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Derailed Fortunes: California's Forgotten Railroad

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Derailed Fortunes: California's Forgotten Railroad

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School Of Humanities And Communication

Senior Capstone: English Studies Concentration

Creative Project

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Senior Project Proposal

1. Name: Alexis DePaolis.

Area Of Concentration: English Studies.

2. Project Description: I intend to write the history of the South Pacific Coast Railroad through the eyes of Alfred E. Davis, co-founder and manager, in a creative non-fiction historical short story in order to share an account rarely told of the most successful narrow gauge railroad in California history and discuss why remaining tracks lay dormant to this day.

3. Alignment With Common Theme: The construction of the railroad was built on the backs of hard-working and scarcely recognized Chinese immigrants. The stories contained reflect on the disasters and fears, the tragedies, and the successes as a result of historically unjust labor practices.

4. Purpose: I aspire to share a story rarely told of the country's most successful narrow gauge railroad, and to recapture a history largely forgotten even by locals. My family owns one of the old tunnels this railroad once traveled through so I have a great deal of interest in this topic and the unique ability to take pictures directly at the site of interest.

5. Format Rationale: I believe that sharing a story rather than cold hard facts better connects to the general public through the use of pathos. Capturing the hearts of the people, and being able to express why an event in history is vital to remember, is crucial to ensuring its long-lasting legacy.

6. Capstone Title: Derailed Fortunes: California's Forgotten Narrow Gauge Railroad

7. Working Summary: After an unsuccessful gold-panning operation during the Gold Rush, Alfred Davis set his sights on a far greater project - the building of a railroad capable of dethroning that of the Central Pacific. After receiving the support of multimillionaires James Fair and James Flood, Davis began construction but found great adversity in the treacherous terrain of the Santa Cruz Mountains. This story encapsulates the great turmoil and victories obtained through many hands present, the resulting rise and downfall of the South Pacific Coast Railroad, and the legacies left behind.

8. Expectations: This Capstone project will consist of a short story spanning at least 15-20 pages, focusing on the hidden history of the South Pacific Coast Railroad. This story will be told from the unique perspective of one of the founders. It will address the questionable working conditions and mismanagement that caused the deaths of many Chinese immigrants. The project will also include a reflective essay which will explain the project choice, how it was created, why it was written, and the consecutive context that makes it an important historical event to remember.

9. Specific Skills And Tools Required: Since my preteen years, I have written hundreds of short stories, filled dozens of notebooks with imaginary worlds, and developed a sizable collection of them on google docs - over forty to date. I have been writing a book for the last ten years revolving around historical interpretations of mythology and Nordic/Finnish lore, so I am very familiar with the process of developing and creating a well-written and impactful story. I have around a dozen stories published online, most of which were assembled by request of family friends over a blog, and I spend a great deal of my free time endlessly researching and mapping the stories I write. Additionally, I

have taken three college-level creative writing courses and am currently enrolled in Introduction to Creative Writing (HCOM 330) here at CSUMB. My needed supplies for this project are all I can self-supply - namely, a laptop, a solid internet connection, paper to take notes and map out the story, and historical books revolving around the South Pacific Coast railroad.

10. Next Steps: The first step I will need to take to meet this project's expectations is to research and gather information. I intend to do this with my own materials written by local authors and by utilizing the library and online databases. I will need to take extensive notes to ensure the story is accurate and well-planned. I will then need to write a plot structure to organize the story before writing it. Once that is completed, I will need to write the story itself, ensure it has time to be properly edited, and then write the accompanying essay and ensure my resume and other articles are up to date. Lastly, I will need to assemble my poster or digital poster for the Capstone festival.

11. Timeline:

February 24th - Proposal due

March 10th - Final Draft of Proposal due

March 30th - By this date I intend to have all of my research completed and notes taken so I will be able to write the story.

April 14th - By this date I intend to have the first draft of the story written and ready for editing

April 21st - By this date I intend to have the first draft edited and ready for additional needed changes. I also intend to ensure my resume is updated.

April 28th - By this date I plan to have the final draft completed. I will also complete the required essay so it will have time to be edited.

May 12th - By this date I intend to have my portfolio assembled with all required documents, and to be working on or potentially completing the Capstone Festival requirements.

Abstract

Derailed Fortunes: California's Forgotten Railroad

At a mahogany bar in Collins Saloon of San Francisco's Montgomery Street, a successful businessman James G. Fair traced a trail of water droplets for his partner Alfred E. Davis to create the map of a visionary rail line soon to be known as the South Pacific Coast. Using historical records and photographs compiled by a selection of local authors and historians, this non-fiction retelling of Davis' experience highlights the tribulations and triumphs of the most successful narrow gauge line in California history in order to share a largely forgotten but crucial aspect of local industrial archeology, as well as to explore the origins of the ghost lines and tunnels which lay abandoned in the Santa Cruz Mountains to this day. Davis' experiences provide a unique opportunity to tribute and memorialize the efforts of dozens of fallen Chinese immigrants, many of whom lost their lives in building this crucial railroad.

Derailed Fortunes

"If the ghost of the South Pacific Coast Railroad walks now in the California night, it is a gentle ghost wearing a straw hat with holes for a horse's ears to protrude, of the sort provided by all humane teamsters in that dim and vanished past" (Lucius Beebe).

....

"Hey Hogs! There you are, you wily ol' chap. Come and grab a drink with us!"

"Yeah, yeah," I muttered as I stepped further into the bar, coarse laughter ringing through my ears. The Collins' Saloon was legendary in these parts. Established on Montgomery Street in San Francisco, Collins' was affiliated only with the wealthiest and dapper men in town and the loveliest of ladies; it had been my stomping grounds for many years. On another occasion, I would have been sure to sample the latest offerings well before this hour, but today I had a whole other matter to deal with.

I found him quickly, perched over the mahogany bar, that Irish chap, well whiskered and already working on his latest glass of whiskey with another reserved beside him. Robust, proud, and nearly unbeatable with machinery and money-making schemes alike - James G. Fair was a force to be reckoned with. I'd had the pleasure of meeting him many years before and working as his right-hand man in mining operations in Virginia City where great fortunes were made for some time, which ceased only with my retirement to a far quieter estate on Jersey Island until the day a fire wiped out my race horses aside from one lovely mare. Perhaps it was only natural to come back.

I perched on the stool beside him, picking up the reserved glass of whiskey and taking a slow draught. He waited, skimming a finger through beads of water that had slipped onto the smooth wooden counter from a precipitating glass.

“You told me you wished to build a line, Alfred.”

“I did,” I admitted, setting my own glass down. “The Big Four are undeserving of all of this land. They need a competitor, do they not?”

Collins P. Huntington, Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins, and Charles Crocker - titans of the industry and partial creators of the first Transcontinental line. Competing with the Central Pacific was foolhardy at best.

Smooth as butter, James’ hand slid along the counter. I found myself watching it for a moment, and I was taken a little off guard when he spoke. “Here, the South Bay. We follow the line from San Jose, track through the mountains, and make our way all the way down here to Santa Cruz along the path of the San Lorenzo River. A narrow gauge line, more daring than that which has ever been constructed in history. And when it is done, we track to the east, provide direct competition for those scoundrels.”

James stopped, watching me for a time, and realizing what he wished, I traced the same line slowly for a time, fingers trailing along the track before I looked up at him once more.

No words were needed. One nod, a mutual shake of the hand, and the deal was done.

....

Nestled in a crop of buildings across the street from the famed Collins’ saloon, settled in the Nevada block, an unassuming office sprawled across rooms 20, 21, and

22. Decorated with several maps and tarnished letters proclaiming 'South Pacific Coast', it was hardly a thing of beauty, yet it was all mine. President of the new company, I was to ensure the creation of the railroad with the financial support of James Fair and James Flood, another wealthy entrepreneur and owner of a successful local saloon. Through a collection of whiskeys and good men at Collins, we had managed to establish a Board of Directors for our new business, and on March 29th, 1876, the South Pacific Coast was born. My nephew was in charge of calculating the cost of the route, which we were led to believe would be less than twenty thousand dollars per mile. Still, unfortunately, dear Tom left out the costs associated with the Los Gatos to Felton route, which wound through the most dangerous and difficult terrain. We would come to find, in time, that this was a significantly more difficult and expensive task to perform than we had ever expected.

In order to ensure the success of the company and prevent potential bankruptcy, profits would need to be made before routes were even established. This led me to one of my most risky endeavors. In early 1876, I approached the offices of Dumbarton Green Point Dairy & Transportation Co., a long-lasting establishment worth one hundred and forty thousand dollars. After an initial purchase of four thousand acres in the surrounding lands I purchased the two thousand acre property and hundreds of cattle already nestled upon it. In our first six months we survived solely off of the profits produced by my younger brother Samuel, and his hard-working team of milkers and cheese and butter churners. While the milk farm was brought up to speed I headed the organization on everything from negotiations, to cattle treatments, to the hiring and deployment of over five hundred men who were to begin construction. While we worked,

James Fair established a town by the name of Newark in the surrounding area, and through a great deal of hard work and press exposure, he managed to capture the hearts of the people and their faith. This allowed him to begin to lay out what we considered the "Railroad Reservation," fifteen acres that we intended to turn into the main terminal and workshops for the soon-to-be-created South Pacific Coast railroad.

A railroad would be nothing without cars to travel among it, and we would only settle for the best of the best. The Carter Brothers were well known for their crafting of difficult and unique railcars all over the nation. Marked by a five-point star, even simply the symbolic nature of a Carter construction meant only traveling with the highest standards and craftsmanship. Our very first train was to be the infamous One Spot - a creation of beauty, styled in a classic Victorian fashion with warm varnished blue and brass fittings, a dark hardwood cab, a protruding '1' proudly painted in soft cream, and embellished further with black shading and accompanying letters, South Pacific Coast. With details of gold stripes and the capacity for a speedy and effortless thirty miles per hour, One Spot was the initial pride of our company, and it deserved accompanying beauty and talent.

Several hundred freight cars and several first-class sections were created by the Carter brothers so we could properly portray the elegance of not only One Spot but our future fleet to come. The first thirty were modeled with duck-bill roofs and were created to be long and roomy, with red plush seats and richly carved dark wood interiors. Two parlor cars accompanied as one must cater to those in dire need of swivel seats and a stiff drink.

Our bravest car, Engine no7, was known to travel through the seediest section of San Jose, infamously dubbed Drawbridge. Nerves and lines of steel withstood very hectic trips with crowds late of the bottle, who was known to be armed with shotguns which they much favored firing at the passing train. Much damage control was initiated for this beast, yet it was all worth the shattered glass as we could inspire the belief that we would travel anywhere, and frankly, we did.

By July of 1877, I found myself with my first great standstill near Jarvis road outside of Newark. Here we encountered our first great adversary: A property owner, by the name of George Patterson. It was a scorcher, fueled further by Patterson's insistence that the railroad we sought to build would prove to be nothing but trouble. A fire hazard and ruiner of good crops and hay fields. My solution to such folk would have typically been a fine bottle of whiskey and a long, pleasant conversation. But such methods were impossible to conduct under the orders of Patterson to blast anyone with a shotgun who dared step foot on his property.

No, we needed to be clever. Far more clever.

Interestingly, plans of the tracks were not the only matter of interest approaching George Patterson. A wedding was soon to take place between George and lovely Clara Hawley. After a great deal of snooping, I learned that they were to depart for the east coast shortly on their honeymoon. We would have our chance, soon enough.

The wedding was a lovely occasion, but better to us was the sight of the new husband and bride departing in a carriage. They left only an empty property with a handful of posted guards - guards who, as it turned out, were very invested in a stiff drink. It was a mystery how shotguns, once clenched in stiff hands, disappeared into the

cold night or how each of the guards passed out and were later embalmed and laid out peacefully on the side of the road in eternal sleep. Stranger still, the railroad simply seemed to build itself - pieces falling together one by one until it tracked across the property of George Patterson.

By October of 1877, the South Pacific Coast spanned across the entire south bay from Alameda Point to the relatively fresh thriving town of Los Gatos. Fifty-two miles of heavy track had been placed, over half of what we had planned in our initial route. It was here I was devastated to hear of the first of many accidents to come. Two ferries, burdened with supplies, crashed into the Alameda pier, causing the death of Oakland native Ferdinand Brewster and the cry of fellow townsmen of "Through To Los Gatos!" It was intended as a demand for the forced seizure of the railroad projects, yet the courts proved merciful, and we were allowed to continue on our way after a great deal of cleanup. In the midst of public relations and brief recoveries, we found our minds drawn to our next greatest challenge - the elegant, haunted Santa Cruz Mountains.

Long had I heard legends of these ranges; the rolling hills, thickly overgrown with patches of ferns, sweet bay, and the exquisite redwood trees which loomed over precipitous ravines, embracing the earth while reaching with several centuries of knowledge for cerulean skies. In a time before the arrival of the first settlers, local Indian tribes such as that of the Awaswas spoke of the 'mana' or spirit of the Gods, which danced through the treelines and welcomed every aspect of the forest. The trees here hold a deep knowledge, unspeakably old, and were once said to be protected by the spirits of the past. Some, I have heard, would even go as far as to consider the forests here a reminder of man's relative insignificance in our world.

Spirits or not, the mountains were our next due course, as they would prove the most challenging to date. We were far from the first to traverse here. Toll roads, daring carriages of skilled and reckless drivers, highwaymen who lurked behind the shadows of the foliage waiting to strike - civilization was certainly making its way at a brisk pace through these enchanted woods. Yet, one matter had yet to be resolved. The harvesting of redwood was an incredibly profitable endeavor, one which few were capable of due to the limited logistics available to aid one with bringing fallen logs back out of the mountains and out to interested buyers.

No railway existed in this steep, deadly terrain. The closest was said to be the Santa Cruz Railroad. Only a few short years before our arrival, in 1873, F. A. Hihn, a local mill tycoon, proposed a railroad between Santa Cruz and Watsonville. In 1876 it was finally completed, and I heard that fifty thousand dollars had already profited from the project. They say that the South Pacific is eyeing the line. I expected a sale to come soon, but until then, we had work to do.

There were many who would have considered me mad for attempting to tackle the most dangerous terrain in this section of the state. Even a narrow gauge line would struggle to weave its way through the dense foliage, dodging trees and ravines alike - but what they did not know was that I had a plan. Narrow gauge lines were not unusual in California, specifically in the mountain ranges. They allowed for far more maneuverable cars and significantly less grading and build time but at the exchange of being less stable, slower, and unable to hold the weight of a standard gauge rail. Accidents in the Rocky Mountains provided clear evidence of runaway cars and resulting explosions. It was for this reason that I chose to do the unthinkable. Our tracks

would be graded for ninety feet to the mile, allowing for a smoother, quieter ride at the expense of time and greatly increasing the time and expense of construction. I also decided to use local redwood lumber to support our rails when the trains needed to cross gorges and ravines. You may recall that my nephew had been in charge of calculating our overall costs of construction. His estimates of twenty thousand dollars a mile became one hundred and ten thousand in this treacherous terrain.

In the fall of 1879, our Chinese workers began to dig out ridges in order to create the first of several tunnels. I had a chance to witness one such occurrence, and may I admit, it was quite a sight. The men would drill out holes that were filled with gunpowder, and as it was lit, they would scramble out of the tunnel in time to feel the resounding rumble as debris blasted loose from the cliffsides. It was very dangerous work, and it was only a matter of time before we faced our first truly serious accident.

I remember that day well.

“Sir, Davis, sir, there has been an emergency.” A runner swept into my office, gesturing to my phone, which rested beside my desk. Admittedly I hadn’t heard it ring, but I moved to pick it up immediately.

“Alfred Davis, What has-”

“Dead, They are all dead.”

“What?” I bolted from my chair, knuckles whitening, jaw stiff. “What happened? Tell me.”

As it turned out, the mountains were haunted by far more than native spirits. An invisible gas leached out into the main caves within the cracks of cool earth and gritty stone. It crawled around my men, surrounding them, lurking with murderous intent.

Ordinarily, it would be detected through a process known as flashing, in which a foreman would be tasked with lighting a scrap attached to the end of a stick before they were sent walking forth into the darkness until the gas caused an ignition, sending an awe-inducing ball of fire as a warning for all living creatures to remain out. The foreman in question believed a disaster was imminent, and he chose to leave.

“Highland, he traveled ahead of his crew. Thirty-two strong Chinese men, sir. God only knows what possessed him. It could have been the devil himself. They say he decided to light a match down in the pits of hell. The tunnel produced a monster, a big fiery beast, blazing fire at us all. The heat, it was as if we were being spat upon by Satan himself. The sound was simply deafening. We couldn’t even hear the screams but knew they were there. They were caught by the darkness and the heat. It traveled so far from the tunnel that even the blacksmith lost his stand. And then, well-”

In the silence of the night, the shadows lurched.

Left. Right.

Left. Right.

*Acrid smoke wafted from the mouth of the mountain beast, drifting into the stars,
embracing the world beyond with fine snowy ashes.*

Drip. Drip.

Left. Drip.

Right.

Moonlight, casting an eerie glow over the still camp.

He stumbled.

Out of the belly of the beast.

....

“Highland, he survived?”

He sighed. “Unfortunately, sir. He emerged conscious. Spoke to the doctor and even waited four hours for their arrival. We have only just the chance to call you. Nearly all of them are dead. The beast took them.”

“I see. Please keep me updated,” I requested. Due to be slain it was, but not on this day. That day would come. Come, as the rise and fall of the sun over the horizon. Two days, still and quiet, broken only by rescue efforts which quickly became body retrievals.

Highland succumbed last, cheeky fellow he was till his last breath: upon hearing his hair had been scorched clean off, he told the doctor, “That will save me from having to pay the barber for a shearing for some time.”

Shame it was; he never got to see where else that money could have gone.

We could never fully solve the gas leak issue despite our best efforts. Drivers were warned and, of course, I ensured all were aware of the Summit tunnel's risks, but it made many of our locals rather nervous.

What a marvelous day it was when, upon reaching the existing Felton lines, I found myself able to take my dear family on a month-long vacation where they toured the new track. May 15th, 1880, marked our first passenger service, with two trains running the full span up to the Alameda ferry. We operated several picnic trains free of

charge to anyone who wished to explore the new route. Everything ran smoothly - until, inevitably perhaps, our next tragedy was to occur.

R.S. Elliot was a very talented conductor, a man I trusted very much. His route was simple enough; his cars lined with a Sentenial reporter and several families. It should have been an easy trip but soon, news rang out.

15 Civilians Killed in South Pacific Coast Derailment.

It was the worst news I could have heard. All of my hard work, the offers of free rides, and the publicity I had tried so hard to uphold were gone instantly. Suddenly, we were being compared to the South Pacific's Simpson station disaster. We were the next ones at fault, except we weren't.

These mountains were far more deadly than we first feared. Cursed, perhaps, not just by the spirits who wander aimlessly through the thick wood but by the naturally shifting, wet soils. A few inches of movement was all it took to throw our tracks out of line, permanently mar the South Pacific Coast's reputation, and on the opening day.

It was embarrassing, insulting - but it was far from the end of what we were to face.

Dirty, dangerous, profitable. The redwood industry was like nothing else I had ever experienced in my life. Only the most daring were willing to risk their lives stepping into the undergrowth, hauling massive logs back to our waiting cars for delivery into the fine valley. Despite all of the risks involved, there was no questioning the enormous profits to be had, and we certainly took advantage of it. Stripped were the hillsides of

those beautiful red trees. Any that proved to be accessible fell victim to our efforts and continued to fill our pockets.

With the business becoming rapidly more successful, we were due to find another terminal location for the sake of this incredible industry. This proved difficult as our ideal location, Lorenzo, proved unprofitable due to the greed of a certain Mr. Pitt, who chose to raise the prices of the land upon hearing of our interest. We didn't let it deter us. Instead, I picked a location to the east and soon we were in full operation, aiding with the delivery of logs and materials to the highly successful John Dougherty, who owned many of the regional sawmills.

By the weekday, we ran a consistent operation delivering passengers and cargo alike up and down the full route of service. Weekends were full of glorious picnic services encompassing kegs of beer, a variety of bread, salami, cheese, and even whole lamb, which was eagerly consumed by our rather drunk customers. More often than not, fights broke out, and sometimes our train suffered. Still, the money could not be questioned, nor the reputation for a speedy and entertaining weekend experience further embellished with limitless alcohol. I had heard reports from our conductors who took to locking the ladies aboard the cars in order to separate them from the rowdy men. They were disgusted, and I could not blame them, yet we could do little to contain such animalistic behavior. Amongst it all, the train rolled on.

My friend, James Fair, was largely a just and experienced businessman - but mistakes were made, and this is when they began to occur. After departing on a world tour he returned with an entirely changed outlook on the business. He became a Senator for the United States and, separated from the demands and attention of the

South Pacific Coast, he pulled away from the best interests of the company. In 1886, instead of waiting out the expansion of the line from the tightly knit and profitable business it had become, he rushed into the decision to create a new tunnel which would connect to Walnut Creek and eventually the Central Valley. This extension was entirely pointless, providing no true profit, and became so expensive that the proposed tunnel was never built. This was due, in part, to James' failure to comply with building codes established in the vicinity of Oakland which were cause to reject his desire to expand with illegal operations entirely. Then, in a moment perhaps defined through madness, he decided to rent portions of the South Pacific Coast to the Big Four to gain more personal profit. It was a decision James regretted to his dying day, and one which I could never agree with. Unwilling to see my life's work corrupted by those whom we had fought so hard to defeat, I left the company shortly after James. Yet, the spirit of the railroad remained in my soul, and I continued to ride the line for my own pleasure from time to time to enjoy the fruitless efforts I had endured.

Just before the turn of the century, a great effort was made to repair and revitalize the South Pacific Coast. It was a very successful endeavor that allowed us many more years of profit, and was likely what cemented our legacy as the most successful narrow-gauge railroad of our time. Despite numerous accidents throughout the 1890s we managed to persevere, and even old One Spot chugged along down the line, carrying passengers and resuming service as best as possible between the wreckage and derailments to come.

The last great incident of my lifetime was yet to come. November 20th, 1902 began with a scene from the very pits of hell. Engines and cars ablaze, coaches and

carriages burning to the skies above, smothering the Alameda pier and incinerating even those daring enough to escape. We never knew what had caused it. Few machines were lucky enough to flee the violence - *Newark*, the ferry, only escaped her own demise through the fast actions of her captain and crew. Incredibly, no injuries were reported, but the financial implications were enormous. I could never have been more glad to know that my pockets were unbothered. Suddenly, being an ex-president seemed just fine.

Then came the year when the entire state shook. In the dawn of 1906, I awoke to the sounds of screams and rumbles. The great city of San Francisco was set alight by the might of mother nature herself, and the rumbling of the largest earthquake any of us had known. Smoke plumed, casting shadows over the living and dead alike as we were forced to flee into the moonlit streets. It was this moment when I came to realize that my own home, set in the heart of the city, was unlikely to survive. At this time, I decided, my dear child, that my time had come to leave the great city, and I was to depart for your home, where I have remained since waiting for death's embrace.

Should one have asked me in the midst of it all if I was afraid of falling into the dark, I may have been more inclined to say yes. But the truth, child, is that I have lived a very fulfilling life. I have accomplished things one could only dream of - things I hold with great pride and regard. My legacy lives on not only in you and my fairest daughter Susie, but in the winding railways carved deep into narrow hillsides, arching through terrain few ever dreamed of traveling, slipping through tunnels embedded with great dangers, a hearty list of immigrant souls and my own men alike.

Perhaps the natives were right when they spoke of the mana, spirit of the Gods, which rests among the trees of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Perhaps for all this time they truly were protected, and our efforts were that which disturbed them. Should that be the truth, child, it would not matter in the least - not now, anyway, that the railway is done and complete.

I wish it, and you, the longest life one can live. I wish you the success I once clasped between my hands, hard as iron, driven into dusty ground in the form of a single, inaugurating spike. I hope you will take with you the lessons learned from my life, and that you will carry on this hard-earned legacy.

Forgive an old man, and make your own success.

Signed,

Alfred E.Davis.

P.S. Be sure it is known, nephew, that I have accomplished the unachievable and beaten the Big Four by meeting death last. Make this known as my last request.

....

While filled with flaws, lessons learned, and faults, Alfred lived a life hard-earned - a life with one hand on the tracks, the other clutching a phone calling every company he could to ensure the furthered success of his line.

It may have devastated him to learn years later of the frequent tunnel collapses and the untimely rumors surrounding the eventual closure of the railroad tunnels in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Hundreds of thousands of dollars sunk deep into the soil, never to be returned. It could have devastated him further to see the state of the mountains as

they are in the modern age, brimming with life and sprawling with healthy redwoods which would have reached enormous fortunes in his day and age.

Or, perhaps, it would have excited him to see so much life and potential, brimming at the seams, ready for the next great adventure of human discovery and intervention.

While the tracks may lay in the shadows of the mountains, history is never forgotten - not when one truly desires to preserve and cherish it.

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Laying The Rails Down: A Reflective Essay

Growing up in the Santa Cruz Mountains, I was always fascinated with the idea of the people before us – the Native Americans, early settlers, and others who found themselves in a land of historical significance, of old-growth redwood trees spanning hundreds of feet into the sky, of the animals and creatures which once roamed more freely and prosperously than they do in the current age. Throughout my early childhood, I attended an elementary school in the mountains, and I remember being confused when I realized while we learned plenty of the East Coast, and even of the Sierras and the rest of the West, there were no lessons on our mountains. What happened in our local history? And why could we not share it?

In creating this project, I wanted to truly explore the history of the Santa Cruz Mountains in the most important period of development, when the industry of the redwood trees and lumber was key, and when a more modern style of life became significantly more possible. By using the age of the railroads, I hoped to address the many aspects of our history as well as to explore the origins of many towns in California including that of Los Gatos and Boulder Creek. I chose to write this story from the perspective of one who would have seen it all to capture a more complete history than what would have been possible from a worker's eyes.

Quite a bit of planning and research went into this project. Several books were read and photographs studied, works recently rescued from the private collections of mountain residents. Through my research, I uncovered stories written by a local author on the conditions of the Chinese Immigrants who worked on this railroad, but I found

nothing of the president himself. I realized his history is more hidden in the modern age than even that of the workers behind the rails, so I chose to use him as my subject, and I proceeded to dig up every source I could find. While I knew this could prove a controversial take in our current day and age, I believe every human being has the right to have their story told. We can only truly understand history if we are able to study and observe every side of it. Near the end of my writing, I chose to turn it into a letter from Alfred Davis to his descendants primarily due to my desire to bring in information about the tracks in the modern age.

A variety of craft elements were used throughout this piece. Most of the letter is written in first person in order to better dig into the mind of Alfred Davis, however a few sections have been pulled from that reality. For instance, the scene of Highland stumbling out of the tunnel explosion was written from an outside perspective to envision the scene more dynamically. Alfred's location at the time of the explosion was unknown, so I needed to use a third, unassociated individual, an omniscient narrator, in order to view his experience dramatically. A great deal of imagery is used throughout this piece, largely inspired by the writings of the time. Old authors and historians wrote of the Summit Tunnel incident as a 'beast of the mountain', so I chose to use this imagery and expand on it. The dialogue throughout this piece is limited but expository - intended to relay important information in a simpler way to keep the reader engaged. Generally Alfred is seen heavily involved in matters regarding all parts of operation, as was recounted frequently in the texts I researched, but as a president he would have had other responsibilities from time to time.

This is the story of the Hidden History of the Santa Cruz Mountains - our history. I hope you will enjoy a look at a past rarely shared and that perhaps through projects like this, locals and children will have a chance to learn far more about the beautiful place they live and the many incredible minds and hands behind it. Additionally, I hope the story of Alfred Davis will also inspire valuable insights into our current catastrophic wildfire situations and the frequent debates of forest management practices, conservation, and preservation strategies.