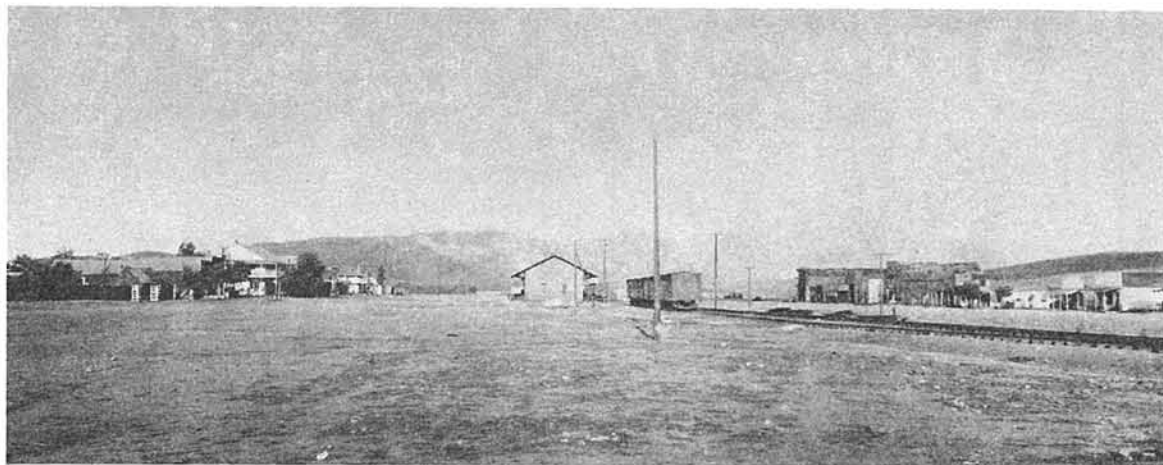




FALL 1987

LOS ANGELES CORRAL

NUMBER 169



Tehachapi Station as it looked in 1883. — DONALD DUKE COLLECTION

The Tehachapi Train Wreck of 1883

By Wade E. Kittell

One of the most tragic train wrecks in the West took place on the Southern Pacific at Tehachapi in the early morning hours of Saturday January 20, 1883. Of special interest to the people of Southern California was the news that Former Governor and Mrs. John Downey were passengers on the ill fated train.

Governor and Mrs. Downey, she the former Maria Gurado of Los Angeles society, had made a business trip to Sacramento and San Francisco. It had been their custom to take the steamer

from Los Angeles because Mrs. Downey feared the new-fangled trains and, up to that time, refused to ride on them. Downey had to answer a rush call to Sacramento for a meeting the following day so he had talked his wife into making the train trip just this one time.

Business completed, the Downeys joined other passengers bound for Los Angeles and points east at the San Francisco station. On the morning of Friday January 19, 1883 they took the ferry

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The Branding Iron

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THE BRANDING IRON solicits articles of 2,500 words or less, dealing with every phase of the Old West. Contributions from members and friends welcomed.

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Los Angeles Corral



Corral Chips

CM Richard Dillon addresses the Friends of the Southern Methodist Libraries on the topic "Texas Argonauts." His book of the same title is due out shortly from the Book Club of California. Collectors interested in the goldseekers who took the Gila Trail from Texas to the California Mother Lode will want a copy of this handsome and informative volume.

Elected to the Board of Trustees of the California Historical Society is Doyce Nunis, who also presents the 10th Annual Geiger Memorial Lecture at Mission Santa Barbara speaking on "Maynard J. Geiger, O.F.M. — Priest, Archivist, Scholar: A Personal Tribute and Memorial." Look, too, for *The Autobiography of Tom Horn*, capably edited by Doyce as the 1987 Lakeside Classic for R.R. Donnelley & Sons of Chicago.

The University of California at Davis receives a generous gift from CM Michael Harrison of Fair Oaks destined to enhance the work of the Library's Margaret B. Harrison Conservation and Restoration Department.

Abe Hoffman is the author of "Favorite Indian Sports in the Earlier Times" and "Sports on the Frontier Often Cruel to Man and Beast" for the *National Tombstone Epitaph*.

Admirers and collectors of California's esteemed poet-printer William Everson will scramble to secure a copy of Msgr. Francis J. Weber's latest miniature volume chronicling the story of *The Unfinished Psalter*, Everson's monumental and, alas, unfinished project back in 1951 to provide the first fundamental printing of the newly translated Roman psalter promulgated by Pope Pius XII. Mentioned in either the text or footnotes are CM Ed Carpenter and Honorary Member Glen Dawson.

(Continued on Page Eight)

(Continued from Page One)

to the Oakland pier and boarded Southern Pacific train number 19. At 10:00 A.M. the "all aboard" was called and the train started for Los Angeles, a twenty-two hour run through the San Joaquin valley. Arrival in Los Angeles was to be at 8:00 A.M. on the morning of Saturday January 20th.

The train consisted of seven cars. Back from the engine was a mail car, baggage car, express car, two sleeping coaches, smoking car and a first class passenger coach. The Downeys were in the first sleeper.

As the train steamed through the valley, Downey might have had some memories of the part he played in bringing the Southern Pacific to Los Angeles from the northern city.

For a long time, during their expansion in California, Southern Pacific had no intention of bringing a line to Los Angeles. They were going from San Francisco through the valley to Mojave and then east to Yuma and New Orleans.

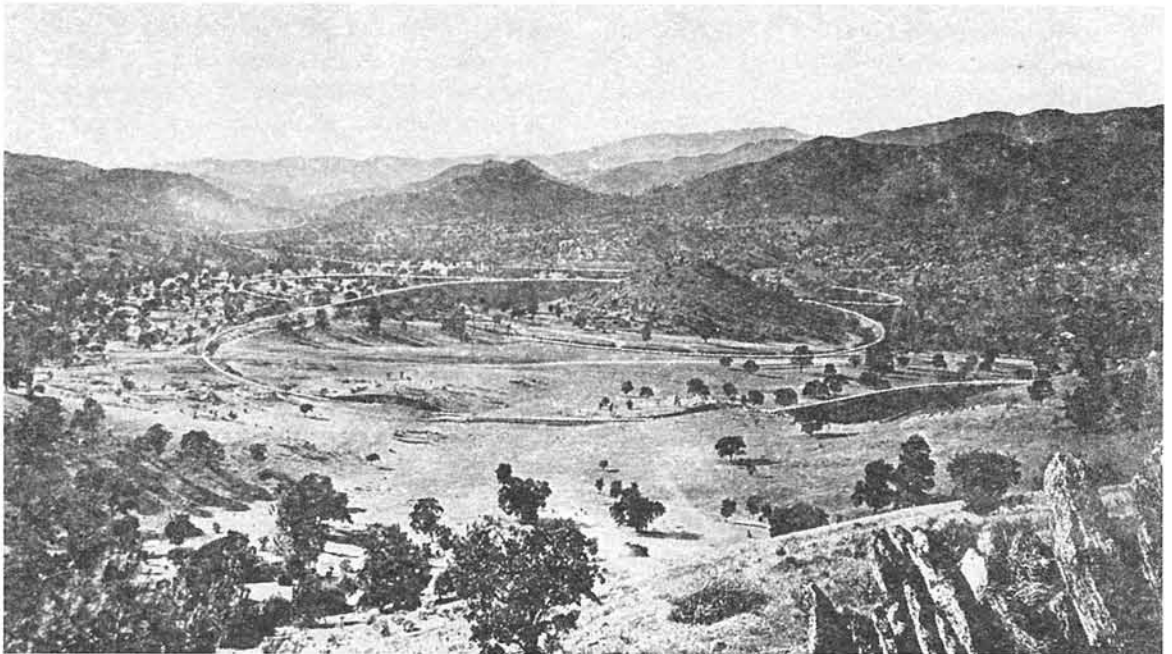
Los Angeles did have a railroad but it hardly got out of town. The line ran from Commercial and Alameda Streets to Banning's Wharf in Wilmington. Downey and Banning put up most of the \$250,000 for the line. What was needed was a rail connection with the world.

As the Southern Pacific was building south through the valley Downey called together some 400 of the leading citizens of Los Angeles to see what could be done. The meeting elected Downey to go to San Francisco for talks with Leland Stanford. The two dickered for more than a month.

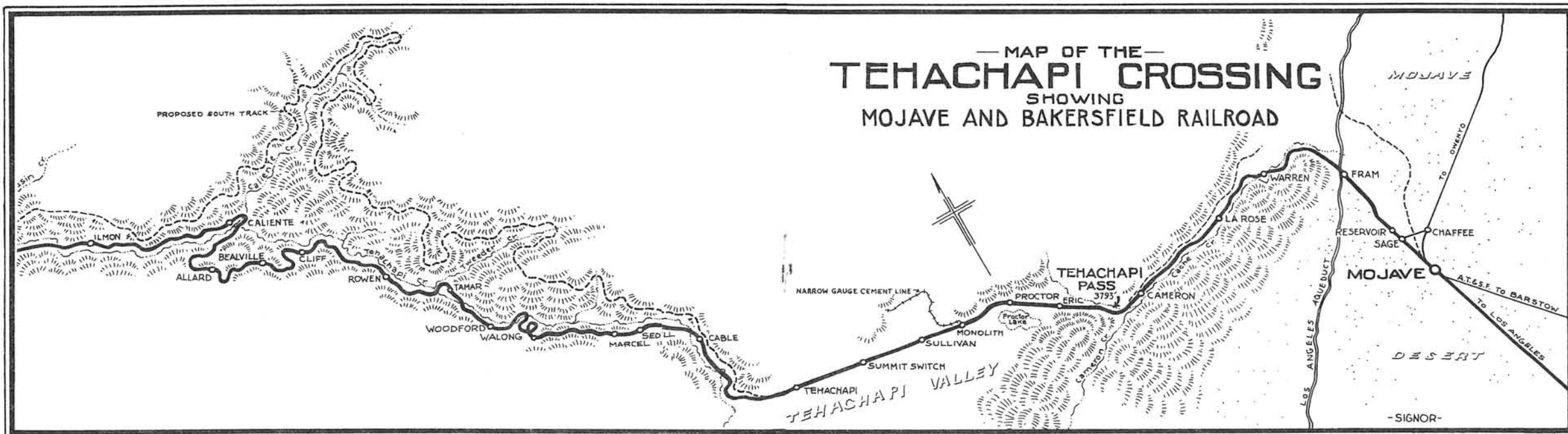
Stanford was agreeable to a line to Los Angeles but wanted to go by way of Cajon Pass, some fifty miles shorter. Such a route did not come to pass at the time.

In time the Southern Pacific agreed to come to Los Angeles. There was a price. Los Angeles was to turn over to Southern Pacific all of the stock of the Los Angeles and San Pedro Railroad. It cost Los Angeles some \$600,000 in railroad stock and bonds. It was Downey who persuaded the people of Los Angeles to accept the terms. Shortly thereafter, in 1872, Southern Pacific began laying track from Los Angeles to San Fernando.

Los Angeles almost didn't get its northern connection. Just beyond San Fernando are the San Fernando Mountains. They seem commonplace when driving to Newhall today. In earlier days it was a barrier only conquered with the opening of Beal's cut.



The Tehachapi Loop was a master stroke of railroad engineering. Here the tracks of the Southern Pacific loops around and over itself, at Walong, in order to gain an even grade within a short distance. — DONALD DUKE COLLECTION



A 7,000 foot tunnel had to be bored through the mountains which, upon completion, would be the longest tunnel in the west at the time. Work started with a blast of dynamite on March 22, 1875. From that date until July 14, 1876 as many as 1500 men battled the mountain. It was a water and oil logged piece of geology which drained water and oil, as well as crumbling rock, on the men as they worked in intense heat. There was often thought of giving up the project but headquarters in San Francisco determined that it be finished.

On the morning of Wednesday September 6, 1876, a special train left the Alameda station in Los Angeles and headed north through the new tunnel to Lang Station. On the train, along with Downey, were such well known names in Los Angeles as Widney, Beaudry, Wilson, Hellman and Banning.

At Lang Station the distinguished guests were treated to a most unhospitable scene. The landscape was dry and dusty with a hot wind blowing tumbleweeds. It was all forgotten when someone spotted the smoke of the arriving train from San Francisco. That train was stopped at the opposite end of a thousand feet of roadbed with the track yet unlaied. Stanford and Crocker stepped down from the train.

Section hands were lined up on both sides of the roadbed and were soon putting down track. At the proper moment Charles Crocker picked up a silver headed sledge and pounded down a

golden spike. The two cities were united by rail.

The men shook hands and congratulated one another. They boarded their trains for the trip to Los Angeles where a spectacular welcome awaited them. There was a night of revelry and good fellowship. It was a moment of success for John Downey.

Yes, Governor Downey could sit back in the comfort of his compartment that January day. They would be home in the morning. During the night their train would pass over the site where the spike had been driven six and a half years before.

As the evening of January 19th turned to darkness, Governor and Mrs. Downey prepared for bed and rest in their compartment.

Caliente was the beginning of the Tehachapi Grade. A helper engine was attached in an unusual fashion. The road engine was detached and taken away for refueling. The helper engine was then attached to the first car. The road engine was brought back and put at the head of the train. The ascent began.

It was a stormy night when the train arrived at the summit of Tehachapi at 2:00 A.M. and there was a strong wind blowing. The train stop was on an incline.

The front brakeman disconnected the two engines after the Westinghouse air brakes had been set. The two engines were taken to a siding and disconnected. The helper engine went to the turntable for the return trip down the grade.

The train which nearly killed Governor Downey, rolled down the grade and quickly picked up speed. As it reached the sharp curve above Cable, the train left the tracks, slid down the embankment, and the cars came to rest on their sides. — DONALD DUKE COLLECTION

The road engine went to take on coal and water. The brakeman was not with the train.

The conductor, a man named Reed, went into the station to sign the register and pick up any train orders. The rear brakeman, a man named Patton, left the rear of the train to escort a lady to the depot to inquire as to a hotel in town. As he went back out of the depot the wind blew out the flame in his lantern so he went back inside to relight it. The conductor was still in the depot.

The brakeman went out of the depot and was horrified to discover the train had disappeared. It had rolled back down the incline into the stormy night.

On the train was a retired railroad man, G.H. McKenzie. He had been standing on the platform of the smoking car when the train arrived at Tehachapi. He stayed on the platform as the crew left the train. He felt the train starting to move. His first thought was that it was a switching operation. When he looked to the front of the train he saw there was no engine.

His first action was to try and apply the hand brake on the car but it was so stiff he could not move it. Going to the rear of the sleeping car ahead, he found that brake also frozen. He ran through the smoker. Most of the occupants were Chinese and could not understand what he was

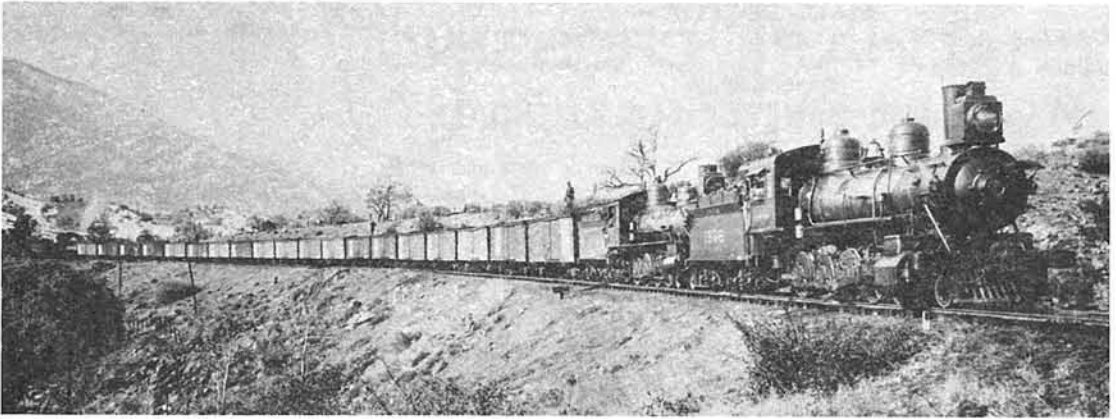
saying. He went into the coach and called for help. He was joined by another railroad man, Stephen Coffyn. Together they were able to apply the brakes on the coach and smoking cars.

As the two men were working on the brakes the runaway train was picking up speed until it reached an estimated top speed of between sixty and seventy miles an hour.

There was a sharp jolt as the train went around a curve. The two sleepers, mail, baggage and express cars had broken loose and left the track. The two rear cars were stopped a mile and a half on down the line.

When the five cars left the track they derailed to the right. The first car struck the rocks at the beginning of the cut and they all rolled down a seventy-five foot embankment, coming to rest on their sides below the track. The heating stoves had overturned with the violent shaking of the cars so that the cars were already on fire when they settled at the base of the embankment. All five cars of the train were burning in the dark four miles from Tehachapi.

McKenzie, along with others from the coach, ran back the mile and a half and located the wreck from the red glare of the fire. They immediately began attempting to rescue the passengers and crew.



A brace of 4-8-0-type steam locomotives tackle the steep grade just below Tehachapi Station. It was a double-header train, with the road engine on the point, that created the problem which caused the Tehachapi train wreck of 1883. — DONALD DUKE COLLECTION

The express messenger, C.K. Pierson, was pulled from the burning car but had already died of his injuries. The postal clerks and baggage man were tossed around but came out in good condition.

In the same sleeping car as the Downey's was Porter Ashe, his wife and maid. Ashe was awakened from his sleep and it took him a few minutes to become oriented. He discovered that his wife and Minnie Peterson, the maid, were not seriously injured. Ashe found the window over his head broken so the three were able to climb out. Another passenger, Howard Tilton, helped the ladies out. Minnie was later found to have several broken ribs.

They heard cries for help from the next compartment. Breaking out the window, they reached in and pulled out Governor Downey. His wife was pinned in the wreckage and the fire was now burning so that they could not save her.

Tilton noticed a man's leg protruding from the floor of the smashed car. He dragged John F. Cassell out but, despite frantic efforts, the fire would not allow them to save Mrs. Cassell. She, along with Mrs. Downey and three other passengers, were burned to death.

Conductor Reed telegraphed Los Angeles from the Tehachapi station for orders. He would not allow a rescue train to go down to the wreck without proper orders from headquarters. This caused a long delay so that it was over an hour before an engine and five flat cars arrived at the scene.

Those who could walk were led to the engine. Injured passengers were laid on the flat cars

with no covering against the high wind and intense cold. They were taken back to Tehachapi where they were given what little medical attention the town could provide.

A relief train did not leave Los Angeles until 10:00 A.M. in the morning. It made a fast run to Tehachapi in three hours and a half compared to a normal six hours for passenger trains. A second special left Los Angeles at 3:00 P.M. with a Catholic priest, at the request of Downey. Other trains came from Tulare and Sumner with doctors.

Early reports gave a total of twenty-one dead but that was later cut to fifteen. Some stories, told to reporters and investigators, that two hoboes were riding the train turned out to be false. In truth the men were two honorably discharged soldiers going to their homes in Arizona from the Presidio in San Francisco.

Governor Downey was interviewed by newspaper reporters on the trip to Los Angeles. He remembered nothing of the accident until the moment he was helped to the ground from the overturned car. His left side was badly bruised and he had three broken ribs. He was disconsolate over the loss of his beautiful wife and his inability to rescue her from the burning wreckage. He was also upset over having talked her into the train trip against her wishes.

When the train reached Los Angeles, about 11:00 P.M., Downey was able to walk from the train to his hack and was driven home. He remained in seclusion for some time until fully recovered from the injuries and shock of the tragedy.

Fourteen of the total count died at the wreck. Captain Waterhouse died in a Los Angeles hospital four days later, on January 23rd.

All of the human remains from the charred wreckage were placed in boxes and brought back to Los Angeles. Attempts were made to make identification of the twenty-one boxes. When the Coroner and his assistants began to inspect the content of the boxes it was found that seven of them contained large sides of beef which had been in the express car. There were then fourteen boxes containing human remains. Mrs. Cassell had been sent to San Francisco. Assistance in identification was given by Conductor Reed using information from the booking agent in San Francisco.

A list published on January 22nd gave the following names.

In the first sleeping car:

L. Wetherd - dead
Major Charles Larrabee - dead
Capt. A.L. Waterhouse, wife & 2 children -
injured (Waterhouse died in Los Angeles January 23rd)
Miss Ida Brown - injured
Mrs. J.K. Brown - injured
Thos. Keegan, soldier - dead
F.G. Gromefort, soldier - dead
Lawrence ———, porter - dead

In the second sleeping car:

B.A. Schlengheyde, Fresno - dead
John F. Cassell, San Francisco - safe
Mrs. John F. Cassell, San Francisco - dead
H.A. Oliver - dead
Miss E. Squired - dead
Mrs. H.C. Hatch - injured
Governor John Downey - injured
Mrs. John Downey - dead
Howard Tilton, San Francisco - safe
R. Porter Ashe - safe
Mrs. Porter Ashe - safe
Minnie Peterson, maid - injured
——— Wright, porter - dead

In the express car:

C.K. Pierson, messenger - dead

There were two unidentified remains which brought the total number to fifteen.

During the days of identification there were some interesting yet pathetic happenings.

When the remains of Mrs. Cassell were sent

to San Francisco they were found to be those of Mrs. Downey. A special train rushed the remains of Mrs. Downey back to Los Angeles. The remains, which at first had been identified as Mrs. Downey, when turned over to the undertaker in Los Angeles, turned out to be those of H.A. Oliver.

On January 22nd Conductor Reed and Brakeman Patten were taken into custody in Los Angeles, arrested and taken to Bakersfield where they were charged with manslaughter. They were bailed out by the Southern Pacific within an hour, the railroad paying the \$2,400 bail for each of them.

What was the cause of the wreck?

It was the opinion of railroad men, the engine crew and the Southern Pacific, that there was a leak in the air brakes. As soon as the brakes began to release, due to the lowering of air pressure, the high wind set the train in motion. The crew had not set the hand brakes because the brakemen had depended on the air brakes. With the conductor and the rear brakeman inside the station and the front brakeman riding the engine to the switching and coaling pits, the train was left standing alone. Had the hand brakes been set the wreck would not have happened. The train crew had come to depend on the Westinghouse air brakes so that they abandoned setting the hand brakes even though the rule book made it mandatory, when the train was left without an engine, to set the hand brakes.

McKenzie, the passenger whose quick thinking brought the rear portion of the train to a halt without injury to the fifty or so passengers, condemned the railroad for the lack of maintenance of the hand brakes and the disregard of rules by the conductor and the rear brakeman for their neglect of the train.

During the course of the investigation there was the story that two strangers had been seen boarding the train while it was untended, releasing the brakes in order to allow the train to roll back for a distance in order to rob it. The story was unfounded as the two men who were seen boarding the train were the soldiers from the Presidio.

No one was brought to trial after the tragedy.

Governor Downey slowly recovered from the tragedy. He went on a three year trip around the world. In 1888 he married Rose Kelly of Los Angeles — and life moved on.

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Special thanks to Donald Duke for permission to use his railroad library for research.



Corral Chips ...

(Continued from Page Two)

Speaking of poet William Everson, *Tony Lehman's* brand new book, *A Visit with William Everson*, has just been published by AM George Houle in wrappers as well as a signed, limited, hardbound edition, both attractively printed by CM Richard Hoffman at his Van Nuys printery.

Don Franklin attends the 19th Annual Meeting of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation held at Billings, Montana. Highlights of the meeting were an inspection of Captain Clark's signature inscribed in the sandstone at Pompey's Pillar on his return trip July 25, 1806, and a float trip down the Yellowstone River where the rafts were launched at the exact spot where Captain Clark and his party launched their cottonwood canoes. Corral members who would be interested in joining the Foundation should contact Robert A. Saindon at 172 Briarwood, Helena, Montana 59601. Their quarterly publication is excellent.

Attending the annual convention of the Miniature Book Society in Chicago were L.A. Corral members Msgr. Francis J. Weber, Glen Dawson, and Jerry Selmer.

One of the notable guests at a Tex Williams Memorial Scholarship Barbecue and Dance is Gene Bear. Proceeds from the event will go to eligible students in the William S. Hart High School District to further their education in music.

Deputy Sheriff Bob Clark spends two weeks in Maryland and Virginia scouring the Georgetown bookshops and doing research in the Library of Congress for an upcoming bibliography of all of the Arthur H. Clark Company publications due in 1988.

Norman Neuerburg has been his usual busy self lately: delivering the banquet speech at the Annual Meeting of the California Mission Studies Association; journeying to New York to receive Classical America's Arthur Ross Award in architecture for his design of the J. Paul Getty Museum; appearing before the Zamorano Club for a talk on "Books and Libraries in Early California"; giving the Bicentennial Lecture at La Purisima Mission on "The Architecture of the Two Missions of La Purisima"; enlightening archaeological excavation classes at Mission San Antonio; and restoring the wall paintings in the Governor's Room at Mission San Fernando.

Msgr. Francis J. Weber is the editor for the book issued to commemorate the visit of Pope John Paul II to the west coast. Entitled *The Holy Father in California's Southland*, the sixty-six page book was printed in a press run of 350,000, the largest issuance ever for a book of its kind. Moreover, one of the notable gifts presented to Pope John Paul II while he was in Los Angeles is a beautiful painting by our own Ben Abril.

Participating in sessions at the Western History Association conference in Los Angeles is Deputy Sheriff Bob Clark and Honorary Member Arthur H. Clark. Bob and author Helena Allen were presenters at "Editors and Authors Publishing Western History" and Art gave a history of our own beloved Los Angeles Corral at the session on The Westerners. Another highlight of the meeting was when it was announced the *Tony Lehman's* monograph on *Herschel Logan* was the recipient of the prize for the best short publication by a Westerner author in 1986, a prize funded by E Clampus Vitus and awarded by Westerners International.

Advance publicity for the meeting of the California Mission Studies Association meeting scheduled for February 5-7, 1988, at San Fernando Mission indicates that Msgr. Francis J. Weber will be the banquet speaker on the intriguing subject, though macabre, of "Caskets, Cadavers and Tombstones." Msgr. Weber is, of course the archivist for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and an authority on Catholic and Mission history.