



Ocean Shore Railroad Reaches the Beaches!

This presentation includes scans of photos from the collection of Barbara VanderWerf's which she donated to the Half Moon Bay History Association, with the agreement that they can be used in the history exhibit in the El Granada Community Center.

It relies heavily on Vanderwerf's wonderful book, Granada, A Synonym for Paradise, as well as The Last Whistle by Jack Wagner, and the three Images books, Ocean Shore Railroad by Chris Hunter, and Moss Beach and Princeton-by-the-Sea, both by June Morrall.



In the late 1800s – We left our history of the Coastside at the end of the 19th Century, with farms continuing to spread, immigrants arriving from all over the world, and trees, mostly eucalyptus and cypress, being planted as windbreaks and to provide a landscape that looked more like the home countries of the new arrivals.

The land was good for farming, but it hard to get here. The road across Montara Mountain didn't exist until 1855, and although it was improved through the years, it was a challenge to travel. Two wharfs helped with moving goods and people back and forth to the city, but the conditions were far from ideal.

Railroads were booming - San Francisco was growing rapidly. Many residents became very wealthy, some from mining, but many more from commerce and real estate investments. One of the most successful was J. Downey Harvey, who was, according to the book The Last Whistle, “a popular clubman with a scintillating personality.”

Railroads were spreading across the nation, and Harvey dreamed of a rail line down the coast. In 1905 he incorporated the Ocean Shore Railroad, with a plan to construct it from San Francisco to Santa Cruz.

He was joined in the effort by J. A. Folger (the coffee king), Horace D. Pillsbury (attorney for Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad), Charles C. Moore (president of a very large and well-respected engineering firm), among others, definitely a qualified group.



*Harvey (with the cane), and two mayors, past and current.
The label says "Bohemian Jinks."*



A train line down the coast - The investors began to obtain the rights to routes through San Francisco and farther south. By dealing with various government bodies and purchasing some land, they found themselves with an approved route in 1905. It was alleged at the time that the San Francisco Mayor may have been influenced by the gift of a large Turkish rug from Harvey.

The railroad promoters knew that the route would be difficult. It would need numerous culverts and bridges and it would be necessary to cross the Devil's Slide. In spite of these potential problems, the construction contract was awarded toward the end of 1905 and work began immediately. They began digging a tunnel through San Pedro Point and clearing and grading the route along the coast. The goal was to have the ocean visible at all times (except when it went through a tunnel) from the train.

Earthquake! - On April 6, 1906, the San Francisco earthquake shook the peninsula and wreaked great destruction. The lines for the new railroad had already reached Mussel Rock. During the quake more than 4000' of railroad track and a great deal of construction equipment fell into the ocean. Other parts of the project were buried in tons of earth.

Because of the economic losses that resulted from the earthquake, the company decided to abandon their visionary plan for a two-track electric railroad in favor of a single-track steam line.

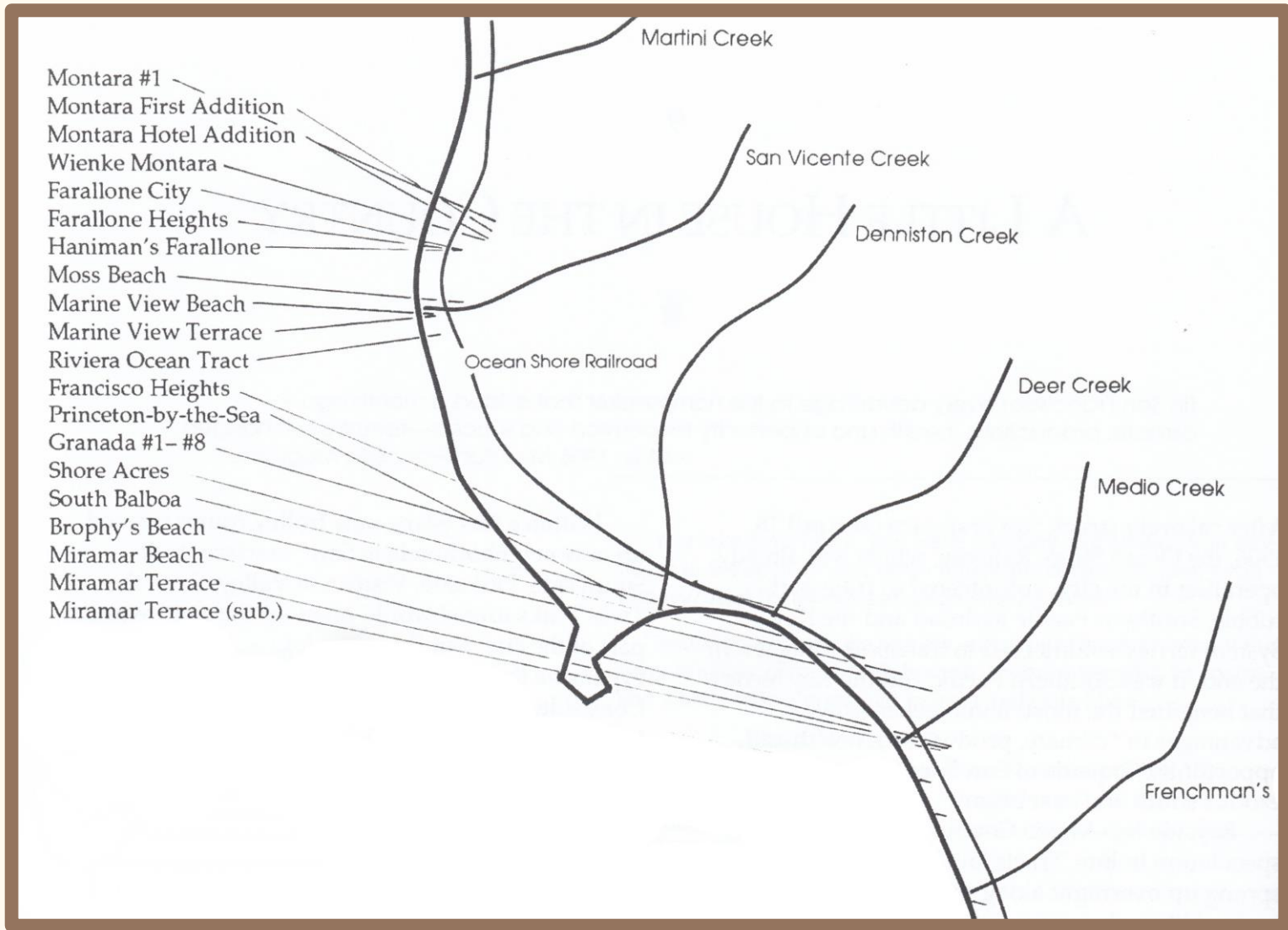
By 1907 part of the line was operational and some revenue was coming in. They began to plan for the next step – real estate development. First were the communities from Pacifica north, then the areas that are today Montara, Moss Beach, Princeton, El Granada, and Miramar.



Railroad tracks in Marin after the earthquake



Across the landslide –
These photos show the trains traversing the Devil's Slide. The one on the bottom right shows people walking on the slide, possibly transferring to a second train.



Real estate speculation - There was a great deal of interest in the new railroad. Real estate investment was booming all around the state. Speculators bought land all along the coast, planning for their own developments.

The railroad investors created a second entity, called the Shore Line Investment Company, to purchase real estate. Harvey was its president, and the same prosperous men were involved. Other groups were investing in the bayside, but Ocean Shore concentrated on the western coast. They sent an agent south who purchased 1271 acres for \$60,000 to create the town they called Balboa.

Balboa must have the best! – Harvey had grand plans for the town of Granada; he wanted it to be the best possible community in California. He went to Daniel Burnham, who was the most famous landscape architect in the western world at the turn of the 20th century, having designed the Chicago World Columbia Exposition in 1893. He was the leader, along with Frederick Law Olmstead, of the “City Beautiful Movement,” which recognized the physical and aesthetic limitations of rapidly growing and unplanned cities. The movement advocated for well-planned cities, with services, parks, and attractive boulevards, and was very influential.

Burnham agreed to the task, stipulating that in addition to maps and photographs, he would need an accurate model of the terrain. Burnham hired young English architect Edward Bennett to help with the project. It was Bennett who visited the site and provided the maps, photographs and models Burnham studied in his Chicago office.

Daniel Burnham and The City Beautiful Movement



- Daniel Burnham
- The 1893 Chicago Exposition
- The S.F. Plan (1905)
- The Chicago Plan (1909)
- Burnham the Propogandist

From: Early Urban Planning: 1870 - 1940 Richard LeGates Urban Studies Program, SFSU

Make no small plans! – Burnham and Bennett submitted a plan in October 1906 for the oceanfront area and the layout of the streets. The town had been renamed Granada, because the post office would not accept Balboa.

Harvey said “in the years to come, Granada will rank with the most beautiful cities in the world.” Historian Barbara VanderWerf, the author of “Granada, a Synonym for Paradise,” said that the fact that El Granada “is the only Daniel H. Burnham town built in the United States” is enough to make it “a national treasure.”

Others through the years have complained about the confusing layout, but even so, El Granada remains the only community in the United States that was designed by Daniel Burnham.





El Granada was designed for people who would walk from their homes to the train station. The plan for the town included a casino (not for gambling, but a place of entertainment, with a theater and a ballroom), two piers, and walkways. Above this were terraces with public parks, including one more-or-less where a park is being proposed in 2021. Burnham recommended planting trees, but not the eucalyptus the railroad company installed in huge numbers. He favored moderate growth trees along the streets such as acacias, aruacarias (also known as monkey-puzzle trees), pepper, locust and palms.



Construction began almost immediately, with a temporary station. And on June 21st, 1908 the town was officially open. Five hundred prospective lot buyers rode the first train for free (including lunch). It had been chartered by the land agent, Charles Kendrick, to bring his best prospects to the town. That train was followed by nine more trains run by Ocean Shore Railroad to bring curious visitors and more potential customers to the site. Some continued on by buggy to see real estate opportunities in other areas.



These are more views from 1908 of opening day and one of the train crossing Deer Creek after leaving Granada station.





Kendrick was an experienced real estate salesman who had been charged with the exclusive right to sell 400 acres of lots. He set up offices in San Francisco, Berkeley, Stockton, Sacramento, Vallejo, Fresno, Marysville, and Chico. An extensive marketing campaign began, with ads in newspapers all over the state and more.

One of the salesmen wrote down his spiel about Granada, including “After a visit to Granada you will readily conceive why we have sold nearly \$2,000,000 of these beautiful lots in the past two years to the best people in the state of California, lots that average in price between \$450 and \$500 for a lot 50 by 100 feet.”

There were three main selling points:

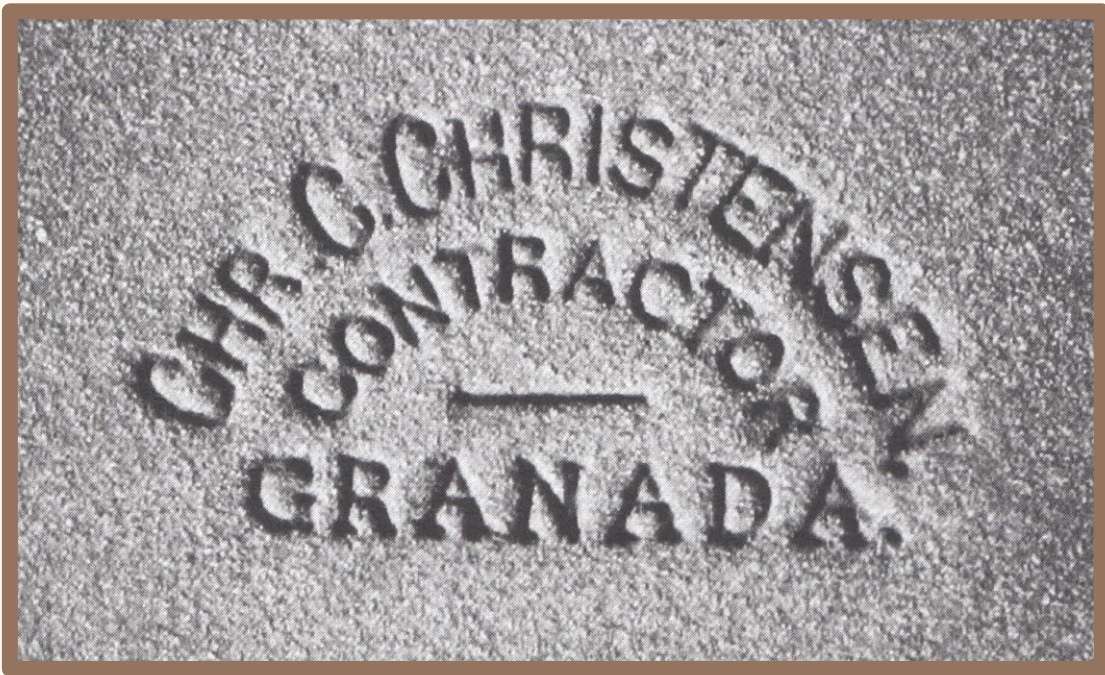
- 1) The natural setting – “There are probably but few places to be found so richly endowed by nature for the building of an ideal city”
- 2) The design by Burnham – “Can you appreciate what it means to plan a city for years to come, so that each and every part will present a symmetrical, harmonious arrangement to be a source of pride and enjoyment to its residents forever?”
- 3) The owners of the development company – “Most of the largest owners in the railway company are owners in Granada.”



The North Granada station was constructed fairly quickly. You can still see it at the intersection of Highway 1 and Capistrano hidden by changes made to convert it to a private residence and then a restaurant. It welcomed visitors along with the main station.



A large open space was created on both sides of the median in Avenue Portola and on the land near the ocean. It was known as Plaza Alhambra, and was the spot where visitors arrived, although the railroad company never built the magnificent new depot it had been promising. The Granada bathhouse, a precursor to the planned casino, was built on the beach west of Avenue Portola below low bluffs. It was reached by walking across a grassy meadow. The new attraction had rooms for gatherings and for changing into bathing attire, and in 1910 three hundred people attended its grand opening.



The Ocean Shore Development Company had to build a town, and they wanted everything done to the highest quality. They built a water system with a reservoir up the hill and sewer systems to serve 10,000 people. They laid 42 miles of water and sewer mains. They graded and paved 52 miles of streets and 42 miles of concrete sidewalks. This was unusual at the time, since most speculative developments promised all these amenities for future installation.



The major contractor for the project was Charles C. Christensen, who became known for excellent work. He built the country club in Burlingame and concrete bridges over the creeks. His mark can still be seen on some of the sidewalks in El Granada. He later retired in Granada to raise chickens and was known as the Mayor of El Granada.



A third train depot was built on the southwest side of town, where the elementary school is now. The railroad company brought in lumber and building materials, cement, tons of rock for the streets (from the Rockaway Quarry in Pacifica), and miles of pipe. All these were unloaded at the South Granada station, which had a thousand feet of siding, warehouses, and sheds, plus factory that made containers for artichoke shipping. Produce from the local farms was sent to market at the station.

Because this was the industrial area, lots nearby were the least expensive, at \$250 for a 25-foot wide lot, so they tended to be sold first. In 1908, not far from the station on Francisco Street the company built the first house in El Granada for the resident manager for the project. Other smaller houses were built nearby, and can be identified by the discerning eye.



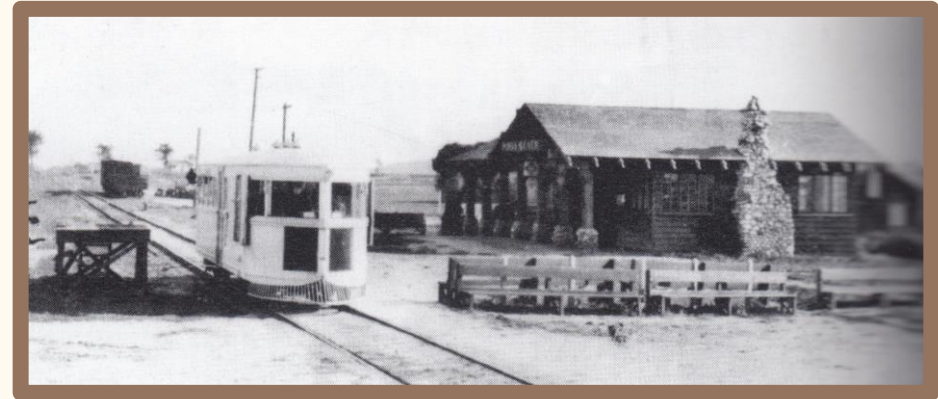


Why El Granada? - A new town needed services, and the Hotel El Granada was one of the first, welcoming visitors and diners. No one knows why he chose to use the “el,” instead of the “la” as is correct in Spanish for the name of his hotel. The owner of the hotel planned to apply to the government for a post office to be located within the hotel and he advertised for a postmaster. He received two applications, one to be the Postmaster of Granada, and one where the applicant had handwritten “El” in front of the town’s name. Since having the town have the same name as his hotel seemed like a good idea to him, of course he chose that one, and the name was accepted by the U.S. Postal Service. El Granada it became, even though Spanish speakers shake their heads when they hear it.

By 1910 there were a general store, church (the building still stands on Isabella), two boarding houses, and about 15 homes. Almost no one commuted to San Francisco, because the trip was unreliable and much longer than had been promised in the advertising. Most of the residents worked at the freight yard or for businesses in the area.



Meanwhile, across the rail line, Frank Brophy had bought many acres on the coast and named his new town Princeton-by-the-Sea. He built the Princeton Inn (now the Mezza Luna restaurant) to serve as his real estate office. Other hotels and restaurants joined in making Princeton a weekend destination.



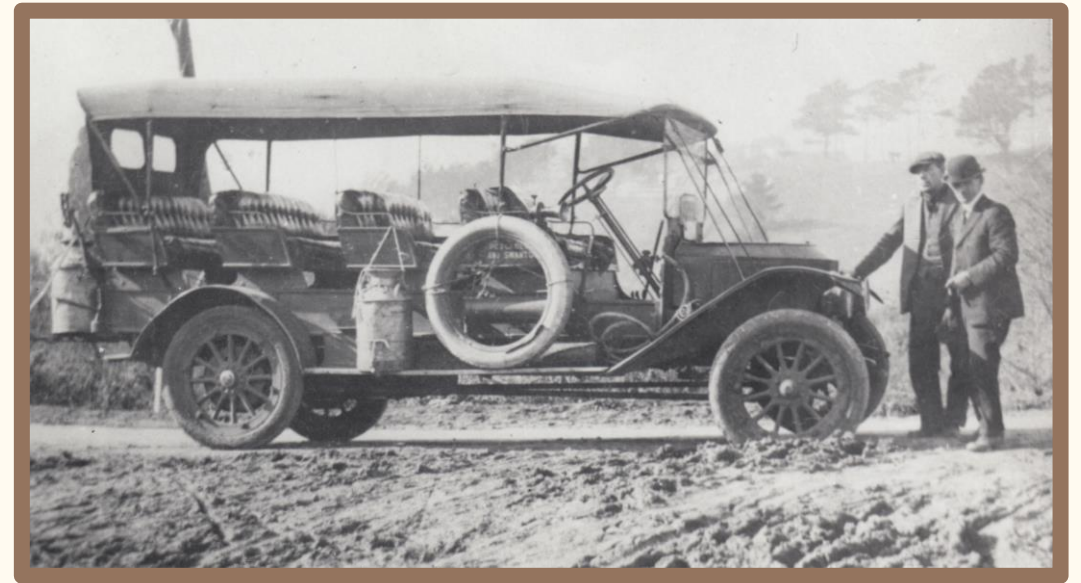
In Moss Beach, arrivals at the train station had a number of hotels available, including Wienke's Moss Beach Hotel and Nye's hotel and Reef's Restaurant. Moss Beach had several general stores, a bakery, plumbing shop, post office, weekly paper (the Coast Side Comet), a planning mill, blacksmith, grammar school, dentist, and barbershop, in addition to some 50 artistic bungalows.

Montara also had a train station (at left) and lots available for visitors interested in coastal property.

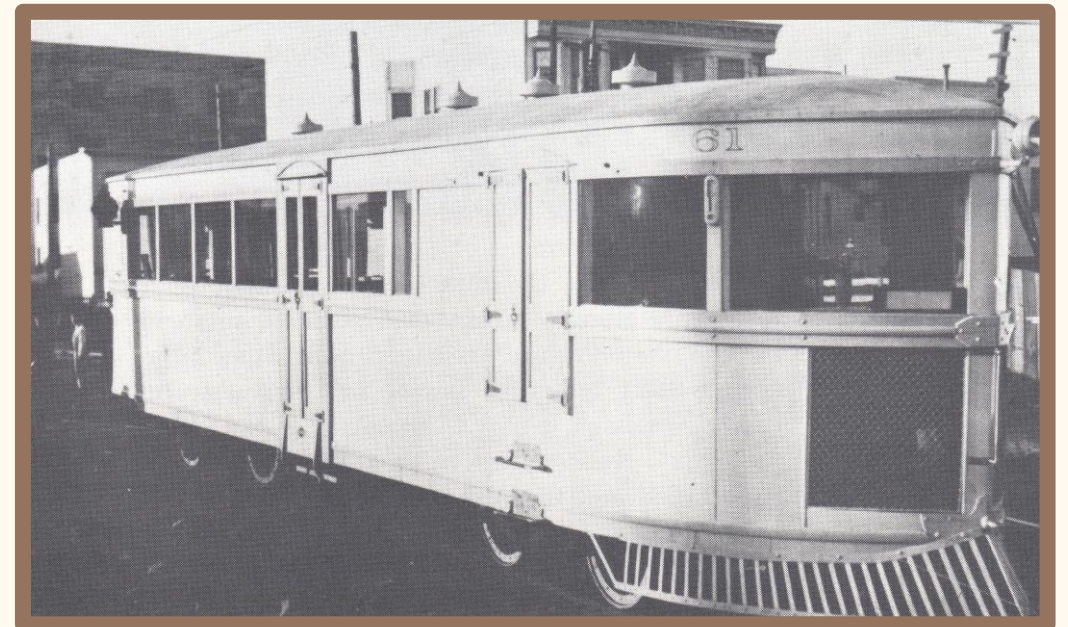
Financial woes – By 1909, the Ocean Shore Railroad was in financial trouble. They had bought supplies and equipment on credit, they did not have the funds to complete the line, they were facing competition both from automobiles and from a rival train line in the south, and their quickly-built line from San Francisco needed constant and expensive repairs. In 1909 they declared bankruptcy.

The company was bought at auction by its major investors for about half of what they owed. The Shore Line Investment Company (owned by the same people) did add electric lines to the town in 1914, and moved the El Granada station building up to the top of the Portola Plaza to serve as a clubhouse (where it remains today as a private home), but additional investment was limited. A few more houses were built.

The railroad tried a few experiments in an effort to recover. They tried a gasoline-powered engine (at right), but even though it was much more economical than a steam train, that was not enough to save the enterprise.



A Stanley Steamer autobus in a photo from 1910



The railroad struggled through the nineteen teens, facing increased competition from the automobile. A strike in 1920 was a major blow to the railroad, and even though many protested that its loss would hurt their businesses and communities, the company applied to abandon its line. On October 10th, 1920, the California Railroad Commission approved the abandonment of the northern section of the line. By the end of 1921 most of the track had been dismantled and sold to a railroad in Siskiyou County. Much of the equipment was returned to creditors.

The Ocean Shore Railroad retained the right-of-way and some of its properties. Many years of litigation followed. It is possible to discern the route it followed along the coast. Grading was often done to keep the track level and those spots can still be seen. Pieces of track have been used in picnic tables at Quarry Park and on the Balboa median.



A photo from 1920 showing a car on the Granada bluffs

Shore Line Investment Company was dissolved in 1922, after selling much of the land to local farmers (more on this next time!). Those farmers were the leaders of the next chapter in northern Coastside history as the automobile changed the Coastside.

Ahead

The Ocean Shore Railroad



Artichokes and Gangsters



Protecting Granada's Character



Thank you very much. My thanks to Barbara Vanderwerf and all who have studied local history!

