

Meehan Siding, a forgotten piece of Zayante's history

By Derek Whaley
For the Press-Banner

Few would consider the village of Zayante as a bustling railroad town and, indeed, it never truly bustled. But it did draw tourists in droves.

The community, historically located along East Zayante Road between Lompico Creek and Mountain Charlie Gulch, began life in the 1870s as a series of logging mills, the largest of which was owned by the Santa Clara Valley Mill & Lumber Company at the confluence of Mountain Charlie Gulch's creek.

Above the creek on the east bank, the South Pacific Coast built its narrow-gauged railroad, definitively linking Santa Cruz County with San Francisco.

At a place known as Dougherty's Spur, a rickety track winded across Zayante Creek and joined with today's East Zayante Road near Zayante Drive.

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Disaster struck the mill in 1886, burning the entire complex down a year before logging operations were to have concluded. Moving on to more profitable ventures, the logging company reestablished itself north of Boulder Creek at a site that became Riverside Grove.

The old spur was pulled up but a siding was retained at a stop called Meehan, named after Southern Pacific Railroad track foreman Patrick Meehan.

Meehan became the railroad hub for the Zayante community. Seasonally, tourists would come from all over the Bay Area and beyond to stay at Zayante Lakes, Zayante Park, and various camps in the hills.

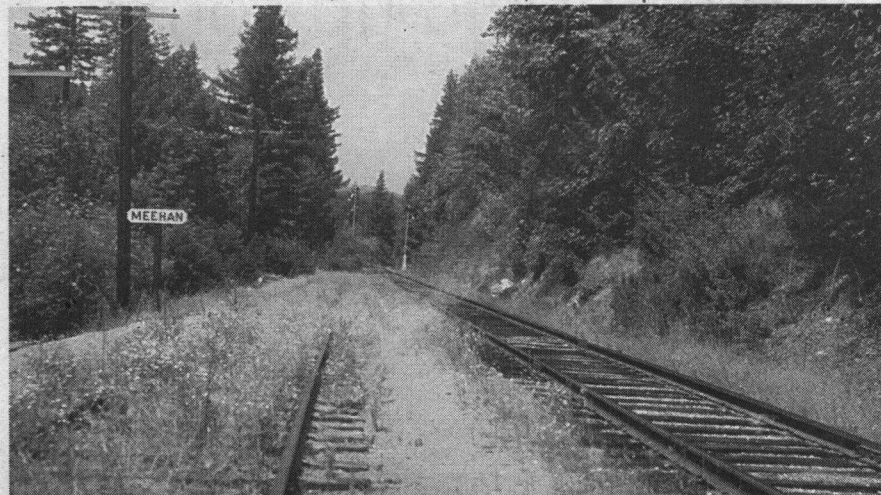
When Lompico was first being laid out, Meehan was the designated railroad stop for the community. Excursion trains stopping for picnics alongside the creek would park on the siding to allow passengers off while scheduled trains passed through.

In the stormy winter of February 1940, the siding at Meehan suffered significant damage

with much of it sinking toward the creek. Other places throughout the line between Los Gatos and Felton also sustained catastrophic damage.

The stop had already declined in attendance over the past decade and the siding had gone into disuse.

The damage to the route proved too costly to repair for the Southern Pacific and the entire line was shut down. Meehan disappeared into history as a forgotten name of a forgotten place.



The Meehan siding, shown here in 1939, was once the hub of rail commerce to the Zayante community in the early 20th Century until heavy rains destroyed it in 1940.

Courtesy of the Jim Vail Collection

■ Derek Whaley is a local historian specializing in the railroading past of Santa Cruz County. For more information, visit his website at <http://SantaCruzTrains.com>.