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Many ways to get around Redlands in the 'golden era'

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In the beginning, before Redlands was Redlands, it took muscle to get from one place to another - either your own as you trekked on foot or the sinews of real horsepower.

Or oxen power.

In the 1840s, Maria Armenta Bermudez hauled her crops to Los Angeles in wooden-wheeled wagons pulled by oxen.

According to Edith Parker Hinckley, in "Redlands and Certain Old-timers," Bermudez planted grain and corn in an area a little west of the Asistencia and took her crops to market in Los Angeles.

"Her most notable feat," Hinckley wrote, "was enlarging the trail from this area to Los Angeles into a road passable for wagons."

In those days, the trip to Los Angeles took several days, considerably longer than today's drive to Olvera Street on Interstate 10, even when the traffic slows down to an oxenlike pace.

When Frank Brown and E.G. Judson began developing Redlands in the 1880s, they knew it would take more than ox carts to bring people to their growing town, so they set out to woo the iron horse.

According to former Redlands Daily Facts co-owner and publisher William G. Moore in his 1983 book "Redlands Yesterdays," the Santa Fe Railway agreed to extend its California Southern line to Redlands if the city paid for the right of way from San Bernardino. The young town, with fewer than 1,000 residents, raised \$42,750, and by February 1888, the Santa Fe was serving Redlands.

The following month, according to Moore, the Redlands Street Railway was incorporated, giving people a way to get around in town once they got to Redlands.

The Redlands Street Railway started out with small cars pulled by two mules. After 10 years, the mules were retired, and Redlands got an electric street car line that was expanded to include a line to San Bernardino. The street railway, according to Moore, was later absorbed by Henry E. Huntington's Pacific Electric Railway Co.

Bill Moore's brother Frank, his partner in owning and running the Daily Facts for 40 years, wrote more about Redlands' railways, street cars and roads in his 1995 book "Redlands Astride the Freeway: The Development of Good Automobile Roads," much of his story drawing on his own memories.

When the Moore brothers were young, Redlanders could board one of the Pacific Electric's Big Red Cars at Orange and Citrus and ride to downtown Los Angeles.

"Moreover," Moore wrote, "we were tied into the great street car network that reached beach cities from Newport to Santa Monica and served most communities in the greater Los Angeles area.

"With an itch for the sea you could go by the PE to the Catalina pier at Los Angeles Harbor. If you fancied the mountains, how about the Mt. Lowe Incline and Trolley to the summit overlooking Pasadena?"

Before coming close to the freeway era, Moore describes a smorgasbord of railway and trolley systems that flourished and vanished in the Redlands area, including the Southern Pacific, which built a passenger depot on Orange Street just north of Redlands Boulevard. That station no longer stands, but the 1909 Santa Fe depot farther north on Orange is still a Redlands landmark.

The railroads brought thousands of tourists to Redlands, from across the country and on excursions from Los Angeles.

In town, street car lines went as far as Tennessee Street in the west and Wabash Avenue in the east, running along Brookside and Citrus, and extended south up Cajon Street to Cypress Avenue. They also ran out Olive to Terracina, up to Smiley Heights and north to Lugonia.

In her 1951 book "On the Banks of the Zanja," Edith Parker Hinckley wrote that the street car motormen "rather lorded it over the preachers, for if the churches were not out by twelve o'clock Sunday noon the bells would clang and people would get up and go out. This encouraged the ministers of Redlands to give short sermons!"

It's easy to look back with nostalgia and longing at Redlands' "golden era" of transportation, when you could board a train or street car and go practically anywhere. "Never again," Frank Moore wrote, "would Redlanders have such a variety of options in getting about Our Town and all of Southern California."

But only a year after Redlands' mule-drawn street cars were replaced by an electric system, Cass Gaylord brought a newfangled toy to town that would eventually ride all the passenger rails out of town.

Gaylord ordered Redlands' first "motor carriage," an automobile made by the Haynes-Apperson company of Kokomo, Ind., costing about \$1,200, according to an account in the Redlands Daily Facts cited by Lawrence Emerson Nelson in "Only One Redlands."

"The machine was delayed in transit," the Daily Facts wrote, "else Redlands would have had the first motor carriage in Southern California. The delay permitted Los Angeles to receive a machine two days ahead of this city."

Gaylord's automobile, capable of 10 to 20 miles per hour, made its debut on Redlands' streets on Aug. 10, 1899, and it was soon followed by Redlands' second car, Dr. Sanborn's Locomobile, according to Nelson.

Automobile fever caught on quickly, and by 1909 there were 291 licensed cars in Redlands, according to "Redlands Yesterdays," which illustrates the story of early automobiles in Redlands with photos of auto races and excursions into the mountains.

In the decades that followed, cars multiplied, streets were paved and rails were pulled up - except for the occasional one that's been found under layers of paving during major street-repair jobs.

In the 1930s, what is now Redlands Boulevard became part of Highway 99, the route that connected Los Angeles and Palm Springs.

And in 1962, Interstate 10 came through Redlands.

Nowadays, Redlanders can drive around town or out to Los Angeles in their motor carriages, making a little better time than Cass Gaylord's Haynes-Apperson did, or take Metrolink, but only if they drive to the San Bernardino station. Although the Santa Fe depot still stands on Orange Street, it's been years since a passenger train has pulled into the station.

Someday the Metrolink line may extend to Redlands, but until then, the only reminder we have of Redlands' "golden era" is the Redlands trolley, little buses dressed up as red trolleys following the blue line around the city.

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