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**History Lesson**  
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## **Tarpey Depot and the SJVRR**

On Tuesday October 6, 1891, a short train departed the East Fresno station of the San Joaquin Valley Railroad. The first spike of this short line was driven into a tie only a few weeks earlier, on August 31, 1891, and already progress had been made to a ranch located nearly midway down the line, which became known as "Tarpey."

It was a warm afternoon. The train had first departed the Southern Pacific Fresno Station about 3:30 pm and would return at 5:10 pm. It was 92 degrees that day in Fresno, about 88 degrees at 5 pm, and there wasn't much shade. About 70 people showed up for the ride, including the "A list" of Fresno society at the time. Of course, the railroad executives were present including President Marcus Pollasky, Secretary Gilbert Osmun, Attorney L.L. Cory, Chief Engineer AD Baron (SP), Thomas Hughes, Fulton Berry, Benjamin Woodworth, and John Grey.

Two flat cars had been fitted with benches for seating the dignitaries aboard, but there still weren't enough seats, and some folks were forced to ride on the roof of the caboose. Among passengers was a reporter for the Fresno Morning Republican (one of those who rode on the caboose roof) and Thomas D. Parker, an author from the Illustrated American weekly magazine, based in New York. The reports from these two writers would be crucial in the discovery of the facts surrounding the construction of the Tarpey Depot.

The excursion train first rolled into East Fresno (the corner of present day First St and Tulare where the Jack in

the Box is located), the first station along the line out of the City of Fresno. Sadly, this beautiful depot was demolished in 1934. The next stop would be near Barton Vineyards. A spur ran ¼ mile north to the actual warehouse and ranch offices, along what is now the middle of Maple Ave between today's McKenzie and McKinley Avenues.

In their reports, both writers remarked how there was abundant agricultural enterprise underway on both sides of the railroad. "No spot in the United States can excel it in fertility" was one quote. Raisins were drying, figs were drying, packing houses and wineries were buzzing with activity. The effects of irrigation were seen all over the area.

A third stop was made at the Las Palmas Ranch, established in 1883 by Benjamin Woodworth and lined with mammoth sized palm trees. And here is where the plot thickens. Both reporters described what they saw, including the fabulous home of Benjamin Woodworth, and the Victorian style railroad depot being constructed there at Las Palmas, to be the first station past East Fresno, and to be called Las Palmas Station. Only a few days prior, on September 27, 1891, the first shipment on the new railroad, a car load of raisins, left Las Palmas for the Fresno SP connection. The Illustrated American even went so far as to produce a pen and ink drawing of the Depot.

Onward the train went, past the Eggers and Boucher Ranches (now the Fresno Airport) and on to Michael Tarpey's ranch, where a spur track was being built. But there was no mention of a depot being built or even planned for the Tarpey Ranch. After some speeches and some champagne, the train returned to Fresno Station.

In 1893 there was a financial panic that killed the Las Palmas Ranch. Ben Woodworth owned about 160 acres bordered by McKinley Ave., Clovis Ave., Olive Ave, and Minnewawa Ave. His entire enterprise was funded by money

inherited from his father. The panic caused him to enter bankruptcy, and the ranch was sold in 1895 to Balfour Guthrie, the same people who took over the Barton Vineyards when Robert Barton died. In 1897 it was sold again to E.L. Rogers of Salt Lake City.

The Las Palmas Depot remained at Las Palmas until about March of 1908. It was moved to the Tarpey Ranch to the northwest of the La Paloma Winery and Distillery, and became the ranch office and PO for the ranch area. It was NEVER a railroad structure while at Tarpey. The depot was installed about 55 feet away from the tracks, making it impossible for use as a freight house. The official SP timetable lists Tarpey as a car load only freight loading station, but not a passenger loading station. Las Palmas is listed until 1895 as both a passenger station and a freight station, and as a freight only station after that. In 1907 it became a less than 5000 lbs. freight station (likely because the depot was moved). The depot lived in the Tarpey neighborhood for the next 55+ years.

In around April 1950, the depot was moved from the Winery to across Clovis Avenue, to become the Billings and Fine Real Estate Company office for the new Tarpey Village housing tract. It was approximately between the present day Anrig Chiropractic office and the house to the north of it. Billings and Fine had the great artistic sense to put neon lighting along the roof top ridgelines and all over the building, as can be seen in the photos, if you look carefully.

By July of 1961, the depot had moved again to the corner of Ashlan Avenue and Judy Street, across Ashlan from the McDonald's, still the office for Billings and Fine, and still adorned in her neon finery. By 1963, the depot was moved again across Ashlan, sitting exactly where the 7/11 store on Ashlan is located today. I know this well, because I played inside the depot regularly. It had black and white checkered linoleum floor and a small Coke machine. I

stopped in nearly every day while walking the short distance from my aunt's house to Tarpey Market across Clovis Avenue, and back to my aunt's. I'm sure my overprotective mother would have been horrified, but my super cool aunt always let me go inside and poke around for a few minutes. You had to crawl under the depot, past the rickety looking bricks that held it up, then go up through a 3 foot square hole cut in the floor to get inside.

In 1966, after much discussion and haggling, Fred Billings donated the depot to the Fresno County Historical Society, with the intention of it becoming part of a pioneer village at Kearney Park. No one asked me my opinion, and in November of 1966, my beloved play toy was ripped from my clutches and moved to Kearney Park.

At Kearney, it ultimately fell into great disrepair. The roof was gone in places and there was a substantial amount of rot and decay that had set in. I visited my old friend about 12 years later, when I was old enough to drive, but it made me sick to see it so sad and forgotten. I never went back, but I always dreamed of one day buying it, moving it to my house, and making it into a model train room.

Of course, the depot was ultimately moved again, this time to Clovis at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Clovis Avenue, where it sits today in all its restored glory, sporting a lovely Jim Savage Mariposa Battalion 1852 Chapter E Clampus Vitus monument. The Clovis Chamber of Commerce uses it as an oversized information booth. But, I still dream of the day when they outgrow it, and I get to put my trains inside.