caboose #210 will be open from 10 am to 5 pm on August 8, 2021 during the **Guadalupe 75th Anniversary Celebration**. Come and tour this historic piece of Santa Maria Valley Railroad rolling stock.



Friends Tour Dana Adobe

Friends members toured the Dana Adobe and Cultural Center in Nipomo on June 5th. We enjoyed an interesting and educational tour lead by very knowledgeable docents. This California Historic Landmark played a central role in early California history. If you haven't been there, we highly recommend it! Be sure and walk the "Railroad Trail" as designated on their trail map. It is part of the Pacific Coast Railway right of way.



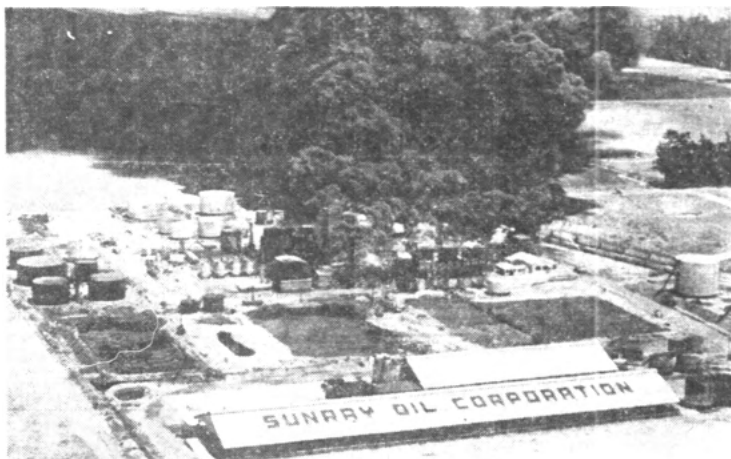
Sunray Oil Refinery Fire (continued from page 1)

Bel-Air Oil was very active in the Santa Maria Valley for oil production. Bell was the original discoverer of the famous Santa Fe Springs oil pool, which was located on ranch holdings inherited from his father James George Bell. Bell was also instrumental in developing Bel-Air estates on the Santa Monica palisades of Los Angeles in 1923.

The plant was acquired by Sunray Oil on February 1, 1946 from the Bel-Air Co. Refinery Superintendent Richard L. Johnson announced that they started working on three new 14,000-barrel tanks for storage of light oils, fuel oils and gasoline and would in a short time erect two other large tanks for the storage of asphaltum. The two tanks for holding asphalt will be of 10,000-barrel capacity each. In the May-June issue of the Sunray News, the house publication of the Sunray Oil Corporation, it was reported that the use of Santa Maria Valley asphalt to pave air strips on Iwo Jima. In 1947 it was mentioned that a desalting unit was added at a cost of \$100,000. In February 23, 1948 Santa Maria Daily Times and Courier reported according to company employees, road oil from Sunray refinery was being shipped to Alaska. In April 7, 1948 Santa Maria Daily Times and Courier stated the refinery was processing up to 7,500 barrels daily. Over the next several years the refinery was enlarged and modernized and additional drilling leases were acquired.

Seventy-one years ago, on Friday June 30, 1950 at 10:27 a.m. the Sunray Oil Refinery suffered a major fire that made national headlines. The distilling tower exploded and the blaze created a thick black smoke that was carried over the City of Santa Maria. Two workers, Fred N. McAdam and Walter W. Peverly, were killed in the explosion, McAdam, age 29, was killed when the blast hurled him 50 feet. Peverly, age 55, was critically burned and later passed away in the hospital. Four people were injured including Tim Shanahan, suffering severe burns. He told the hospital attendants that the concussion blew the shirt off of his back. Three firefighters, H.A. Ingram, John Gifford, and Roy Montooth were treated by a local physician for minor burns and released. According to Sales Manager Harry Arnold, all operating equipment was destroyed and about 20 storage tanks were burned. Between six and eight other tanks were saved. The number of tanks was revised to 16 tanks of road oil and fuel oil plus the operating plant of the refinery were set off by the explosion of the flash tower on a visbreaker (a processing unit in an oil refinery) in the distilling section of the million-dollar plant.

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Aerial photo of Sunray Oil fire in 1950



Sunray Oil site as viewed today from the Osburn Yard

Sunray Oil Refinery Fire (continued from page 5)

The Sunray refinery fire could have been worse, but the heroics of the firefighters kept the fire from spreading to the more high explosive and combustible tanks nearby. The firefighters worked 48 hours straight fighting the blaze. From the July 5, 1950 Santa Maria Times, "Members of the Santa Barbara County Fire Department were the first to arrive and fought the fire for more than 30 hours. These county firemen received the unqualified praise of two specialized and seasoned oil well and refinery firefighters who found everything possible had been done to control the blazing tanks when they arrived from Los Angeles scarcely five hours after the plant had ignited. Probably the greatest tribute to the courage shown by these men was the manner in which they approached the blaze despite the fact their experience in fighting oil fires was definitely limited and they couldn't be familiar with what was potentially dangerous and what was not so."

Other responders included Union Oil workers, state firefighters from Santa Luis Obispo County, sheriff's office, the city police and fire department, the National Guardsmen, the Red Cross, and countless other volunteers. Red Cross workers supplied coffee and sandwiches to the firefighters and National Guardsman until 3 a.m. They returned at 6 a.m. with more food and coffee.

The account from the June 30, 1950 Santa Maria Times - "County crews cleared roads thru sandy fields to the south and west with a bulldozer over which pumper trucks were moved on to get water and foam chemicals on the blaze. Fire fighting equipment also rushed from all oil companies in the immediate vicinity. Union Oil Co. secured equipment from its Avila refinery, reported to be 'the latest equipment for fighting oil fires.' County firemen at Santa Maria airport had three trucks at the scene, with another fire truck coming from Orcutt."

The Santa Maria Valley Railroad was part of the heroic efforts of the day. It was reported in the Santa Maria Times that the Santa Maria Valley Railroad crew from Betteravia used a diesel locomotive to pull 16 tank cars from the path of the blazing oil and asphalt. The cars were pulled west of the refinery area. Members of the crew were Manny Phillips, engineer, F.G. Eagler, conductor, Jack Rice, fireman, James Stappart and Arthur Codazzi, brakemen.

The Sunray Oil fire was listed in the ten worst fires of 1950 with a total damage of \$2,501,500. The refinery was rebuilt and by the following June was back in production processing 5,000 barrels of crude oil per day.

Union Oil purchased the refinery and Sunray's crude oil production in 1954. Union Oil at the time was building a new petroleum coking plant on the Nipomo Mesa which is now owned by Phillips 66. The plant was later dismantled and Union Oil later transloaded crude oil at the Bell Storage siding. H.Y Minami later converted some of the buildings to rail served packing sheds. The SMVRR went from hauling crude oil to hauling vegetables. The refinery was located across the railroad tracks from what became the Osburn Yard. In fact the current Santa Maria Valley Railroad's office was a Sunray Oil Refinery office and was moved across the railroad tracks. The railroad's office is the only remaining structure of the Sunray Oil Refinery.

Today the land has been mitigated and appears to currently be under development. However, the Midco Pass siding is awaiting mitigation as crude oil still bubbles up from the ties.

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All photos are from
the archives of the
Santa Maria Valley
Railroad unless
otherwise noted.