

WHEEL CLICKS

Pacific Railroad Society Inc.

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A CONSTRUCTION DATE FOR THE PALMS DEPOT

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The construction date for the Palms Depot has long been a mystery, since Southern Pacific Railroad's extensive corporate records, which must have included such information, were all destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906. I have recently succeeded in uncovering some newspaper references which appear to provide a basis for determining the date.

"The Palms" as a real estate subdivision dates to 1886; on December 24 of that year Messrs. Curtis and Sweetser filed a tract map with the County Recorder reflecting a survey by E. T. Wright, County Surveyor. The map shows a "station" there within the 100-foot right-of-way of SP's Santa Monica Branch (built in 1875 as the Los Angeles and Independence Railroad), but it seems improbable that this was any more than a shelter for passengers (or perhaps it was the LA&I "section house" referred to as "Grasshopper station" by Luther A. Ingersoll in his 1908 book, *Century History: Santa Monica Bay Cities*). Furthermore, the Palms Depot we know was located off the 100-foot right-of-way on land designated "Depot Grounds" on maps as far back as the turn of the century.

The best contemporary documentation of progress at The Palms during its first year is found in the *Santa Monica Outlook*. On June 1, 1887, that paper reported:

"The proprietors of The Palms, a new townsite five miles from Santa Monica on the railroad to Los Angeles, are making some fine improvements. The streets are all graded and the sidewalks planted with palms and shade trees; several parks are laid out and planted; a large well has been dug, which has an abundance of water, and steam pumpworks erected to send water into a 150,000 gallon reservoir which has been placed on a high point overlooking the town site. The Railroad Company are building a neat depot, and about twelve dwelling houses and one store have been erected. An air of good taste and permanency prevades (*sic*) all the improvements. The Palms at a time not remote in the future will be a choice residence spot."

And on August 10 the *Outlook* noted:

"Mr. Curtis, one of the owners of 'The Palms' tract, is building a handsome two-story residence. A number of houses, including a depot and two store-buildings, have been erected at that point, which goes to show that pleasant locality is steadily growing in popularity."

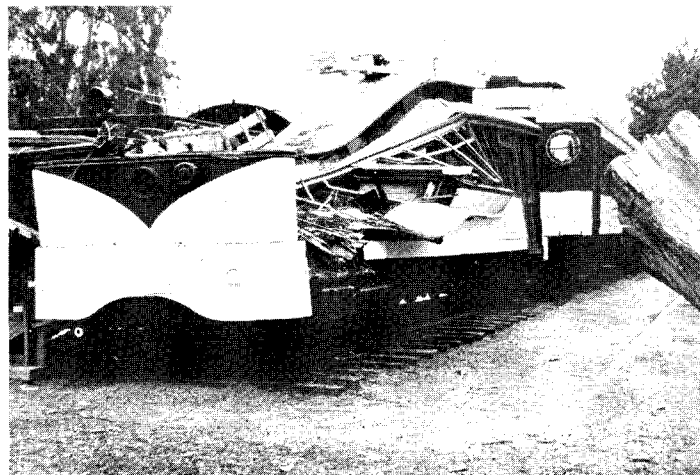
The depot came in for high praise from the *Los Angeles Times* in its Annual Trade Number on Jan-

uary 1, 1888:

"The Southern Pacific Railroad depot at 'The Palms' is one of the most attractive in Southern California, nestled in a beautiful park, or rather, cluster of parks, with its nicely-graveled approaches, and its green lawns, inclosed by fences, with fountains, to give an air of refinement in the general combination of taste with business requirements."

Since Ingersoll also refers to this depot and does not indicate its later replacement with another, it seems reasonable to conclude that the depot built in the summer of 1887 is the one which has survived to the present.

Recently, staff of the History Division of the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History drew my attention to the following item in the *Los Angeles Times* for September 9, 1906: "The Southern Pacific is rebuilding its passenger station at The Palms." No further details are given. This "rebuilding" cannot have been very drastic, however, since the Los Angeles County Assessor lists the value of the "improvements" on the depot site as \$450 in March, 1906, and \$600 a year later. Also, Ingersoll, who goes into some detail on Palms developments of this period, does not mention any work on the depot. Perhaps SP did some interior remodeling at this time. We can only hope that photographs will turn up which can be dated with certainty to before 1906.



Los Angeles Railway 536 was unable to withstand the onslaught of a large tree at Travel Town during a storm near the end of November, 1982. After much delay, Orange Empire Railway Museum's bid to purchase the remains was accepted by the City of Los Angeles. OERM salvaged usable parts from the Type BG Huntington Standard on May 7 and 8, 1983. Photo by Don Jeffrey