

Nevada Central Railroad

General Information



Prepared By:

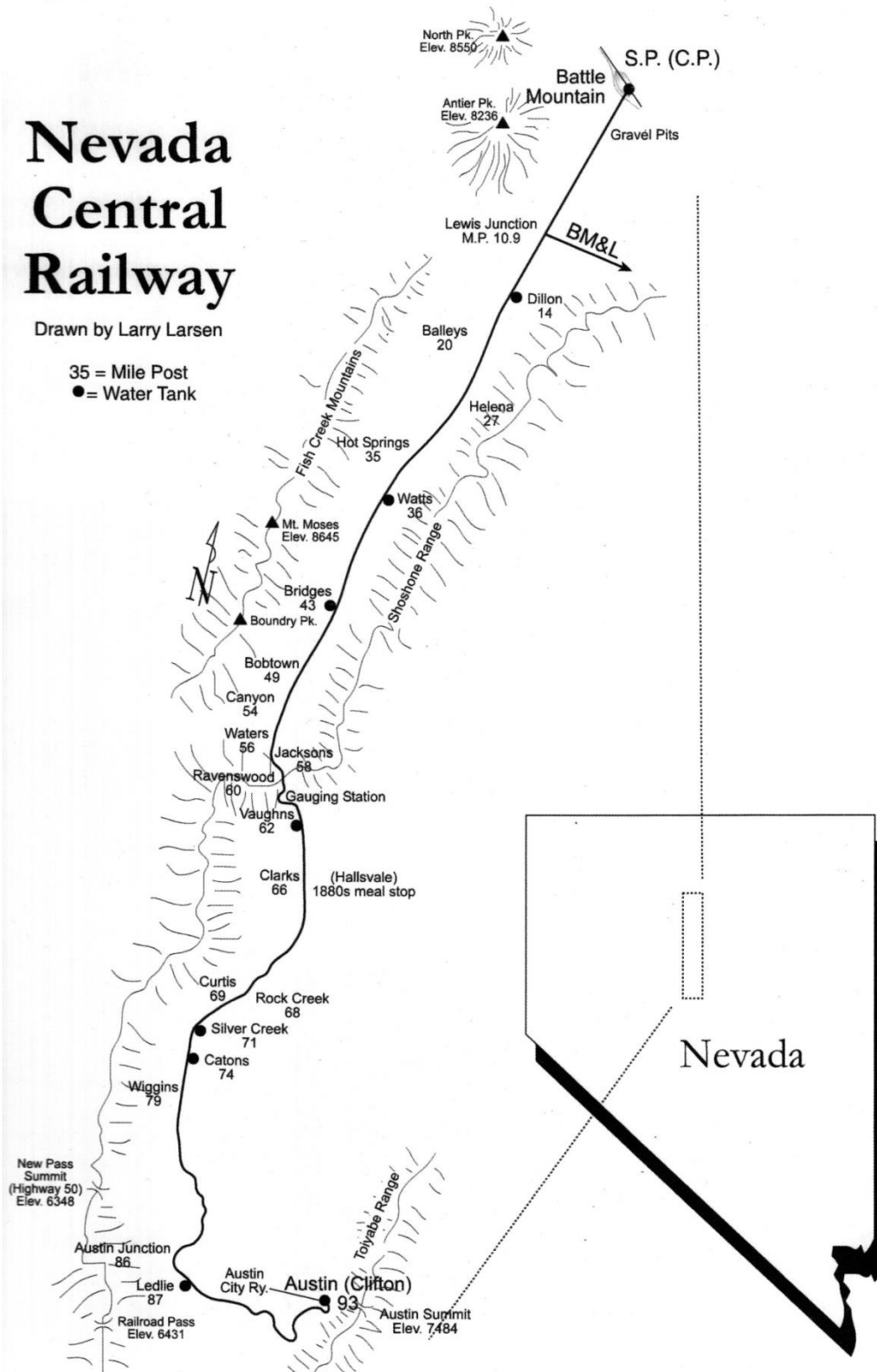
Warren White & Elizabeth Rassiga

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Nevada Central Railway

Drawn by Larry Larsen

35 = Mile Post
● = Water Tank



Introduction

The Nevada Central Railroad ran between Austin, NV and Battle Mountain, NV between 1880 and 1938. It was a narrow-gauge line built to connect the mining center in Austin with the transcontinental line at Battle Mountain, providing transport and access to San Francisco and New York.

How it came to be

A rich silver deposit was discovered in Pony Canyon in the Toiyabe Mountains in 1861. It began the “Rush to Reese”, after the nearby Reese River. A mining community sprung up and in a few years Austin had grown to over 5,000 people and was the second largest city in the territory of Nevada, behind Virginia City. But Austin was in a remote area and the slow speed and high cost of transport of goods and materials was a growing problem. After the trans-continental railroad was completed in 1869 there was increasing interest in building a railroad that would link Austin to Battle Mountain, and the Central Pacific Railroad.

Michael Farrell was Secretary of the Manhattan Silver Mining Company in Austin as well as being clerk for Lander County and a newly-elected state senator. On February 9, 1875 he succeeded in getting the state assembly to pass a \$200,000 county bond to be paid to the builder of a new railroad connecting Battle Mountain and Austin (over the veto of Governor Bradley). One condition was that it had to be completed in five years!

Organizing the effort and getting financial backing for “Farrell’s Folly” turned out to be difficult and time consuming. It was not until a meeting at the Baldwin Hotel in San Francisco on March 25, 1878 that the Nevada Central Railway (later to become the Nevada Central Railroad) was funded and organized. Actual construction of the narrow-gauge track would not begin until September.

Building the railroad

James T Ledlie, a railroad engineer who had been a general in the civil war, was hired as chief engineer, responsible for construction.

The initial purchase was to buy all of the equipment of the “Monterey & Salinas Valley Railroad”, which was being shut down. It consisted of 2 engines, 2 combination passenger and freight cars, 8 boxcars, 40 flat cars, two “gallows”

turntables, and 38 miles of rail. The cost was \$128, 558. Other purchases would follow. The total cost of construction was just over \$900,000.

The contractor who supplied the labor advertised for 500 workers for the job.

The first mile of construction, starting at Battle Mountain, was reported complete on September 13, 1879. Construction continued:

- October 25, 1879 30 miles completed
- January 2, 1879 40 miles completed
- January 31, 1879 77 miles completed
- February 7, 1880 79 ½ miles completed

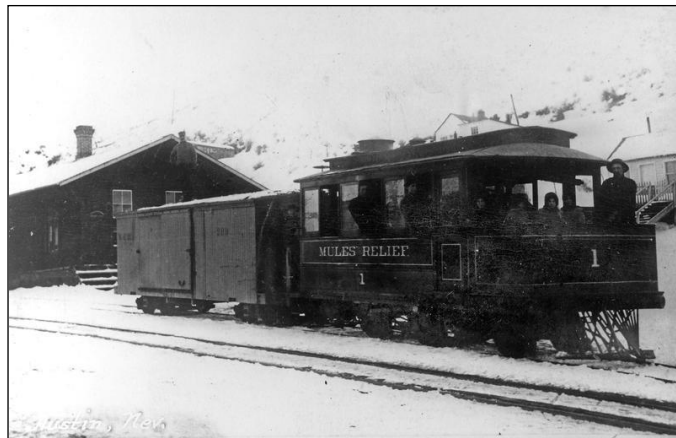
There had been weather delays and a shortage of rails. With 33 hours left there were 3 ½ miles of track to be laid before the subsidy deadline, and the last supply train from Battle Mountain was late. As midnight came the construction was complete and there was great festivity in Austin and Battle Mountain.



NCRR Train in Battle Mountain

Austin City Railway

Completion of the Nevada Central did not completely solve the transport problems of Austin. The Austin Terminal at Clifton was still a mile from downtown, and the road was up a steep 7.5% grade. Goods were carried up that grade via a mule train. This was an expensive and tedious operation. Allen Curtis initiated plans to build a connector line from Clifton up through the center of Austin to the mines. It was called the Austin City Railway, or, more commonly, the “Mules Relief.” It went straight up the main street of Austin, connecting the NCRR terminal in Clifton with the mines in upper Austin. It began operation in 1881. Operations were difficult and there was one accident in which an engineer was killed. The line ceased operation in 1889 after there was a downturn in the mining business.



Mules Relief, Winter 1881



ACR/ NCR station in Austin

Operating the NCRR

Shortly after completion daily trains operated between Austin and Battle Mountain.



Clifton station in Austin

Maximum speed on the trip was 20 miles per hour, and the normal schedule for the trip was about 5 hours. The railroad brought goods for all the stores in Austin as well as supporting mining operations and passenger travel. Later it would become important for moving cattle.



Battle Mountain connection with Central Pacific

Business in the first year of operation it was very good. In the following year it was hurt by other southern railroads that could also provide transport into central Nevada. In 1881 it was bought by the Union Pacific as a strategic asset. By 1889 it had gone into bankruptcy and ownership reverted to the original owners. At that

time the name changed from the Nevada Central Railway to the Nevada Central Railroad.

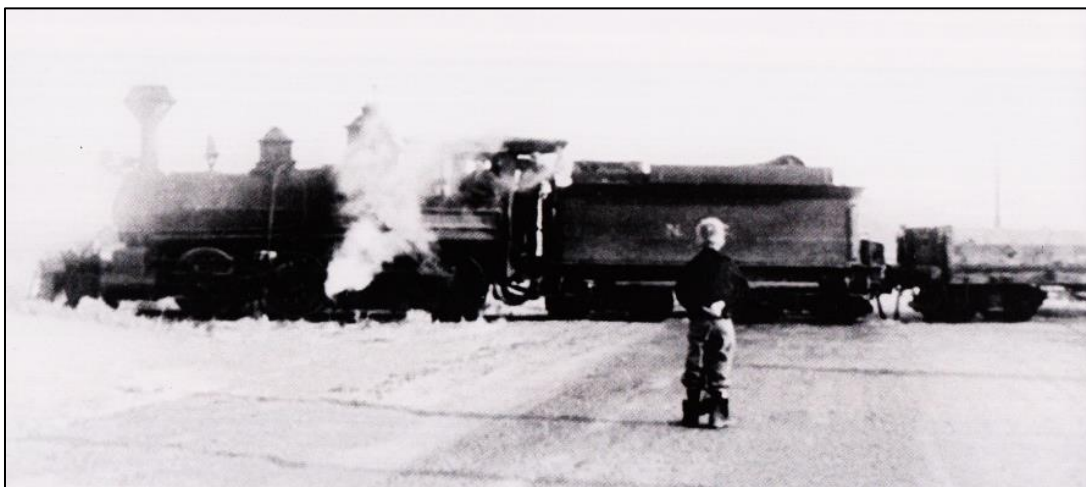
Operations were hampered by effects of heat, freezing and floods. There were incidents of track damage and some accidents.



By the 1930s cars, buses, trucks and the Great Depression were taking their toll. Near the end only 30 trains a year were operating, and those were for livestock shipments.

Shutdown in 1938

Eventually, the Nevada Central Railroad shut down. The last train to Austin came on Feb 2, 1938. The photo below is one of the few recordings of the event.



Jerry Mock Collection

Where are they now?

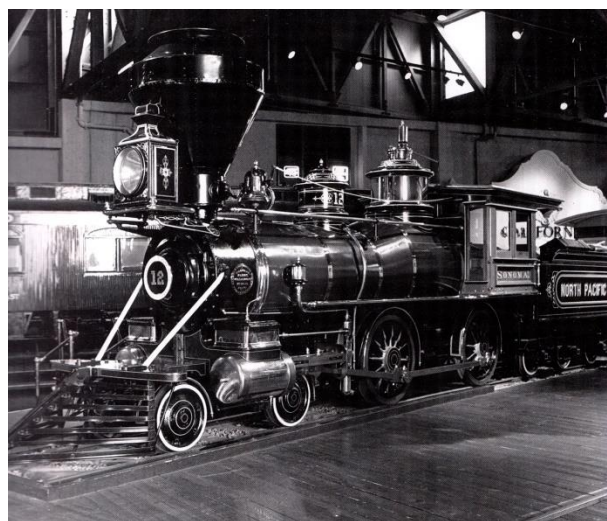
During its years of operation the NCRR was never very profitable. As a consequence there was little opportunity to spend money on upgrading to new equipment. The NCRR bought used equipment when it needed it and ran it as long as possible. When the business shut down in 1938 it was still using 19th century equipment. Because of its historical value, a surprising amount of NCRR equipment still survives, having made its way into entertainment and museums.

Engines #5 and 6 were used in the 1939 California Exposition re-creation of the driving of the Golden Spike in a pageant called the “Cavalcade of the Golden West”.



Mallory Ferrell Collection

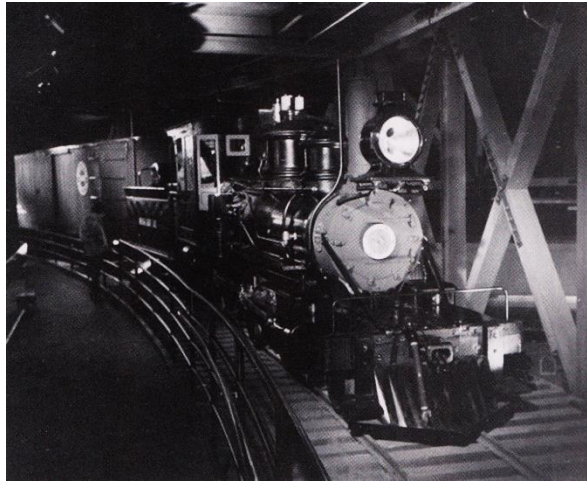
Later they went to the California State Railway Museum in Sacramento.



CSRM

NCRR engine #5, now numbered 12 and lettered for the North Pacific Coast line, is on the main floor heads a train that is entirely made up of NCRR equipment.

NCRR number 6 now sits on an overhead trestle in the museum and is lettered as Nevada Short Line number 1.



Mallory Ferrell Photo

The California State Railroad Museum also features a beautifully restored display of the Silver State coach. This elegant piece of equipment was built in the Nevada Central facilities in Battle Mountain. It is lettered for the Nevada State Railway.



CSRM

Interestingly, engine #2 was sold to a private collector. Ward Kimball was a key member of the Walt Disney team. He restored it and built a back yard railway called the Grizzly Flats Railroad. He renamed the engine the Emma Nevada, after the 19th century opera star who hailed from Austin!



Today, the Emma Nevada can be seen at the Orange Empire Railroad Museum, not far from Anaheim, CA.

Further Reading

Those interested in learning more about the Nevada Central should look at Mallory Hope Ferrel's excellent book, [Nevada Central Sagebrush Narrow Gauge](#). It is an excellent compilation of history and photographs.