

Learning Opportunities in a Living History Setting

... at Historic Santa Clara Depot



One goal of the South Bay Historical Railroad Society (SBHRS—a non profit, public benefit corporation) is to provide the community an educational resource allowing children to experience the railroad heritage through a living history setting. We have a small museum that is intended to be seen; where the children will not be overwhelmed, but will be able to experience history through a

unique combination of displays. Since the depot continues to be a working CalTrain Station, the students can also experience the modern transit system and become acquainted with its use.

The museum portion includes displays of a velocipede, crossing signals, signage, tools, control panels, various types of signal lanterns, locomotive bells, interlocking control tower, and historic memorabilia. On occasions we can provide a viewing of the scale model railroad layouts that are under construction.

The Santa Clara Depot provides an unique opportunity for classes to enrich the education process. The Depot was constructed in 1863 by the San Francisco San Jose Railroad. This Depot has held the distinction of being the oldest operating depot West of the Mississippi River. The Depot was taken over in 1985 by the SBHRS for the purpose of restoring the





structure to provide a museum to preserve the unique history that the railroads brought to Santa Clara County, the State of California, and the United States of America.

The social, technological, economic, and industrial development brought about by the spread of the railroad was an important factor of post Civil War expansion.

Locally, the railroads tied the state together. Although San Francisco is only 45 miles and about an hour away today by car, the choices a person had in the early 1800s to go to San Francisco required a bit longer trip. The options in those days were to go by foot, horseback, stagecoach, or ferryboat. Going to San Francisco in the 1800s generally took longer than going cross country today.

I have included a draft of a lesson plan that we believe has a lot of opportunity for learning experiences in our living history setting. We have included elements of math, science, history, and economics to show the far reaching effects of the railroad on our society. The SBHRS wants to make this opportunity available to your class. Please contact me at work or home to set up a visit.



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