

A station to another time

Is the Goleta Depot just another whistle stop between Los Angeles and San Francisco? You'll be surprised at all the history the rails that run through Goleta have to tell. Goleta was on the route the Southern Pacific Railroad Co. would go through as it began constructing the Los Angeles to San Francisco Coastal Line.

California here they come

The completion of the Transcontinental Railroad on May 10, 1869, at Promontory, Utah, finally joined the Atlantic and Pacific portions of the country. California, that isolated state way out west, was now within easy reach of the east. The state

became a destination for everyone seeking a fortune or a new start; prospectors, merchants, farmers and speculators took advantage of the railroad to get here faster and cheaper than the old way via ship around Cape Horn, a perilous three-month ocean voyage.

San Francisco became a boom town, but at the expense of other parts of the state, particularly

southern cities like Los Angeles and San Diego. Once again, there was a need to join major population areas on the Pacific coast and this is where Goleta becomes part of California's railroad history.

In 1886 the Southern Pacific Branch Railway began work on the Los Angeles-to-San Francisco Coastal Line. At the same time, crews from San Francisco worked their way south to join the two routes. By 1887 the southern crews reached the Ellwood Valley in Goleta and waited for the northern crew. On March 31, 1901, just west of Goleta, the last spike was driven and the Coastal Line was open for business.

Goleta Depot

Once the Coastal Line was running, Goleta Depot was a busy place. Passengers and freight were scheduled through the station. And, as was customary in those days, the station was also the telegraph center for the area. Unlike stations in the larger cities where there were separate freight and passenger depots, Goleta Depot handled everything. These two-story wooden buildings were designed around the Southern Pacific's Combination Plan Number 22. Everything was standardized right down to the official company color scheme of Colonial Yellow, accented with brown trim and white window sashes. Think of it as a depot in a kit.

The station master lived upstairs in the second-story apartment. Scores of these stations were built along the Southern Pacific's line as more and more freight and people traveled by rail. The valley's agricultural business took shape and grew. Citrus and walnuts left Goleta on the rails.

In those days traveling by train was a catered affair. Elegant dining cars and sleeper Pullmans made the long multi-day trips across the country or overnight trips from

Los Angeles to San Francisco comfortable and something to look forward to. The trains had romantic names like the Sunset Limited. Today, that elegance remains in a publication that was born of that era and created by the Southern Pacific Co. itself; it's still called Sunset Magazine.

During World War II the depot saw its share of traffic as soldiers, sailors and aviators traveled up and down the coast on the Coastal Line. By the late 1960s, though, the railroads began to see less and less freight.

It was the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 that began the decline in use of trains. Freight and passengers were now moving on a new system, the Interstate Highway System or, as it was officially known, the National System of Interstate and Defense Highways. Railroad systems throughout the country saw a decline in revenues, and in 1973 Goleta Depot was closed. Eight years earlier the last passenger train had stopped at the station and the familiar "all aboard" was no longer heard in Goleta.

Moving the station

After years of neglect, decay and attempts to save the station, the Goleta Depot Committee began to raise funds to move the depot building to Los Carneros County Park. At midnight on August 18, 1981, the building was cut in two and moved from its original location near present Hollister and Kellogg down Hollister Avenue, over the 101 via Fairview and down Calle Real to its present location just off Los Carneros Road, where it remains today.

After months of cleaning, refurbishing and new paint, it was back in business on Oct. 10, 1982. Renamed the South Coast Railroad Museum at Goleta Depot in 1991, Goleta Depot today provides a look back into Goleta's history and provides the community with events and volunteer opportunities for young and old.

A miniature 7½ inch gauge line, known as the Goleta Short Line, provides a fun ride around the depot's grounds. A miniature train line inside the main depot building shows what Goleta and Santa

Barbara looked like back when trains were the way to go. A gift shop with lots of train memorabilia and books was recently opened. Throughout the year the museum has programs and events for everyone and next month is no exception. Get yourself ready for the Bunny Express on Saturday, and during Christmas don't forget the Candy Cane Express.

Today Amtrak's Coast Starlight Express once again rolls up and down the coastal

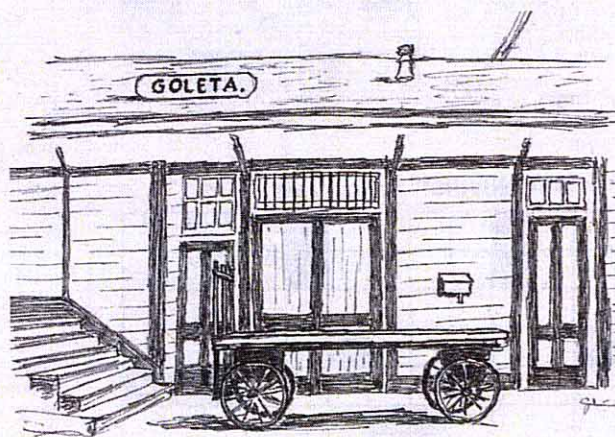
route between Los Angeles and Seattle or one of the most scenic railroad routes in the world.

Take advantage of this living history right in our own backyard. Visit the South Coast Railroad Museum and maybe you'll have an itch to hit the rails yourself.

Tony Galván, is a natural history illustrator, photographer and kinda nosey traveler who lives in Goleta.



South Coast Railroad Museum



Getting there: Drive north on U.S. 101 to the Los Carneros Road exit. Turn right (toward the mountains) and go about 0.2 miles (if driving south on the 101 take the Los Carneros exit and turn left). The museum is on your right (Goleta Depot is the two-story yellow building) and shares the driveway with the fire station.

Museum: South Coast Railroad Museum, 300 North Los Carneros Rd. Goleta, California, 93117-1502, Tel. 805-964-3540, e-mail. director@goletadepot.org

Hours: Wednesday through Sunday, 1-4 p.m. Donations accepted.

Website: www.goletadepot.org.

Events: Free Train Rides Wednesday and first Friday of each month. You must be at least 34 inches tall to ride the trains.

Easter Bunny Express, Saturday.

Free Rides for Mom, May 13.