



the reactor

by Paul Azevedo

No one was hit by a train last week in Pacifica. The Ocean Shore Railroad missed no scheduled runs to its San Francisco terminal, and none were late. It's highly unlikely that anyone in town made any jokes about breakdowns or washouts from the fog. The chug-chug of the old engine, and whatever sound the old self-propelled electric cars made, has long since died away.

But The Ocean Shore Railroad, which sent its first train from San Francisco to what is now Pacifica 75 years ago last Thursday, died before most of us were born, including a lot of Pacifica grandparents.

Down at Vallemar Station last Thursday night they had a party to celebrate the old railroad that had so much promise, and that opened up the Coastsides to development. The Ocean Shore RR shaped Pacifica and much of the Coastsides through its right-of-way, which clouded many a title, through the subdivisions which it inspired, and even in death the ill-fated line provided a ready-made roadway for the new highway called the Devil's Slide route in the thirties.

THE RAILROAD seemed most logical in conception. It provided the first modern transportation system along a rugged, rockribbed coastline.

Where there had been great difficulty of access, now San Francisco lay within an easy commute.

We can look back now and pronounce the railroad a failure. It hugged the coast where it might have been

better advised to go inland. It had to reorganize its finances in 1912. It finally died in 1920.

It started its construction at both ends and never succeeded in meeting itself in the middle. It never made back its investment. It caused a lot of shacks to be built, a lot of paper subdivisions to be platted, a lot of dreams to founder on the rocky shore of reality.

BUT IT WAS a glorious failure. The founders saw a real need, and tried to fill it, and did so for 13 years, if only partially.

Before the first train ran the great earthquake of 1906 wrecked much of the company's machinery and slides destroyed much of the difficult achievement of bypassing the great outcrop of San Pedro Point.

If they had but realized it, the earthquake before the opening, and the automobile after would combine to insure that this great adventure would not succeed.

They poured champagne at the Vallemar Station restaurant last Thursday in celebration of that first train and, coincidentally, of the first anniversary of John Miller's restaurant in the old station.

I wasn't there, nor the other Tribune staffers like Bill Drake or Tom Johnston, all of us unashamedly sentimental about the Ocean Shore, because, while we celebrated the approaching 75th anniversary of the railroad last year with a whole section of the Artichoke Gulch Gazette, we had to read Vallemar Station's ad in the Tribune to realize we had absent-mindedly flubbed opportunity to celebrate the true diamond anniversary.

TIME DOES indeed pass, and a few short weeks from now we will be celebrating Pacifica's 25th. One-third the age of the Ocean Shore, it has already outlasted it. With luck, in the year 2007 we'll gather round the bar at the old station, drink champagne and congratulate Pacifica, which by then will be half as old as the Ocean Shore railroad, a city that will have come through the perils of birth, growth, and middle age. By then we may have a full understanding of what we have created.