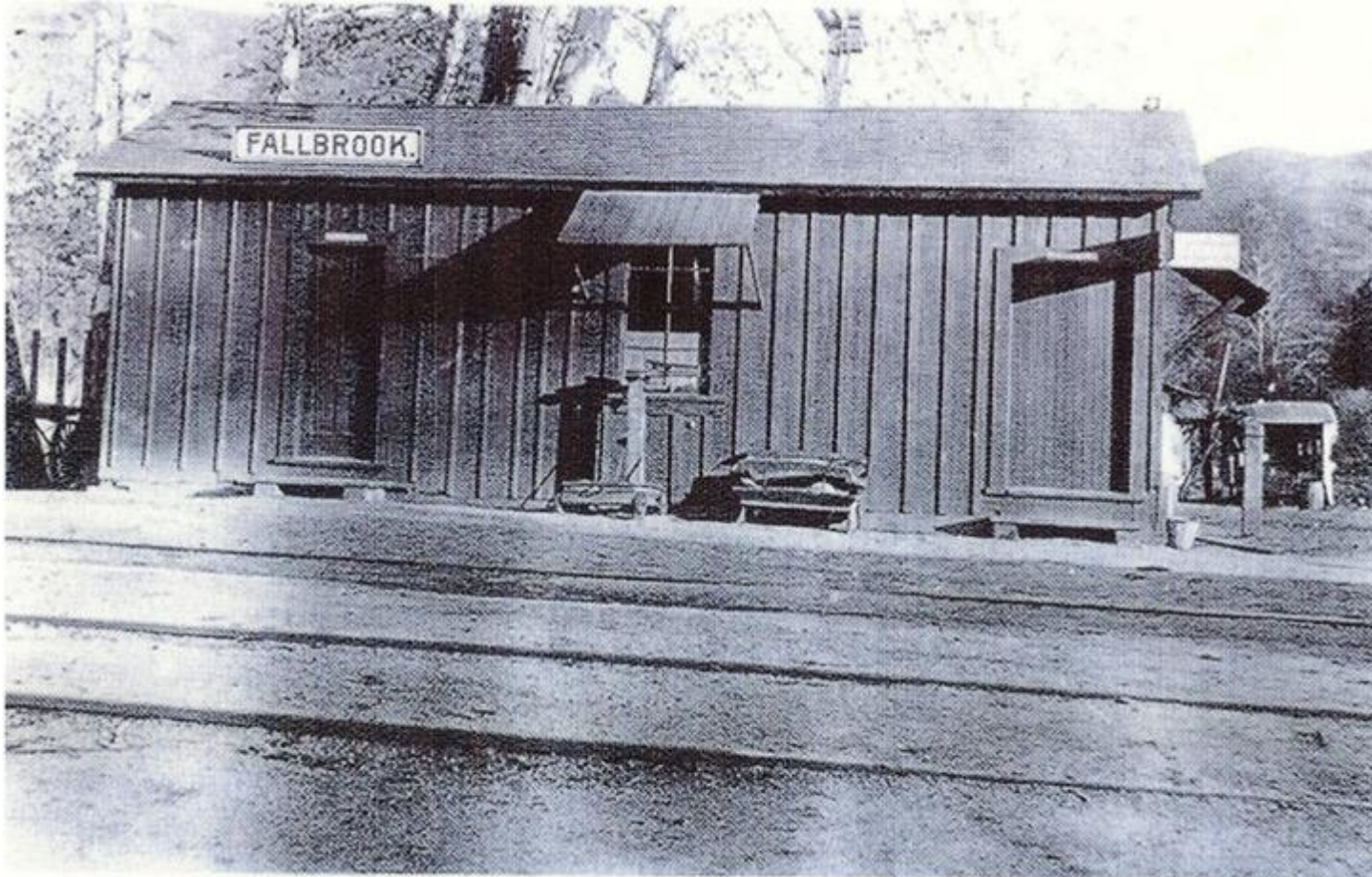


The Historian

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Fallbrook Station in the Santa Margarita Canyon in the 1880s

THE TRAIN THRU SANTA MARGARITA CANYON

In early 1881, ships from San Diego landed lumber and food supplies on the beach at the mouth of the Santa Margarita River. Construction of the new California Southern Railroad was moving northwards along the coast from National City towards Oceanside. Hundreds of men, mostly Chinese workers, were recruited from San Francisco and other railroad projects in northern California.

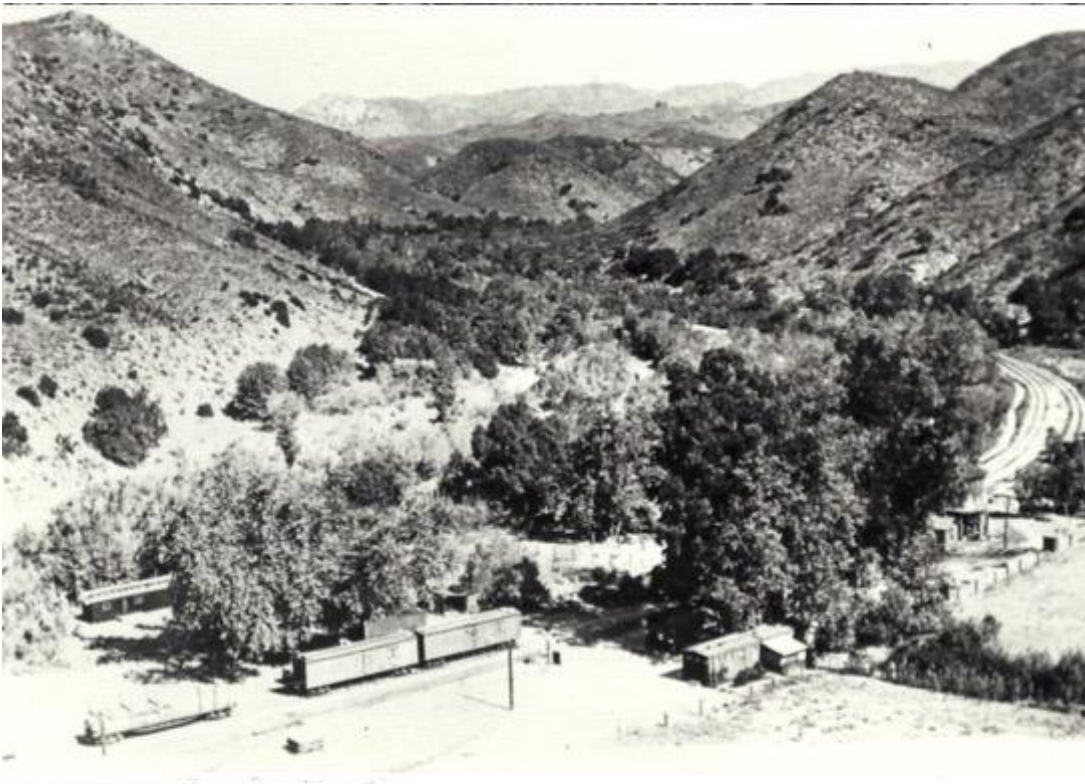
Just north of Oceanside, the track laying turned east through the rugged terrain of the Santa Margarita Valley towards the narrow Temecula Gorge. Six locomotives were in use by the end of the year, bringing up rails and telegraph poles which were collected and piled onto a tract of land the California Southern Railroad had purchased from W.B. Hayden, a homesteader on the Santa Margarita River. A labor camp here soon housed more than 2,000 men. Fallbrook Station came to be located here,¹ at the spot where today's DeLuz Road intersects with Sandia Creek Road.



Train Tracks through the Temecula Gorge about 1890

Between De Luz Creek and Fallbrook Station, the railway crossed the Santa Margarita River four times by means of floating trestle bridges. The San Diego Union newspaper described upstream Temecula Canyon as “seven miles of solid rock.” Here the pace of construction slowed as the railway progressed through the canyon. Dynamiting could be heard all over the district. Rockslides made very dangerous working conditions in the canyon.

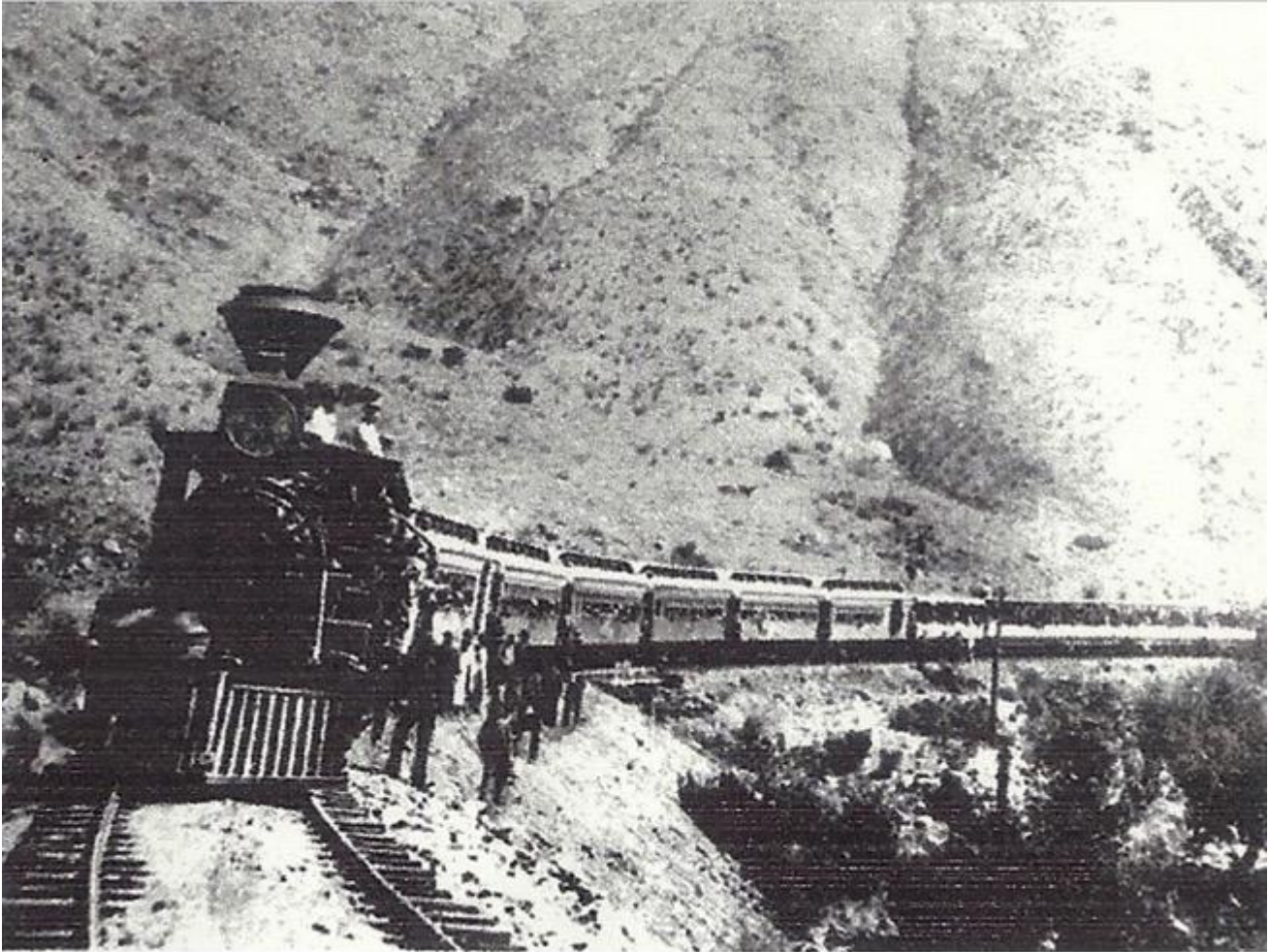
Initially, the California Southern Railroad surveyors had studied several routes to go inland to Colton. The Santa Margarita Valley and the rugged Temecula Gorge route was selected as the most direct through the coastal hills, despite the warnings from local farmers, that the water marks high on the canyon walls demonstrated past flooding.¹ California Southern may have been persuaded to use this route when Juan Forster granted free passage across Rancho Santa Margarita.¹ The proposed San Luis Rey River route would have required land purchases from Rancho Monserate.



Fallbrook Station in 1880s looking east towards Temecula

The fare was \$6 one way from National City to Colton or \$9 round trip.¹ The National City Record newspaper said “The scenery in Temecula Canyon alone is well worth the price of the trip.” The Howe post office adjoined the Fallbrook station. A shack for Wells Fargo was also nearby. James Tracy and his son had their dry goods store in an adobe building they built nearby on their own piece of land.

The first train arrived at Fallbrook Station on January 2nd, 1882, sixty-seven miles from National City.¹ The daily passenger train left National City each morning to arrive in Fallbrook for a midday stop. After the stop, the train continued through Temecula Canyon to Colton where it turned around for the return trip, arriving back at Fallbrook for a dinner stop.



April 26, 1882 Odd Fellows excursion train in Santa Margarita Canyon. Sightseers paid \$2 a ticket for the day trip out of San Diego.

A newspaper correspondent from Louisville wrote of his experience on the train, “Seven miles from Temecula we reach Fallbrook Station. This is the dinner station and a lovely spot. We are still in the deep canyon and surrounded by mountains, but on the east side an easy road carries one to Fallbrook. We made views at Fallbrook station and resumed our journey. It’s a two hours’ run to Oceanside, twenty-five miles through the famous Santa Margarita Ranch. The sensation is quite pleasant as we dash through the valley of the Santa Margarita, where on either side of the railroad track hundreds of fat cattle and sleek horses are grazing or resting under the sycamores and oaks, and the crystal waters of the Santa Margarita run with us, dashing over the pebbly bottom in its wild race to the ocean. Suddenly we make a sharp curve to the left, as we reach the bluffs overlooking the ocean and we hear the surf breaking on the beach as we pull into Oceanside station.” ¹

Everything went smoothly until February 14, 1884 when heavy rains turned the languid Santa Margarita River into a raging torrent. The tracks and floating bridges from Fallbrook to Temecula were washed out. The Chinese labor crews that had only been recently discharged and had dispersed around California were recruited to return. Trains were running again in less than a year. The expense of replacing the tracks drove California Southern Railroad bankrupt. Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad took over the route.

One result of this event was that Santa Fe extended the old California Southern route from Colton across Cajon Pass to reach Barstow, finally completing the link between the City of San Diego and the transcontinental railroad in November 1885. Land speculators took notice that little Fallbrook Station was now a stop on the transcontinental railroad. The small community that had been forming around the train station in the flood prone canyon began relocating uphill to the new site of West Fallbrook.

In 1891, heavy rains again washed out the tracks once more. This time it would be 4 years before the trains ran again. This time only the tracks from Oceanside to Fallbrook were repaired. The line from Fallbrook to Temecula was abandoned permanently. Trains now used the new Coast Route that had been completed in 1888 to connect San Diego to Los Angeles, which had a connection to the transcontinental east-west network.¹ Fallbrook Station became the end of the line in the Santa Margarita Canyon.

The Fallbrook branch train continued reliable service for the next 21 years. Horse drawn wagons from West Fallbrook would meet the daily train at the station, to carry passengers, freight and mail up the hill to West Fallbrook businesses and hotels. In 1911 a West Fallbrook passenger could buy a round trip ticket to Boston for \$110.50.¹

In January 1916 after a prolonged drought, catastrophic flooding washed away the station and all the tracks. This was the end of train service in the Santa Margarita Canyon.



Fallbrook Station after 1916 flood. Rails twisted and useless for miles. Trains never ran again in the Canyon.

Epilogue: Santa Fe built a new line up on higher ground. From Oceanside, the railway ran across Rancho Santa Margarita (today's Camp Pendleton) to service Fallbrook's new olive and citrus packing houses. The train ran through the center of Fallbrook to the new Santa Fe station on Alvarado Street beginning in 1917 until it permanently ceased in 1982.¹

~Tom Frew

Footnotes

- 1) The California Southern Railroad and the Growth of San Diego part II by Douglas L. Lowell, San Diego Historical Society Quarterly, Winter 1986.
- 2) Train in Fallbrook, by Don Rivers, Fallbrook Historical Society, November 1998
- 3) Railroad in Fallbrook, Fallbrook in Review vol. 3 page 2. Attributed to Maie L. Ellis.
- 4) The California Southern Railroad: A Rail Drama of the Southwest Richard V. Dodge and R. P. Middlebrook May 1950 page 27
- 5) Ibid, page 28.
- 6) Reprinted in Fallbrook Review, August, 1885.
- 7) San Diego History Center, Journal of San Diego History, Fall 1985, The California Southern Railroad and the Growth of San Diego by Douglas Lowell.
- 8) Fallbrook Enterprise April 11, 1911.
- 9) See Fallbrook Historical Society, Train Tracks Thru Fallbrook, The Historian, Winter 2019.

PHOTOS OF SANTA CLAUSE AND CHILDREN AT OUR ANNUAL CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE





**THE SLACKER HILL BAND ENTERTAINING
AT THE CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE**



**THE HISTORIC LADIES AFTERNOON TOURING CARRIAGE
SERVED AS OUR FLOAT
IN THE FALLBROOK CHRISTMAS PARADE**

Fallbrook Historical Society

P.O. Box 1375, Fallbrook, CA 92088

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The Fallbrook Historical Society's mission is to bring history to life by educating the community and others about Fallbrook's rich heritage



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