

Larry Ames talk at WG Trestle Celebration, 6/10/17

<Thank previous speakers>

Thank you, all, for attending!

<acknowledge elected officials>

And thank **Severn Edmonds** and **Kathy Pimentel** for hosting the event here today!

A true story:

Some years ago, a friend and I worked at a small company.

Every so often, our manager would pass us in the hall and ask how things were going.

I'd respond that I was working on this task or was trying solve that problem; my friend would say that he had just completed a task here or had just solved some problem there.

When the company had to downsize, I was the one let go – because I never seemed to have accomplished anything.

The moral of the story: while we all have to keep working on the tasks ahead, it is also important to acknowledge our accomplishments.

With that in mind, and while knowing that there are still tasks ahead, we are here today to celebrate our accomplishment – the listing of the **Willow Glen Trestle** on the **California Register of Historical Resources!**

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There's so much history here to talk about, and so many groups and individuals to acknowledge and thank!

First, the history:

- 1864: the first rail connected SJ to SF, and within a few years, SJ was connected to the entire country.
- By the early 1900's, we were famous for our fruit trees, and this area was known as "The Valley of Heart's Delight".

It was also the time of the “Robber Barons”, and Southern Pacific had SJ in their train monopoly.

- Local agricultural interests convinced T.S.Montgomery, one of the richest men in town, to join the Board of rival *Western Pacific* to bring it to SJ and to bring in some competition.
- In 1922, this trestle connected San José (and their main depot on Santa Clara St.) over to Niles Canyon and on to the nationwide rail network – it broke the monopoly.
- Also: Western Pacific was innovative, with new services such as “overnight delivery” and “less-than-carload” service, both of which helped the small local farmers.
- Western Pacific and the trestle shaped this part of town: as Mr. Montgomery had promised, Willow Glen was kept residential (in fact, one of Mr. Montgomery’s companies built quite a few of the houses in the area), even as the trains promoted the industrial development of western San José

Over the years, the cities grew and farming faded.

- In the 1970’s, **Rod Diridon** helped **Don Hebbard** start the Los Gatos Creek Streamside Park Cmte to help coordinate the planning of the Los Gatos Creek Trail. (**Zoe Lofgren** formally appointed me to the Cmte in 1984.)
- Around 1984, we on the Cmte hiked the creek channel to evaluate possible trail alignments, and that’s when I first discovered the Willow Glen Trestle.

>> It was “magical” -- I felt that I’d walked back in time!

We on the Cmte then started working w/ city planners to figure out how to showcase the trestle as part of the future trail network.

- In 2000, San José created a Parks Strategic Plan – “The GreenPrint” – and it recommended that the Western Pacific rail alignment be converted into a trail – the Three Creeks Trail – if & when rail service was discontinued.
- The following year, 2001: service stopped & the rail ROW came up for sale. The community worked w/ then-Councilmember **Ken Yeager** (and later w/ Councilmember **Pierluigi Oliverio**) for the city to acquire the land. It took a decade, but the city was finally able to buy it, thanks in large part to the millions in grants from **County Parks, the Santa Clara Valley Open**

Space Authority, the SCVWD, and the State of California. (Give a shout-out to **Blanca Alvarado** and **Jim Beall!**)

- By 2012, the City owned the land and the trestle, and it had the needed permits, the funding, and the detailed plans for the trestle's restoration and incorporation into the trail network.

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- For some reason, in early 2013, the City decided to buy a new prefab steel bridge, and it directed that it be placed here.
(It wasn't a "unified front": then-Councilmember **Sam Liccardo** helped by pulling items off of the Consent Calendar so we could discuss matters, and **Xavier Campos, Raul Peralez, and Don Rocha** stood up for the trestle, as did the city's **Hist. Landmarks Cmsn & the County's Heritage Cmsn.**)
- City staff's officially stated reason for demolishing the trestle basically was: "No one knows that it's there, so no one will miss it."
(So: we gave numerous trestle tours to help fix that!)
- We suggested that their new bridge could be used elsewhere, like for example on the Coyote Creek Trail, somewhere where it would be needed and appreciated.
- To save our trestle, we asked the community to show its support – and within 3 days, over 100 people wrote letters to the City, many w/ heartwarming and personal stories of fond memories and family connections.
(Thru-out this long process, whenever I would get discouraged, I would go back and reread some of them!)

To get the City to stop its "march towards destruction", and to get it to do a *proper* environmental review, **the Friends of the Willow Glen Trestle**, with help from **PAC*SJ**, had to file a suit under CEQA law. (Give a shout-out to **Jean Dresden, Helen & Dan Chapman, Martha Heinrichs, Scott Lane, Brian Grayson, Gayle Frank**, and my wife, **Liv!**)

We were extremely fortunate to find **Susan Brandt-Hawley**, who specializes in CEQA law and who practices statewide for historic preservation.

While the legal process is still on-going, the City did finally do an Environmental Impact Report.

The EIR shows that it is faster and cheaper to restore the trestle than to replace it; it's readily made safe (and fire-safe); both computer-modeling - and the recent rains - show that it's not an impediment to the flow of floodwaters; and, creosote and all, it's better for the creek and the habitat to just leave the trestle in place rather than to try to remove it.

But the prefab bridge would also work. Given that the City has already bought the replacement, if the trestle was not found to be historic, they most-likely wouldn't keep it.

So: that was the point at which we began researching the trestle's past.

Jean and Martha did amazing research!

Deborah Arant and Richard Nieset had thrown us a fund-raiser, and that paid for our historian, **Seth Bergstein**, who did additional research and then wrote our application for historic listing.

With help from **William Burg & Jay Correia** at the State Office of Historic Preservation, a year ago we filed for **National Historic Registration**.

However, despite unanimous approval by the **Calif. Historical Resources Cmsn**, our attempt failed when it got entangled back east in Washington DC.

We applied to the Calif. Historical Resources Cmsn again this year, this time for the **California Register**, and this time our application was successful!

Public support was critical!

>>**24**<< letters of support – far and away more than their average nomination!

Letters from County Supervisor **David Cortese** (who's been very supportive throughout this process!)

Linda Gibson and Jeffrey Smitten – **grandchildren** of the trestle's design engineer!
Neighbors, trail users, and long-time residents!

To quote **Commissioner Luis Hoyos**:

"I'm encouraged and I'm glad to hear a community take such great interest in something that's theirs."

By a roll-call vote, a unanimous decision:

The trestle is now formally listed on the **Calif. Register of Historical Resources!**

There is more to do:

- Although the trestle is now formally and officially listed as “historic” by the State of California, the City continues to challenge that status;
- we are also awaiting the resolution of the court case;
- the EIR needs to be amended to reflect the trestle’s official historic status;
- and the new City Council needs to become informed on the issues, and then it needs to formally change the direction it gives to the Parks Dept. and the Public Works Department.

The trestle’s Historic Status also opens up opportunities for more grant funding, and we’ll be glad to again help the city apply for it. Additionally, we’re planning another fund-raiser this fall to show public support and also to help pay for trestle repair and maintenance.

We’re optimistic!

There’s now lots of **public awareness**: people know about the trestle now!

And we sense that there is a lot of **public support!**

We look forward to working with the City and all Stakeholders towards saving and restoring the trestle, and making it a wonderful historic “place” here at the gateway to Willow Glen!

Those tasks lie ahead, but, for now, let us acknowledge our accomplishment: the Willow Glen Trestle is now on the Calif. Register of Historical Resources!

Let’s celebrate!

Thank you!