

WHEEL CLICKS

Pacific Railroad Society Inc.

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THE PALMS DEPOT

by RALPH MELCHING

The cluster of low hills lying about midway between Los Angeles and Santa Monica obstructed the alignment of the first railroad built between these cities. It was where the line was deflected from its east-west alignment, to the northwest, that the new railroad station stood, resplendent in yellow and brown paint, overlooking a newly laid out grid of streets. The year was 1885, and the brave little subdivision called The Palms was the only sign of urbanization between Los Angeles and the sea.

The railroad, later to be known as the Santa Monica Air Line, was constructed in 1875 as the start of an ambitious venture by local businessmen and was called the Los Angeles and Independence Railroad (L.A.&I.). The silver and lead

mining boom, which hit the Owens Valley in the late '60s, helped to transform Los Angeles from an adobe village to a young city. Not only did most of the exported bullion pass through the city, but Los Angeles became the principal source of supplies for the mines and miners. It was this business that the L.A.&I.'s backers coveted, but alas, Southern Pacific (S.P.) preempted this in 1875 by establishing a railhead at Mojave and completing the line through to Los Angeles the following year. The L.A.&I. never got beyond Los Angeles and was acquired by S.P. in 1877. The line was extended in 1893 to one half mile northwest of Santa Monica Canyon and onto a pier extending 4720 feet out to sea. For a number of years Port Los Angeles, as it was called, was the principal

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With the scaffold removed and sporting a freshly painted exterior and station location sign, The Palms Depot greets the crowds attending the 11th annual Christmas at Heritage Square on December 6, 1981.

Photo by Bert Draper



THE PALMS

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port for this area, and most of the sea-borne commerce passed over the Air Line.

In 1908 the line was leased by the Los Angeles Pacific Company and was partially electrified. It became part of the Pacific Electric Railway system in 1911, and the electrification was completed the next year. The Palms Depot provided passenger and freight service until 1933 when the agency was transferred to Culver Junction, a mile to the east. The Big Red Cars continued to stop at Palms until the one remaining round trip over the Air Line was discontinued in 1953. The building served as a private residence for many years and was later used in many ways. It was vandalized and fell into such a state of disrepair that it was finally condemned by the Fire Department.

In 1975 a grass roots movement to save the station took shape, and a "stay of execution" was obtained. It was apparent that the building had to be moved to another location if it were to be preserved for posterity. A home was found at Heritage Square, a haven for endangered landmark structures, lying along the Pasadena Freeway at Avenue 43 in Los Angeles. A feverish fund-raising campaign ensued, including staging our first silent movie show at San Gabriel Civic Auditorium. Proceeds from the show, many contributions, and a generous loan finally succeeded in rescuing the little station. The morning of February 12, 1976, found it safely at Heritage Square after an all-night journey across the city.

This was only the beginning of the restoration project. Additional money had to be raised for a foundation and weatherproof roof. It was found that many of the structural members supporting the roof also needed replacing. Contributions continued to come in, including some very generous ones. Starting in 1977 the silent movie benefit, a unique festival of railroad genre movies, became an annual event bringing in an increasing amount of money each year. All of this has brought The Palms Depot to its present gratifying state replete with new paint, roof trim, and windows. The project is a little "in the red" at present, but it is hoped that the benefit show on April 17, with Douglas Fairbanks on the screen and Gaylord Carter at the organ, will again pack the San Gabriel Civic and that additional contributions from individuals will also be forthcoming.

While the exterior of The Palms Depot now looks great, there is still much to be done. Changes must be made involving doors and windows to restore the building to "as built" condition. Other improvements will include downspouts, drain lines, wood decks, concrete slabs, brick and asphalt surfacing, and some minor repairs. The next phase of the project is a limited restoration of the interior. The two main rooms downstairs, described as the reception center and the conference room, will have tongue and groove siding on their walls. The kitchen, upstairs office, and bath will be modernized to the extent necessary to make them functional by present day standards. New plumbing, electrical, and heating-air conditioning installations will be made. It is estimated that \$34,372 will be needed to complete the exterior restoration, the interior work will cost \$53,818, and the plumbing, electrical, and heating-air conditioning will cost \$13,671.

Major contributions to The Palms Depot resto-

ration project include \$10,000 from First Interstate Bank, \$7,000 from Ward Kimball, \$4,000 from the late Carl Dentzel, \$2,000 from Catherine Schafer, and \$1,000 from Mrs. R. Hamilton. A large number of smaller contributions have totaled more than \$4,000.

At the 1982 benefit show on April 17, the feature film starring Douglas Fairbanks is entitled *The Matrimaniac*. Preceding this a number of short subjects will be screened including the ever popular film of Market Street in San Francisco bustling with horse cars, cable cars, and electric railway cars all vying for space with nonrail vehicles and pedestrians. Also to be shown is the uncut version of *Two Tars* with Laurel and Hardy.



Ward Kimball painstakingly applies the lettering to one of the three station location signs for The Palms Depot. Ward Kimball photo

GOLETA DEPOT MOVED

A Santa Barbara, Calif., *News-Press* clipping, forwarded to us by Rolland Graham, has a photo of the Southern Pacific Goleta Depot resting on cribbing at its new location in Lake Los Carneros Park. After lowering it to a concrete block foundation, complete restoration is the goal of the project sponsors, Goleta Beautiful. Doors and windows need rebuilding, and the entire roof is to be replaced. The sponsors are appealing for donations to complete the project.

COMEDY TROLLEY FILM

Dave Cameron calls our attention to a 1953 film by famed director Luis Buñuel to be screened on Monday, April 12, at the Fox Venice Theatre, 620 Lincoln Blvd., in Venice. Entitled *Illusion Travels by Streetcar*, the film is a "strange, mad comedy," says Fox Venice publicity. "It takes a wild ride on a Mexico City tram liberated by two workers when they discover that the trolley is to be demolished for scrap. The resultant journey is a wry travelogue full of outrageous and unexpected action." Traction fans who have seen *Illusion* say it is well worth viewing. Show times are 6:55 and 9:55 p.m. Admission is \$3.50 or \$1.50 before 6:00 p.m. The co-feature is *Simon of the Desert*.