



# Western Archives

**Santa Fe Railway Historical & Modeling Society**

**July and August 2013**

**Volume #3 Issue #4**

## Special Points of Interest:

- San Bernardino's Mount Vernon Viaduct
- Selected Photos from the 'Viaduct'

## Mount Vernon Viaduct

By Jeff Staggs

Having lived in the San Bernardino Valley virtually all of my life, one of the features I have always taken for granted is the bridge which transects the Santa Fe Railway's San Bernardino "A" Yard, commonly known as the Mount Vernon Viaduct.

Anyone who has observed decades of photographs of the San Bernardino yards and depot operations has been on the Mount Vernon Viaduct. The bridge has been used by countless photographers for more than a century in the quest to visually document the spectacle of Santa Fe railroading. And it is safe to say, that all of the well known names of railroad photography who ventured to San Bernardino, and whose images we enjoy today, took their turn standing at the guard rails of the Mount Vernon Viaduct.

The bridge is strategically placed so that it divides the 'A' Yard. The views up until the late 1990's included the roundhouse, repair shops and passenger depot on the east side; and the sand house, storage tracks and lead tracks to the "B" Yard on the west side. Many of these views changed with the onset of the BNSF, the removal of the roundhouse and shops, and the transformation of the San Bernardino Yards to container and commuter operations, but the Mount Vernon Viaduct still remains.



*The 'Viaduct' as it appears today from the top of the Metrolink parking structure.*

## Archives Mission Statement

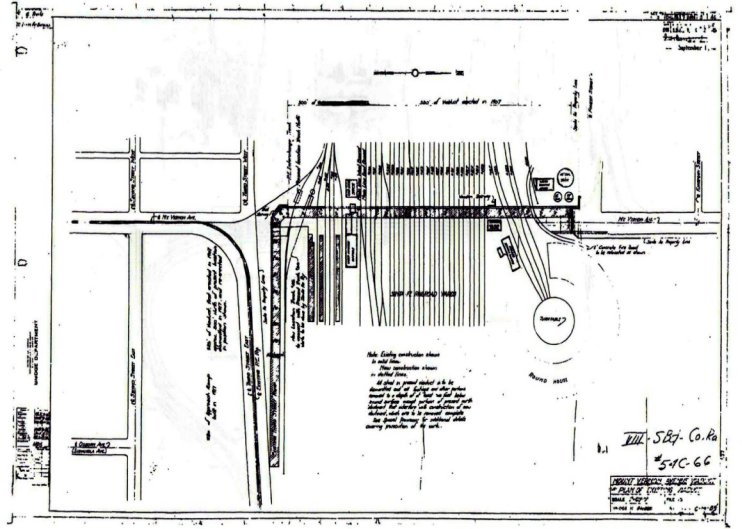
**To collect and preserve historically significant materials regarding the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway and its predecessors and successors, and to make these materials available to members of the Society and the public**



## Mount Vernon Viaduct, continued:

While looking at items from the Bill Garner Collection, recently received at the SFRH&MS Western Archives, I located two photographs of a very different bridge at the same location. Thanks to a little research and also information provided by Glen Icanberry and Lee Gustafson the following information was obtained.

The original Mount Vernon Viaduct was built in 1907-08. It was 385' long, was constructed by the Thompson Bridge Company, of steel beams and stringers, with a wooden floor, and topped by asphalt. Initially designed to be only a walkway, pressure from the City of San Bernardino forced the Santa Fe to include a roadway in its design. It had a twenty foot wide roadway and six foot wide sidewalk on the west side. This initial bridge cost \$59,302.00.



*Architectural drawing of the 1907/1917  
Mount Vernon Viaduct*

During late 1916, and into 1917, apparently coinciding with the disastrous fire which destroyed the original San Bernardino Depot and Division Headquarters, the original bridge was moved several hundred feet west and into alignment with Mount Vernon Avenue. It was also extended 285 feet, on the south end, to allow for the building of the new depot and further expansion of the railroad's facilities.

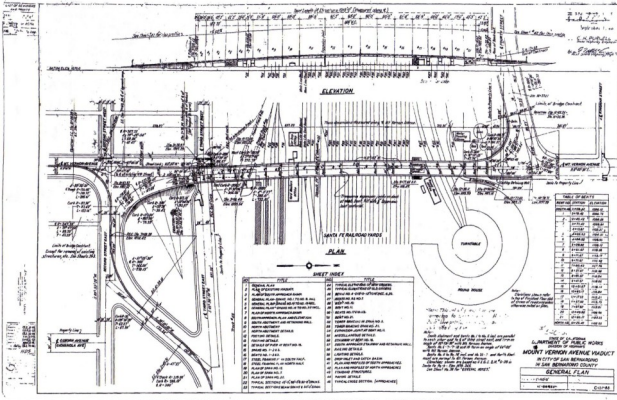


A ramp which was added on the south side, and extended 300' to the east, perpendicular to the bridge, and was placed in alignment with 3rd Street. This allowed access to the depot and freight house facility, and avoided the Pacific Electric tracks which were still in use at that time.



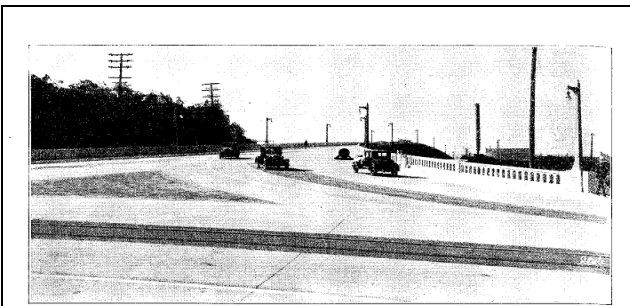
*A 180° view looking to the east from the Mount Vernon Viaduct taken in the 1940's courtesy of the  
San Bernardino Railroad History and Railroad Museum.*

## Mount Vernon Viaduct, continued:



(Above) Architectural drawing of the 1934 Mount Vernon Viaduct.

(Below) Article from the August 1934 'Santa Fe Magazine'.



SOUTH APPROACH TO NEW VIADUCT CROSSING SANTA FE TRACKS AT SAN BERNARDINO

### Viaduct Over Yards At St. Bernardino Completed In June

By R. H. MACK

WITH appropriate dedicatory ceremonies, the new viaduct recently completed over the Santa Fe Railway yards in the city of San Bernardino, Cal., was opened to traffic on June 9, thus improving the western entrance to that city and eliminating the "death trap," as the old viaduct was sometimes called. This latter causeway was constructed in 1907 and was entirely inadequate for modern highway needs, being built only of steel floor beams and stringers, with a wooden floor surfaced with asphalt.

The new structure combines safety and durability with beauty of line. It has a forty-foot reinforced concrete roadway with a three-foot six-inch sidewalk on each side and an overall length of 1,016 feet. The flared approaches give easy access at either end. The project involved the relocation of the street railway tracks at an estimated cost of \$14,000 and yard changes by the Santa Fe Railway Company at an estimated cost of \$13,000. New street work cost \$58,000 and rights of way \$30,000.

The total cost of the entire improvement will aggregate some \$322,000, being financed from state and federal funds and the Santa

Fe Railway; the necessary rights of way being paid by the county of San Bernardino. The old viaduct was taken apart and incorporated in the new structure, so that very little was wasted. The additional size and strength of the new causeway is well illustrated by the fact that 405,000 pounds were salvaged from the old viaduct, but 1,315,000 pounds of structural steel had to be added to that salvaged from the old structure to make it of modern size and strength.

The structure itself contains:  
 2,500 cubic yards of structure excavation;  
 12,900 cubic yards of imported borrow (approaches);  
 5,975 cubic yards of cement concrete;  
 401,000 pounds of bar reinforcing steel;  
 405,000 pounds of existing structural steel (fabricated);  
 1,315,000 pounds of new structural steel;  
 14,330 lineal feet of treated Douglas fir piles.

The necessity of improving the western entrance to San Bernardino had been apparent for a number of years. Civic-minded citizens, backed by the Chamber of Com-

In 1933 new plans were drawn up to replace the narrow 1907 bridge with a modern four lane overpass, along with rerouting of Third Street. On June 9, 1934 the present Mount Vernon Viaduct was completed at a cost of \$322,000.00. The viaduct has an overall length of 1,016 feet, and was built of steel and reinforced concrete. The project required the relocation of PE Railway tracks on Third Street, to connect with Second Street. This was documented in the August 1934 issue of *Santa Fe Magazine*.

Changes were made to the Santa Fe "A" Yard trackage, which cost Santa Fe \$13,000.00, as required by a California Railroad Commission order issued on May 23, 1932. The City and County of San Bernardino, and State Highway Commission paid the balance.

That bridge, which still stands today, served as an extension from the famed Route 66 as a major business route through San Bernardino (Route 66 used Mount Vernon Avenue but turned west on 5th Street, just north of the Santa Fe Yards).

Today, the Mount Vernon Viaduct is showing its age. Truck traffic is restricted from the bridge and plans are being drawn up to significantly shore up or even replace the entire bridge. In addition, local transportation authorities have plans in place to extend Metrolink rail commuter service onto the old Redlands District tracks within the next two years. These plans include adding additional tracks adjacent to the north side of the Depot, and the construction of an enclosed overhead pedestrian structure immediately west of the Depot, which will partially obscure the trackside view of the Depot from the Mount Vernon Viaduct.

The Mount Vernon Viaduct, while not officially a piece of Santa Fe property still serves an important but unintended purpose. That is the essential platform used by decades of railroad photographers and historians to document railroad operations in San Bernardino, the gateway to Southern California and Cajon Pass.



The opposite 180° view looking to the west from the Mount Vernon Viaduct.  
 Courtesy of the San Bernardino Railroad History and Railroad Museum.

## Photos from the Viaduct



This is a sampling of the photos in the Bill Garner collection at the SFRH&MS Western Archives, taken by him, and many he collected during his career and travels as a Santa Fe railroad man from San Bernardino. The interesting point is the changing buildings, locomotives and equipment over fifty years of Santa Fe operations.

### Western Archives Newsletter

Santa Fe Railway Historical & Modeling Society

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