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Train hits house after jumping rails

10-car derailment near Manresa Beach

By MIKE WALLACE

Southern Pacific's Santa Cruz Local, headed from Davenport to Watsonville, derailed near Manresa State Beach Tuesday at 6:02 p.m.

Engine 3836 — the second of two — jumped the tracks, taking 10 cars with it. One of the derailed boxcars slammed into the rear wall of a home at 325 Vista Drive, and another stopped just shy of a home at 309-A Vista Drive. There were no injuries.

The home at 325 Vista is owned by Ann Sullivan of Hanford, and is currently being rented by Terry Smith, Hunter Morris and Lisa Yothers. The home next to it, 309-A Vista, is owned by Robert White of La Selva Beach. It is occupied by Jeff Odom, Becky Mastoris and Walter Higbee.

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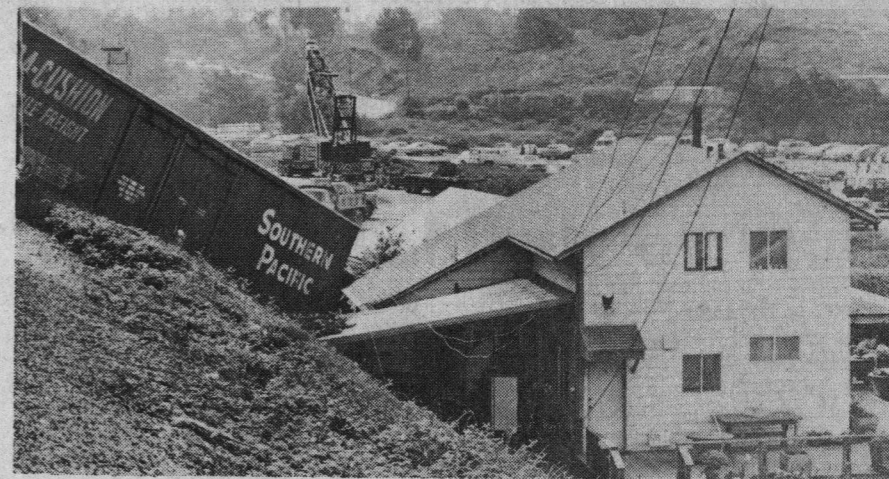
Odom, who has lived in the home nearly four years, had just come home when the accident occurred.

He was sitting in a bedroom at the rear of the house. From a window in that room, he could look out and see the railroad tracks on a grade above the house.

He was reading when the train began to approach, and he heard more noise than usual. He looked out and saw the wheels on the outside of the tracks, rather than the inside. The other set of wheels, he said, was cutting through the wooden ties. Then the boxcars started tumbling down the grade.

"At that time I proceeded to flip and haul ass out the front door," he said. "I've been freaked out ever since. I only got about two hours sleep last night."

Although none of the boxcars hit Odom's



A boxcar slammed into 325 Vista Drive . . .

photos by Chris Stewart



Saturdays, it goes from Santa Cruz to Davenport, then back to Watsonville.

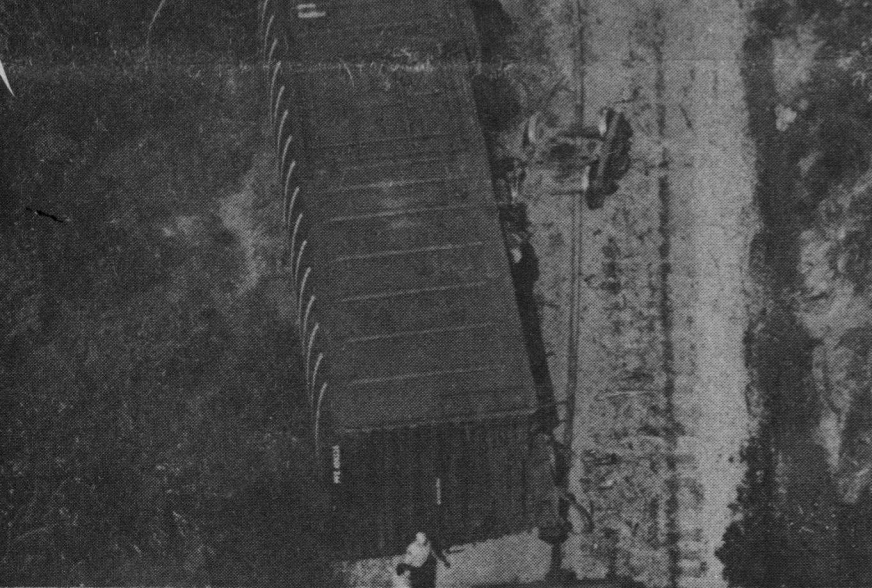
Yesterday's train was returning to Watsonville with 23 cars and a full crew. The crew members were engineer Blair B. Kough, conductor Robert Rice, brakemen Robert Dickie and Jimmie Cooke and fireman William W. Rosenoff.

The official point of derailment was Milepost 110, just north of the trestle crossing San Andreas Road. Fulkerson said the train was going 25 miles per hour, the legally permissible speed, when the second engine and the 10 cars behind it jumped the rails.

The force of the derailment was considerable. Sections of rail were bent and separated, and wooden ties four inches thick were cut through by the cars. Some of the train wheels were ripped from their cars.

Some early secondhand reports from the scene indicated that the train had been





Morning after — Aerial view of derailment scene was made this morning by staff photographer Sam Vestal from United Flight plane piloted by Don McDowell.

hours sleep last night." Although none of the boxcars hit Odom's home, the train knocked over a power pole which hit the roof at the side of the house. A car also landed on a propane tank several feet from the residence.

And, one of the boxcars landed atop Odom's yellow dump truck, squashing the front end of it. "It's pretty customized," Odom observed wryly.

He was the only one home when the train derailed. "I'm glad I wasn't here," Miss Mastoris said this morning. "I really freaked out when I saw it last night. I don't handle things like that very well."

Residents of both homes were ordered out last night, and spent the night with friends.

"Everything seemed to be going in slow motion," said Terry Smith, the only one of the three residents at home at 325 Vista Drive, when the train came down.

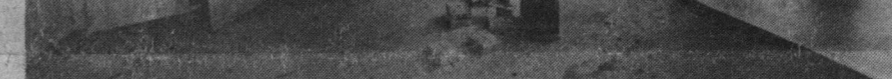
"I was in the front room," Smith said, "when I heard the train coming up. I always stop what I'm doing and listen to it."

He went into a small room off the living room. There is a stereo in there, and Smith always takes the needle off when the train comes by. The train causes too much vibration to allow the playing of records.

From that small room there is a window looking up to the tracks. "The first thing I know is that there was more noise than usual. I stood there watching it for about 10 seconds, then I could see the cars jumping up and down the rails. I just made it out in the front yard when the house got hit."

Because of the angle of view from the window, Smith never saw the cars actually being derailed, since the actual point where they began jumping the tracks was out of sight behind the house.

An entire wall of the kitchen at 325 was



... knocking in a kitchen wall.

bashed in by a falling boxcar, and a storage area behind the kitchen was demolished. There were built-in refrigerators and a stove against the wall, which now tilts into the rest of the kitchen at a pronounced angle. The floor was covered with packages of frozen food knocked out of the refrigerator.

"We just got the whole kitchen remodeled," said Hunter Morris, surveying the damage this morning. "I've got all my clothes in that storage room, and I can't get to it."

"Our house really kissed it," he said, "but I'm going to get a new fishing pole out of this deal."

Part of the home was knocked off its foundation, a greenhouse was crushed, and a waterbed burst in an upstairs bedroom, flooding part of the home.

Later in the morning, Miss Yothers came into the kitchen to look for some cat food. It was in one of the shelves in the wall that had been knocked in, and she didn't want to try to open the cupboard door. One of the newsmen covering the crash reached in and got out a box of Little Friskies.

La Selva Fire Chief Al Kinslow had just returned home when the call came that a train had been derailed. In all his years as a fireman, he'd never been to a derailment. "I said, 'Would you say that again?'" he recalled today.

Kinslow sounded the siren to call out the volunteer firemen, and by 6:04 p.m., a crew was at the scene. The rear end of the train was in the La Selva Beach Fire District, and

the front end was in an area served by the Corralitos Forestry station.

"We ordered an ambulance sent out," said Kinslow, "and I had two men check the house and two men check the capoose. Nobody was hurt, so we called off the ambulance."

One of the cars had a fuel leak, but the tank was pressed against the ground, diking the leak.

"There was no wind blowing in, which was lucky," said Kinslow. "If there'd been a fire and the wind was blowing, we would have been in trouble, but it was as calm as it is right now."

Once the situation was assessed, the fire department stood by until shortly after 8 p.m., keeping order. "We were having a devil of a time keeping people off here," Kinslow said.

At various times, the La Selva Fire Dept., the Department of Forestry, the county sheriff's Office, the California Highway Patrol and special railroad police were at the scene, trying to keep tracks clear.

This morning, Harold F. Fulkerson, trainmaster at Watsonville Junction described the circumstances of the derailment to newsmen.

The Santa Cruz Local is the only train to run through Santa Cruz County. It leaves Watsonville Junction early in the morning and proceeds to Santa Cruz.

Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays the train goes up the San Lorenzo Valley to Felton and Olympia, then returns to Watsonville. Tuesdays, Thursdays and

train wheels were ripped from their cars. Some early secondhand reports from the scene indicated that the track bed had been loosened by the winter rains, causing the derailment, but Fulkerson said that was unlikely.

He said more likely causes would include a break in the rail, or some mechanical problem with the train itself. He stressed, however, that the derailment was still being investigated, and that it would be impossible to determine a cause until the cars were lifted so that they and the track could be examined.

Asked how much damage the derailment had done, Fulkerson would give no estimate. However, when pressed as to whether the figure would be closer to \$100,000 or \$1 million, he said, "It's between a hundred thousand and a million. The

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On the inside
President Carter is tackling the tough ones.
Page 4.

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Dentists are next on the list of investigators of Medicaid cheating. Page 20.

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Repair crews had a big job ahead of them today, but Southern Pacific figures it can be done in two days.

Train

(Continued from page 1)

rerailing alone is going to cost between 25 and 30 thousand."

This morning, two 115-ton cranes from Bigge Crane and Rigging of San Francisco were on hand to begin the job of cleaning up the derailment site.

Fulkerson said about 75 men would be working on the project for the next two days.

What it involves is lifting the cars back on to the track by crane, and repairing the track and bed. "It'll take a couple of days," said Fulkerson. "We'll be running by Friday morning."

Of the 10 cars that came off the rail, eight were loaded and two were empty. Three of the loaded cars contained frozen food, which can last 36 hours from the time the refrigeration unit is turned off.

Fulkerson said that a special attempt would be made to get those three cars back to Watsonville first, in order to save the cargo.

The other five cars carried different loads. Three had canned goods, one was filled with Lipton Tea, and one was carrying furniture. None of the cars was carrying hazardous material.

According to Fulkerson, this is the first major derailment in Santa Cruz County since five cars jumped the tracks in Santa Cruz about five or six years ago.

He said some derailments of a minor nature occur from time to time when trains are being loaded at the sand plants they serve.