

NATIONAL HOSPICE MONTH • FARMING ON THE CENTRAL COAST • PROJECT LIFESAVER

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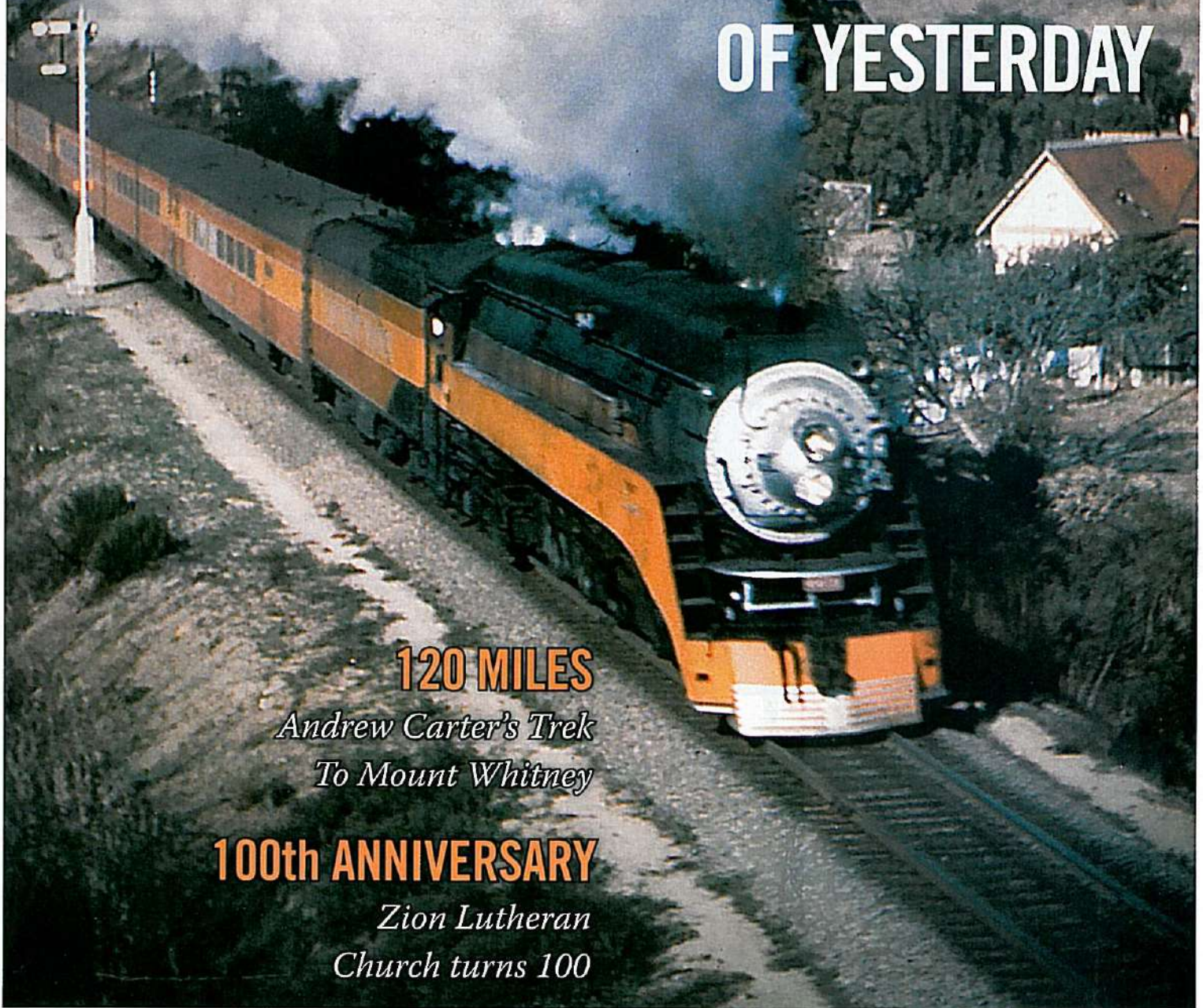
THE TRAINS OF YESTERDAY

120 MILES

*Andrew Carter's Trek
To Mount Whitney*

100th ANNIVERSARY

*Zion Lutheran
Church turns 100*



When it was time to celebrate America's Bicentennial with a *Freedom Train* the choice of locomotive was simple – Southern Pacific's General Service, or popularly referred to as a *Daylight* locomotive, No. 4449. The new colors of red, white and blue provided a striking combination. 4449 is spending the night at San Luis Obispo, April 26, 1977. *Walter Rice Photograph*



THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL TRAIN

By Walter Rice PhD

THE "WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL TRAIN" DEBUTED March 21, 1937. On that date, the Southern Pacific Railroad began operating between San Francisco and Los Angeles via San Luis Obispo streamlined *Daylight* passenger trains on a fast nine and three-quarter hour coast line schedule. On that August 4th the new train carried its 100,000th passenger, the shortest time ever for an American passenger train to achieve such a mark.

Streamlined powerful "Golden State" (later called "General Service") locomotives pulled the *Daylight* at speeds as high as 79 miles per hour. These powerful GS locomotives' range allowed them to run the entire 471-mile distance from San Francisco to Los Angeles – a world's distance record for a steam locomotive. Other steam locomotives, when they arrived in San Luis Obispo, had to be replaced and serviced, creating a substantial source of employment for the city.

In late 1935, Southern Pacific executives began formulating plans for a new streamlined passenger train to be powered by the "best locomotive in the world." In 1935 the country was still near the trough of America's greatest economic collapse – the great depression. Like all American business, Southern Pacific had been economically battered. Instead of further retrenching, Southern Pacific, to its credit, was about to make a

significant investment gambling that future coast line passenger traffic would warrant such expenditures.

Most remarkable (certainly, by today's standards) only 18 months elapsed from the time railroad management began their planning to the implementation of the new *Daylight*. Designed by Southern Pacific's General Superintendent of Motive Power and Mechanical Engineer, the first of the Lima built new *Daylight* locomotives arrived in late 1936. Based on specifications of a 1930 Baldwin product, the new locomotives

The change from the old heavyweight non air-conditioned cars to the impressive new streamline train was dramatic.

showed off their modern streamline statue.

They featured streamlined skyline castings and side skirting, which blended into the pilot and conical silver noses. Painted in what soon be-

came known as "Daylight colors" of black, red, orange, the GS locomotives conveyed both speed and beauty. During their 18 years of service, *Daylight* locomotives became a symbol of California comparable to the state's palms, beaches and orange groves, which they passed.

The change from the old heavyweight non air-conditioned cars to the impressive new streamline train was dramatic. Passengers now rode in a luxurious air-conditioned chair cars (or parlor cars, if they preferred) sitting on sponge rubber cushions. Meals were served in the moderately priced coffee shop or diner. For socialization there was the lounge in the tavern car.

New luxury, speed and reduced fares awaited the California traveler. Southern Pacific soon promoted the *Daylight* as "The Biggest Travel Bargain in America." Six dollars was the one-way San Francisco - Los Angeles fare, \$10.80 round trip. By contrast, the excursion round trip fare in 1928 was \$25.00.

The strategy was to maximize revenues and thereby achieve profits maximization. It was successful. Riders flocked to the new train. The *Daylight* became the world's most profitable intercity train.

After the flat agricultural topography from Salinas to Santa Margarita, the *Daylight* began traversing an engineering spectacular to enter into San Luis Obispo. The four miles after leaving Santa Margarita 346 feet of elevation is gained until the summit is reached inside tunnel No. 6 - the summit tunnel. Once the summit is obtained, the *Daylights* began an over 1,100-foot 13-mile descent to San Luis Obispo, with a maximum grade of 2.2 percent. This was accomplished by the line snaking down

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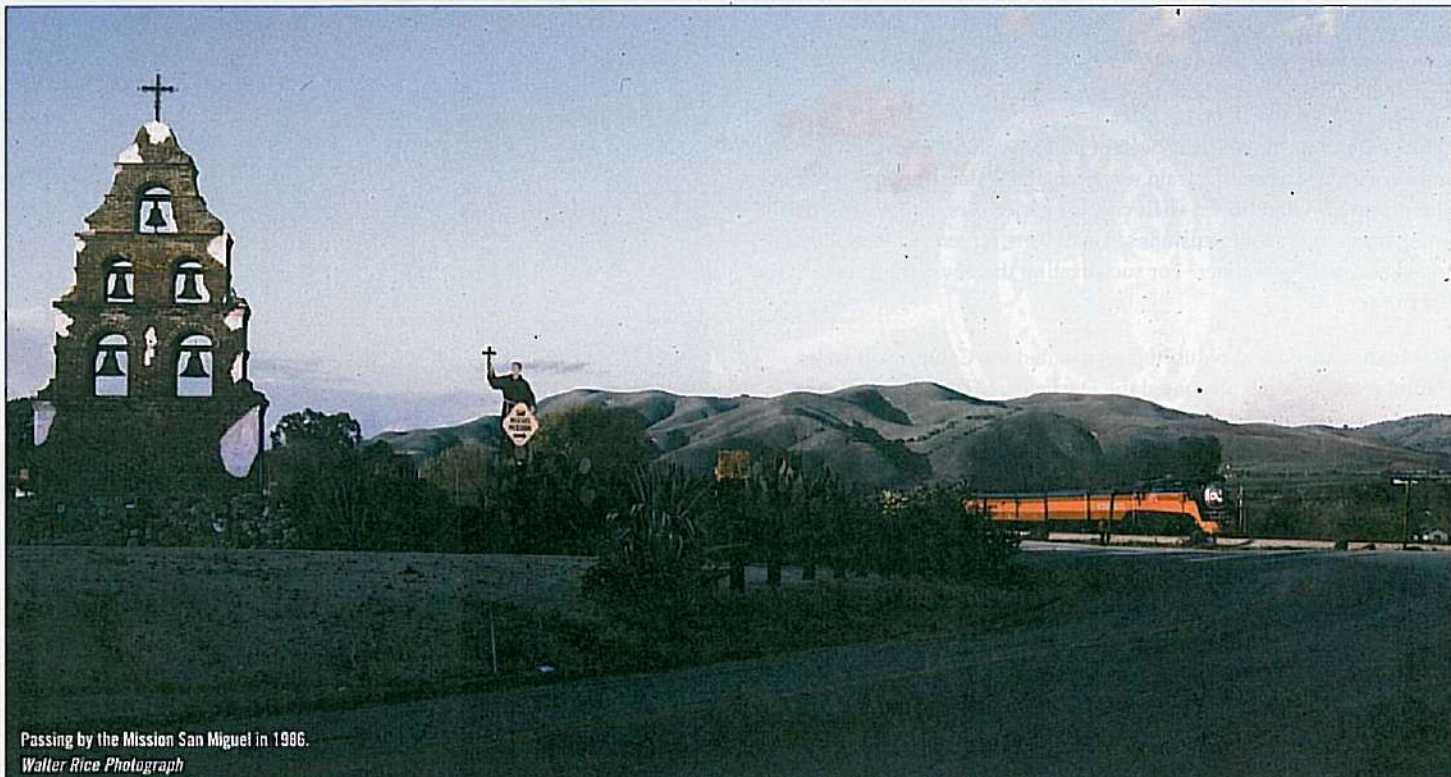
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Passing by the Mission San Miguel in 1986.
Waller Rice Photograph

the slope of the Santa Lucia Mountains, reversing direction and then reversing again. The highlight is the world famous Horseshoe Curve where both ends of a train (from the middle) can be seen simultaneously. During the initial part of the descent, a series of tunnels that were bored through dormant volcanoes are encountered.

Southern Pacific during peak season often ran multiple sections of the

Daylight to satisfy demand. The *Noon Daylight* was added to the schedule until World War II forced its discontinuation. The *Daylights*, coupled with the streamlined all-sleeper overnight *Lark*, captured the public's imagination. Once the reviled "Octopus," the Southern Pacific Railroad was now enjoying a zenith of public approval.

World War II travel restrictions were removed April 14, 1946. San Luis



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Traveling through Price Canyon in 1947.
Robert McVay photo.
Walter Rice Collection

Obispo railroading returned to normal. The removal allowed the reinstatement of the tavern and parlor cars on the *Morning Daylight*, plus the restoration of the *Noon Daylight*.

At train time, the San Luis Obispo train depot would be an exciting place. *Daylights* were meticulously serviced, and Cuesta Grade helper engines attached or detached all within the scheduled space of seven minutes – the longest and operationally the most important stop of the entire journey. Precision schedule adherence in the era timetable operation was a must given the number of daily train movements on the coast line. The logistical support the *Daylights* received in San Luis Obispo was integral to the trains' many successes. The *Daylights* were dieselized on January 7, 1955.

Times and management are subject to change. Freeways and airplanes began to erode away the coast line's passenger base during the 1950s. Southern Pacific management reacted by engaging in tactics designed to further discourage ridership in order to justify regulatory discontinuance of now money-losing passenger services.

In 1949, the *Noon Daylight* was replaced by an overnight train known as the *Starlight* using the same equipment. In 1957, coaches from the discontinued *Starlight* were added to the all-Pullman *Lark*, which in turn was discontinued in April 1968. A downgraded and debased *Daylight* continued to 1971 when Amtrak took over. Amtrak would ultimately adopt the name *Coast Starlight* for its Los Angeles to Seattle coast line service.

One final note. During the glory years of the Most Beautiful Train in the World, the *Daylight* averaged with stops over 50-miles per hour. Today the *Starlight's* average is 32-miles per hour.



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