

ECV Jim Savage Mariposa Battalion
Humbug: Steve Weller
Historian: Dan "Professor Firetruck" Carrion
History Lesson
Jan 2023

Fresno Station's 1st Rail Delivery

Jim Faber was an enterprising merchant, who never overlooked an opportunity to prosper. And once early in his career, in the very early days of the whistle stop which would one day become Fresno, his patience and ingenuity were put to the test.

In the late 1870's, when the Central Pacific Railroad was making its way through the valley of the San Joaquin, Leland Stanford, the president of the CP, planned a major station on the south bank of the San Joaquin River, where what's left Herndon (after High Speed Rail) now stands.

When the crews reached the river early in 1872, several ambitious traders had already established their businesses there. Of course, one of them was our pal, Jim Faber. Faber's "store" was a tent, filled with all kinds of merchandise from blankets and whiskey to pots and pans.

Governor Stanford chose the name "Sycamore" for the new station, although the real "Sycamore" was a few miles down river of that location. While the crews worked feverishly to build a huge bridge across the San Joaquin river, another crew was already at work on the south side of the river, building southerly away from Sycamore.

In the metropolis of Sycamore, speculators bought and sold lots (purchased or deeded first from the railroad) and merchants in crude tents did business. Other makeshift concerns such as saloons thrived.

One day, the intelligent and farsighted Stanford and several of his associates went on an inspection trip down the line in the southern direction. Soon they reached the site where Fresno would one day be located. Upon arrival, Stanford saw vast acres of beautiful green wheat waving in the breeze. A.Y. Easterby, after two unsuccessful attempts, had finally mastered the art of growing wheat in this seemingly arid land. Stanford was hugely impressed at the sight of such marvelous agricultural endeavor, the only bit of green in the Valley at that time.

Stanford thrust his gold handled cane into the dirt and said, "This is it. We will build a town here called Fresno Station." Of course, back in Sycamore, this came a quite a shock to the system. But after the initial panic, the merchants and other business people made preparations to follow the shimmering rails to the new townsite, and forsake poor Sycamore.

Our friend, Jim Faber, quick thinking and determined not to be undone, formulated a plan of action. He made a deal with the crew members of the work train. For certain gratuities to be determined later, they would drop his merchandise at the new station down line. Of course, the work train was never allowed to haul freight for anyone. It was meant as a conveyance for workers, materials, and supplies belonging to the railroad and was for railroad use only. Exactly what was promised to the crew to entice them to do Faber's bidding has never been made clear, but surely it must have been substantial.

By now, the rails had been laid all the way to Goshen. Faber, with the help of the work crew, loaded all of his goods – bottled, barreled, or crated – into a boxcar, with instructions to drop the supplies off at Fresno Station upon arrival.

The train left Sycamore, and Faber, who was not allowed to ride the train, loaded his tent and was content to follow along

trackside in an old iron wheeled wagon, blissfully aware that he had outfoxed the other Sycamore merchants. He would surely have the only supplies in Fresno, thereby cornering the market.

As luck would have it, the train was not ordered to Fresno Station, but was to pass through at speed and stop at Goshen only. This fact was only presented to the crew after the train had left Sycamore. But rising to the occasion, they quickly adapted to the needs of the situation. Upon nearing about a mile north of Fresno Station, they began unloading Faber's goods from the box car. They rolled barrels, tossed crates and bundles, and threw bottles out of the open box car doors, and watched as they bounced along trackside. But they had, at least, kept their word that the supplies would be "dropped" at Fresno.

Faber, following along happily in his wagon and nearing the station, found a sad, smashed, leaking barrel that looked oddly familiar, and smelled of an alcoholic libation. Then he found a broken crate, also familiar looking. Next, he found a cracked box, blankets, dented pots and pans, shoes, and lots of clothing...all with the same familiar look. And the train was nowhere in sight. He quickly salvaged what he could and hurried on to the town.

So it came to pass that Fresno's first merchant opened his tent with the first rail delivery to Fresno...a stock of dusty, smashed, cracked, dented, and whiskey smelling merchandise. All of which quickly sold out to the hungry and hardy souls that flocked to the new settlement, much to the delight of Jim Faber.