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Michelle D. Garcia-Ortiz
CSUSB

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Photo Essay

A Photographic Exploration of San Bernardino County's Transportation Legacy

By Michelle D. Garcia-Ortiz

Photos by Michelle D. Garcia, Cecilia Smith, and Lydell Smith

Introduction

San Bernardino County is most noted for its picturesque mountains and its fast food pioneers, but its impact on the transportation industry is often overlooked. The San Bernardino County region has made a significant mark in the automotive, railroad, and aviation industries. California history was changed forever because of the people who traveled or flew among the regions rails, trails, and skies. Exploring this history photographically is a visual reminder of the stories hidden within the San Bernardino Mountains and in throughout its valleys.

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Figure 2: Side of the 15 Freeway in the Cajon Pass. Photo by author.



Figure 3: Union Pacific Train as it Travels through the Cajon Pass. Photo by author.

The Automotive Industry

San Bernardino is considered the gateway to California, but San Bernardino has its own gateway, the Cajon Pass. This famous pass is where the story of San Bernardino County's transportation legacy begins.



Figure 4: Route 66 Sign located on Foothill Boulevard in Rancho Cucamonga, CA. Photo by Cecelia Smith and Lydell Smith.



Figure 5: A portion of Route 66 that travels through the Cajon Pass. Photo by author

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One of the United States' most famous trails is Route 66. This legendary highway is immortalized in a Nat King Cole song of the same name. It is often called the "mother road." Route 66 begins in Illinois and ends in California. It travels through the Cajon Pass and San Bernardino County and is the road many travelers used to migrate to California. Traveling along this route, motorists can encounter many famous landmarks in various cities in San Bernardino County that commemorate the heyday of this famous highway.



Figure 7: Entrance to the Wigwam Motel. Photo by Cecelia Smith and Lydell Smith



Figure 6: Wigwam Motel guest bedrooms or teepees. Photo by Cecelia Smith and Lydell Smith.

The Wigwam Hotel located in San Bernardino is one of the many motels that opened along Route 66 during its boom period. This hotel opened in 1950 and is rumored to be the basis for the “Cozy Cone Motel” featured in Disney’s animated feature film: “Cars.”



Figure 8: The Bono’s Historic Orange Stand located on Foothill Boulevard in Fontana, CA. Photo by Cecelia Smith and Lydell Smith.

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Figure 9: The Bono Family Restaurant located on Foothill Boulevard in Fontana, CA. Photo by Cecelia Smith and Lydell Smith.

The Citrus industry is a trademark of the San Bernardino region. The Bono family restaurant opened in 1936 and though it is no longer operating, it is one of the few historic Route 66 orange stands left in existence.

The Railroad Industry

Glancing at the Cajon Passes myriad of trails, it is impossible not to notice its rails as they run through the San Bernardino Mountains. Today Burlington Northern Santa Fe, Union Pacific, and the Southern Pacific run through it, but it was the arrival of the Atchison, Topeka, and the Santa Fe that brought civilization and cargo to the west. More importantly, the railroad brought with it a much needed boost to the San Bernardino economy.



Figures 9-13: Interior and Exterior of the San Bernardino's Historic Train Depot. Photos by Michelle D. Garcia-Ortiz.

The original San Bernardino Sante Fe Depot no longer exists. It was built in 1886, but was destroyed by a fire in 1916. The depot was rebuilt in 1918 and was designed to have a mission style appearance. In its heyday from the 1920's to the 1950's the depot hosted everyone from soldiers to celebrities. In the 1960's the Sante Fe Railroad Company shifted its focus from passengers to freight and the station fell into disrepair. The station was newly renovated in 2004 and hosts Amtrack passengers as well as freight trains.¹

The Aviation Industry

In the world of aviation, San Bernardino County has had a tremendous impact which is due in no small part to March Air Field. This United States Air Force (USAF) Base served as an important training facility through the majority of the United States wars, and was especially important to the United States' victories during both World Wars. The base opened its doors during World War One when America needed to respond to the German threat to take to the skies and turn the

¹ Jensen, Joel, "California's legendary Cajon Pass," *Trains*, (1995): 62

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tide of the war in their favor. Many influential Californians, including Frank Miller, the owner of Riverside's Mission Inn campaigned to have a military base in Southern California. March Air Field is most noted for its tremendous impact during World War Two, not only for the many famous bomb squadrons that trained their prior to shipping out, but also as the main testing site for new combat planes. Today this reserve base is still a training center. As the base is not often accessible to the public the rich history can be examined at the March Air Field Museum located adjacent to the base.



Figure 14: Entrance to March Field Museum. Photo by Michelle D. Garcia-Ortiz.

The entrance to the March Field Museum located in Riverside, CA is attached to the base itself. By traversing its grounds visitors can become spectators to aircrafts that train at the base. The museum features planes and artifacts from every war the United States has participated in since World War One.



Figure 15: Boeing B-52D Airplane located at March Air Field Museum (February, 2013)
(Michelle D. Garcia-Ortiz)

The Boeing B-52D had its initial testing at March Air Field. It has been part of the USAF's arsenal for almost fifty years. It can be refueled in the air and has completed non-stop flights around the world.²



Figure 16: Historic March Field License Plates on display in March Field Museum. Photo by Michelle D. Garcia-Ortiz.



Figure 17: Soldier's Uniform on display in March Field Museum. Photo by Michelle D. Garcia-Ortiz.

The March Field Museum features artifacts not only from the historic base, but also pictures, memorandums, uniforms, and Prisoner of War garments from a variety of major wars that the United States participated in.

Conclusion

San Bernardino County is not just a stopping point on the way to Los Angeles. The uses of its rails, trails, and skies have long been used to pioneer innovations that have shape and altered American culture. Examining this history photographically is a picturesque way to bask in San Bernardino's transportation legacy. San Bernardino County is more than the famous fast food restaurants and citrus groves. Its picturesque landscape holds significant pieces of American History.

² Unknown, "Boeing B-52 Stratofortress" (Information Placard, March Field Museum, Unknown).

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