

Whether or not the city of Visalia was named for Nathaniel Vise, as some assert, nor not, as others with equal fervor aver, the fact remains that Nathaniel Vise was an early settler of importance and had his part in the settlement of the town.

Late in 1851, after the massacre by the Indians of the Woods party, there arrived in the Four Creeks country, two pairs of brothers. Nathaniel and Abner Vise and A.A. and C.R. Wingfield.

The Wingfield brothers, residents of Mariposa, remembering the fertile lands through which they had passed with the Judgins party, retraced the Fremont trail and made camp first where the trail crossed the Kaweah river at the head of Deep creek. Later they moved to the south side of the river to what later became the Goad ranch and claimed all land south from the river, including the Woods cabin. There they remained until the arrival of Major James D. Savage and his party.

Just why the Vise brothers came to this section is a matter of conjecture. ^{authority} One/says that Abner Vise got into trouble in Mariposa and that his brother brought him here to put him in hiding in the swamp country of the Four Creeks.

Another authority asserts that Nat Vise, a sportsman, made hunting a business for profit, thus gaining a livelihood. He would take orders for any sort of game and occasionally wandered into the San Joaquin country for antelope meat.

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ad one vise

Arriving in December, 1851, the Vise brothers built a log cabin on the north bank of Mill creek, near an Indian sweat house called sa-ha-la, seven miles from the Wingfields. It is believed the Vises knew of the whereabouts of the Wingfields but that the Wingfields did not know of the arrival of the Vises.

On the sites of these camps, the two pairs of brothers built the villages that later contended for the honor of becoming the county seat of Tulare county.

By the spring of 1852, the gold excitement was dying down in Mariposa county and the section swarmed with numbers of idle politicians, gamblers and other frontiersmen eager for new experiences and power. Tales of the fertile Four Creeks country were brought in. The state legislature was in session and an act was passed on April 20, 1852, creating Tulare county.

Tulare county was formed by the division of large Mariposa county, more than half of the southern portion being organized into the new county, including all that area north and east of the Coast Range mountains and from the Tehachapi mountains on the south to and including the Kings river watershed on the north. The name was taken from the Spanish name for the region, Los Tulares.

After the organization of the county, Vise was said to have been defeated in an election for sheriff.

While the business of formulating the new government was proceeding, settlers, men and their families, were coming from the north. Nathaniel Vise, enterprising, ambitious and more or less of a promoter, ~~had~~ succeeded in inducing a number to settle in the neighborhood of his cabin.

ad two vise

Among those first settlers, some stopping at Woodsville and others coming to the territory later to become Visalia, were S.C. Brown, A.H. Murray and family, three Matthews families, Colonel Thomas Baker and family, George F. Ship, Nathan Dillon, Edgar Reynolds, three Glenn families, Dr. John Cutler, Bob Stevenson and family, O.K. Smith, Samuel Jennings and J.C. Reed.

Vise subsequently released title to his original claim. It is asserted by some that he was urged to do so by the new settlers and others state he offered the land provided it should be used as a new townsite. It is held by another group that he released his title on condition that the new townsite be named in his honor.

S.C. Brown is quoted in an old edition of the Visalia Daily Times to the effect that Vise never had a wife with him in Visalia.

Brown is quoted as follows:

"When Nat Vise came here he brought with him a fellow named Cal O'Neil, who was dressed in woman's clothes to escape detention by the officers. O'Neil was the son of an early day and widely known sheriff of Stockton. The son had killed a man and in order to elude the posse, he had been dressed by his friends in woman's attire and escaped to San Francisco, later coming south to the wilderness of Woodsville. It seems probable that the appearance of Vise with this 'woman' gave rise to the belief now often expressed that he was married. O'Neil later went to Central America, joined in the famous Walker raid, was shot and killed.

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ad three vise.

"Vise had the character of a half dozen persons combined in one. He could preach and play poker with equal avidity and as a hunter he had few equals. While Vise indulged his propensity for expounding his religious views but little in this section, it is said that he could preach a powerful sermon, one that would not fail to bring tears to the eyes of his hearers. He, himself, was highly emotional. After services, he would as readily sit down to a poker table, run a race, or do any one of a dozen other equally divergent things. He was a man of fine physique, robust and powerful."

Brown stated that one morning early, hearing a shot in the vicinity, he went to the scene and there saw Vise engaged in a hand to hand encounter with a huge bear. Vise had shot the animal, inflicting only a slight wound, and then as the bear came toward him walking on hind feet with paws extended, had slipped off his coat, wrapped it about his left arm as a shield, met Bruin half way and carved him with his knife.

"Vise was a most sympathetic man," Brown continued. "One rarely ever appealed to him for assistance in any way that he did not obtain it."

"He took his departure one day, but returned about a year later. He remained but a short time, however, and after that never returned."

edition rabbit drives

Rabbits drives, of which little is known by the present generation, were conducted frequently in the early days in the fight against these pests which menaced many crops in Tulare county.

As many as 8000 have been bagged in these slaughters in which many early residents, now living, took part. The animals killed, when not too badly mangled, were shipped to the San Francisco market; those unmarketable were skinned and the scalps turned in to the county government which at one time paid a bounty of two cents a skin scalp. It is said that the rabbit drive is peculiar only to the San Joaquin valley.

The country where these drives occurred mainly was field or prairie, without trees or fences but covered with either alkali bush, sage brush, grease wood, salt or bunch grass.

The county supervisors, to encourage the drives, provided about seven miles of wire and lath fencing, which was set on the plains in a "V" shape, with a sizeable round corral at the converging points and at which point also was an uphill chute covered with grass and litter, up and over which the scurrying rabbits would tumble, to find themselves trapped.

Under this incline entrance to the corral, which was built of timber, it was not unusual to find from one to half a dozen coyotes which had been driven in with the rabbits.

In setting the fence, two sides three miles long were set in triangular form with two ends coming together at the corral, and the outer ends forming wings three miles apart, marked with two white flags as guides to the approaching army of drivers starting back perhaps a mile or more beyond the fence flags.

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ad one rabbit drive

A drive ~~usually~~ usually was called to start at 10 o'clock. Everybody would get in line while the band was playing a quick-step. About 200 horsemen and vehicles would be abreast of the line of footmen, who would number from 300 to 600. The marshals would be on horses keeping the lines straight and the gaps closed. Those afoot would be armed with two clubs, picked especially for the purpose. In the rear, at a safe distance would be the shot gun trailers to pick off the rabbits that might break through. All were instructed to make a noise and this was what none could help when the rabbits began to run and the clubs were flying after them.

Experienced hunters became expert in bringing down rabbits with the well balanced clubs. Possibly a thousand rabbits would break through the lines, some with crippled bodies or legs, while an equal number would be dead in the path.

The excitement increased as the rabbits were seen running up the chute and jumping off into space, landing in the center of the enclosure. The yelling and racket became almost deafening but this was all sort of a summer zephyr compared with what followed when the killers entered the pen.

Men handled one another roughly in their eagerness to speed the slaughter and many a hunter received a blow intended for a rabbit. The rabbit generally received the death blow on the top of his head but sometimes several blows were necessary. The animals would huddle near the side of the corral, making noises like the cry of a small child and hundreds of them killed themselves by rushing head-on against the fence.

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ad two rabbit drive

The killing required about half an hour after which the counting started. The entrance to the corral would be covered two feet deep with dead animals and the slaughter in the pen would run into the thousands, from four to six thousand not being unusual counts.

In the earlier days it was impossible to grow trees or vines without the use of rabbit fencing, some of which still is standing. Many ranchers kept gray hounds and it interesting to see these dogs on a hunt. It was difficult for a single dog to pick up a rabbit because of the rabbit dodging, stopping and back-tracking. The dogs in the neighborhood would get together early in the morning without human direction and in a bunch they would start to get their breakfasts.

Reaching the hunting ground, which never was far distant, the hounds would scatter in different directions until they were some ~~extreme~~ distance apart in a circular formation. When a rabbit was jumped, each dog would crouch down and keep perfectly quiet and some of the dogs would be sure to see the victim coming his way. These dogs, instinctively, had a correct knowledge of team work and proved quite a factor in clearing the plains of the destructive jack rabbits.

The rabbit drive was a big drawing card for the Traver celebrations of early days. One ~~one~~ occasion, a San Francisco ^{management} packing house/financed an excursion from Chicago for the benefit of stockholders and employees in that city to attend one of the Traver drives. On that day many of the larger rabbits killed were skinned carefully and the pelts, complete with heads, ears and feet were shipped to a San Francisco taxidermist to be mounted for the midwestern tourists to take home as mementoes--trophies of the chase.

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ad three rabbit drive

There was ~~much~~ some criticism in uninformed circles at the time that the rabbit drives were brutal; even today one hears those not acquainted with conditions as they then were express abhorrence of the "cruel" slaughter.

The killing off of the rabbits in the 1880's and 1890's, however, was absolutely necessary to the later propagation of trees and vines, one of the greatest resources of wealth in the San Joaquin valley and Tulare county today.

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edition mussel slough

The Mussel Slough tragedy which occurred about four and one-half miles northwest of Hanford, then in Tulare county on May 11, 1880, stands out as one of the major tragedies in the history of the county and resulted from the controversy of the settlers of Mussel Slough and the Southern Pacific company over the tenure and price of lands granted by congress on July 26, 1866, to the railway company to aid in construction of railroads.

The Southern Pacific, under the act of congress, was granted the odd numbered sections of land, checkerboarded, for 20 miles on each side of the proposed line through the state. In 1867, the company filed maps preparatory to proceeding with the work, but no actual construction was started until the time in which certain work had to be completed had almost elapsed.

There had been delays and vacillation on the part of the land department, the railway companies claiming the grant during the period intervening between the making of the grant and the time of actual construction, with the result that the settlers were not sure whether they were occupying railroad land or land to which they were entitled legally. These new residents developed the district into rich ~~productive~~ productive agricultural areas, introduced an irrigation system and greatly enhanced the value of the lands through their own hard work.

After the construction of the railroad, the price of land for the sections claimed by the railway company was fixed by hired railroad graders, who, in their effort to please their employers, put an excessive valuation. In pamphlets previously issued, however inviting settlers to locate on the land, a price consistent with the government price of \$2.50 an acre was promised, all building and other improvements not to be considered by the land grader.

ad one mussel slough

The settlers protested the high rates asked by the railroad as well as the title to the land of the company.

A narrative of ensuing events by J.J. Doyle, one of the leading settlers of the Mussel Slough country is believed accurate.

The story, as previously published, follows:

"In 1870, I was living on the west side of the San Joaquin river. In the Rural Press I saw a letter written by W.S. Chatman, a land lawyer of San Francisco, who claimed a section of land near me which was also claimed by the railroad company as being in their 10-mile float.

"In this letter, Chatman stated that as a lawyer he had investigated the matter and found that the railroad had no right to an acre of this land for the reason that it was a state corporation and was to receive similar lands granted to the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad company. Their charter provided that they should build a road from the Bay of San Francisco running through the counties of Santa Clara, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Tulare, Los Angeles and San Diego, to the town of San Diego and thence east to the state line.

"Chatman showed in his letter that according to the Grant act they were to file a map of the proposed route which they had not done.

"Upon investigation, I found that there were ~~322~~ 354 Spanish land grants between San Francisco and San Diego. Of course, they would get none of this land. I also found that the west 10 miles of lien land was nearly all in the Pacific ocean.

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ad two mussel slough

"They knew, however, of the great San Joaquin valley, in which the Laguna de Tache was the only land grant, and therefore had changed their route near Tres Pinos so as to enter the center of the valley and go over the Tehachapi Pass, as the road now runs.

"I came into the Mussel Slough country in 1871 and myself and brother located on lands bordering the Mussel Slough. As I believed from Chatman's letter and from my own investigations that the railroad had no right to a title to these lands, I petitioned congress in the fall of 1874, but getting no immediate relief, I offered a filing in the Visalia land office. This was rejected and I appealed my case with 30 ~~225~~ others to the Department of the Interior.

"All told, I appealed nearly all of 300 cases from the Visalia land office. We were beaten in these and I then took a case through the state courts, the United States courts and to the supreme court. Twelve separate decisions were rendered, no two of which agreed.

"After this, for the purpose of acting unitedly in our fight with the railroad, we settlers organized the Settlers Land League, which at one time attained a membership of 600. In 1875, I was sent to Washington where I remained six months. I got a bill on the calendar but, through manipulation, it was defeated. In 1879, I went to Washington again, but accomplished nothing. A decision against us had been handed down by the federal courts and the railroad was eager to dispossess us, but as we were so strong and well organized, they hesitated to do so.

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ad three mussel slough

"I sent a resolution to Sacramento to Governor Stanford who was then president of the road and, at his request, we appointed a committee composed of Major McQuiddy, J.M. Patterson and myself. We called on the governor and persuaded him to visit our country in which he did ~~in~~ April, 1880. We started then a negotiation for a settlement of the matter with Governor Stanford and had been engaged for about a month in a discussion of an equitable arrangement when suddenly, without warning and without our knowledge, the United States marshall appeared, coming for the avowed purpose of dispossessing some of our men. We were that day to have a big meeting at Hanford to listen to Judge Terry give an exposition of our rights in the premises.

The marshal was accompanied by men named Har tt (M.D.), Clark (W.H.) and Crow (Walter J.), who were all loaded down with arms. The marshall, prior to serving any papers, desired to confer with us, which we granted. In the meantime, a number of our men, more through curiosity than anything else, went over to the wagon where M Crow and Hartt were. Of these only two, Harris (James) and Henderson (J.W.) were armed.

"All at once, during the conference, shooting commenced without any special provocation and Harris was killed. According to the evidence, it appeared that he and Hartt had fired almost at the same time. Harris hit Hartt in the groin and he died within four days. Then Crow shot Harris with a number 10 shotgun loaded with 12 bullets. He hit him right in the breast.

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"Then he shot ~~Henderson~~ Knutson (Iver), who was on horseback, shot him with 12 bullets and then turned his gun on Dan Kelly, whose horse, just as Crow fired, had become unruly and whirled around so that the charge entered Kelly's side and practically blew it off, Crow was out of the wagon at this time, the team having previously run away as Hartt was attempting to get out. Crow and Hartt and Clark each had a couple of British bull dog pistols, a number 10 shotgun and a Winchester rifle of the largest size.

"After Crow left the wagon, he walked about 40 steps for the purpose of killing McGregor (Archibald), who was holding the marshal's horse. McGregor got behind the horse and Crow reached around in front of the horse and shot him with his pistol twice, the bullets entering the breast and coming out at the back.

"This put Henderson into it, who, seeing McGregor murdered in that way, rushed for Crow. They exchanged four shots and Henderson fell dead. Then Crow left the grant and attempted to get to his home which was distant about a mile and a half, but was shot dead on the way.

"On account of this, 17 of us, myself included, were indicted by the United States grand jury for resisting the United States marshal, and tried and convicted. I was not within three miles of it when it happened and yet we were convicted and served eight months in the San Jose jail for resisting the marshal, who, indeed had not attempted to exercise any authority or the enforcement of any order.

"A remarkable thing about the fight was that every man but one who fired a shot or was struck by a bullet was killed.

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"This trouble was simply a legal fight on our part for our homes. I think and always shall think that the railroad had no legal right to the land, but that they acquired their title while we were fighting

"While we were serving our time, a petition of 47,000 names was sent to the president; the states of California and Nevada passed resolutions in our favor and there numerous other petitions. No one of them was listened to any more than if it had been a piece of blank brown paper.

"After we had served our time, the matter dragged on for about two years before it was finally settled. In my case, after being in the contest over nine years, I had to pay the railroad company \$30.60 an acre for my land."

Others fared little better than Doyle and others fared worse. And thus ended one of many chapters in the story of the clashes between the pioneers of this area and the railroads.

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edition railroads

~~But~~ Railroad construction and progress are linked closely to the history and progress of Tular county. During the days when produce and goods were hauled to and from the Stockton and Los Angeles markets by wagon the rates were so high as to be prohibitive.

There was a period, too, after the railroads had been built when the carriers fluctated their rates to take "all the traffic will bear" and it was not until governmental agencies ~~wasxbranghixintazetion~~ and public sentiment forced lower rates that the railroads were of great actual benefit to the ranchers of the county.

The necessity for railroads in the valley and county was recognized early and a mass meeting was held in 1861 in Visalia in front of the court house for the purpose of considering a proect of aline to San S₁meon. A committee consisting of William G. ~~max~~ Morris, A.H. Mitchell, S.W. Beckham, Thomas Baker and E. Jacob was appointed to solicit subscriptions and view the proposed route.

The proposal was taken ~~up~~ up be members of the board of supervisors who appointed A.O. Thoms, H. Bostwick and A.J. Atwell to view the route and estimate costs. Eleven men, including ex-Governor McD^Ugal went on the expedition to view the routes.

On December 10, 1861, a meeting was held in V₁salia to hear the demands of the Central ~~Raxifac~~ Pacific company.

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ad one railroads

The meeting was addressed by J. Ross Brown and ~~Witt~~ William M. Stewart, Nevada senator. The county was asked to issue 7 per cent ~~25~~ 20-year bonds as a gift to the railroad company, at the rate of \$6000 a mile for a total of \$378,000. The road was to cross the county via Visalia, a distance of 63 miles, and was agreed the railroad company would be ~~taxed~~ taxed at the rate of \$5000 a mile.

Merchandise was to arrive from San Francisco in eight hours at a rate of \$10 a ton as compared to the hauling time of 15 days at a cost of \$60 a ton. There were, at this time, about 3000 tons of freight leaving Visalia for the north and about 500 coming in annually. By the increase in taxation and the reduction in freight rates, it was expected the bonds would pay for themselves in seven years. Resolutions approving the project and pledging assistance in the construction of the road were adopted. The committee was composed of Dr. W.A. Russell, A.J. Atwell, B.G. Parker, Hugh Hamilton, T.J. Shackelford, F.W. Blake, Y.S. Stokes, A.H. Murray, Tipton Lindsey and J.B. Hockett.

The public favored issuance of the bonds and the legislature approved a measure authorizing Tulare and other counties to issue securities but the bill was vetoed by Governor Haight.

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ad two railroads

Visalians remained confident that the road would pass through ~~Visalia~~ the town and many predictions were made ~~that~~ of the great prosperity that would result. Property prices soared and it was therefore a crushing disappointment when the survey of 1870 was made, which passed through Tulare county about eight miles west of Visalia.

A new effort was made to induce the railroad to pass through Visalia in February, 1872, ~~when~~ shortly after the road had reached Merced. A meeting was held and a committee consisting of Tipton Lindsey, R.E. Hyde, Elias Jacob and T.L.B. Goodman was named to obtain the rights of way to the route through Visalia. These rights of way were obtained speedily and the committee went to Sacramento where the members were told to wait the action of Engineer Montague.

On a visit to Sacramento in the following April at which members of the committee were prepared to offer a large bonus, they were informed by Governor Stanford that he could conceive of no inducement that lay in their power to bring about a change in the route. This was by reason of the fact that the railroad was entitled by act of congress to the alternate sections of unoccupied land lying on each side of the right of way. Should the route be changed to pass through Visalia, in which neighborhood nearly all the lands were deeded possession, the railroad would be forced to relinquish this immense domain.

Hyde and Jacob, attending the conference telegraphed the following message to Visalia: Ephesians, chapter two, verse twelve."

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ad three railroads

Reference to this disclosed: "Cut off from the Commonwealth of Israel."

Visalians called a mass meeting ~~xxxxxx~~ for May 11, 1872, to take measures of last resort. At this gathering, Tipton L₁ndsey presided and S.C. Brown introduced the following resolution which was adopted:

"Resolved, that it is for the best interests of the people of Visalia to take steps looking to the construction of a branch railroad leading from the town to the main trunk of the San Joaquin valley railroad at the nearest point to this town."

This resolution really was the inception of the Visalia and Goshen railroad for which articles of incorporation were filed on May 19, 1874. The directors were R.E. Hyde, S.A. Sheppard, E. Jacob, S.C. Brown, Tipton L₁ndsey, John C^Utler and Solomon Sweet.

The line was completed and put into operation the following August during great rejoicing in Visalia. The first depot of this road was in the western part of town and horse drawn hacks were used to convey passengers to and from points in the town but subsequently the depot was moved to the present site of the Southern Pacific railroad. Upon completion of the San Joaquin Valley railroad, now the Santa Fe, the Goshen-Visalia line was sold to the Southern Pacific. The latter concern then extended the line from Visalia to Exeter, making through traffic in 1898.

Local capital was used in the construction of the Visalia and Tulare railroad in 1888. The line cost \$130,000 but never proved profitable and after the coming of the Santa Fe in 1897 its usefulness had ended and in 1898 the rolling stock and rails were sold and the enterprise

ad four railroads

The Southern Pacific, ~~XXXXXX~~ successor to the Central Pacific in the San Joaquin valley, on December 5, 1887, started construction of what was known as the East Side line. This road was ~~xxxx~~ routed east from Fresno to Sanger, then southeasterly through Dinuba, Lindsay, and Porterville and connected with the main line at Famosa. The line, about 104 miles in length, was completed in November, 1888.

In 1895, when the San Francisco and San Joaquin Valley railroad was organized and the project of building a line from the northern city to Bakersfield was set forth, Visalians determined to get on the route.

A gathering was held at the old engine house, present site of the city hall, and S. Mitchell, Harry Levinson and William H. Hammond were named on a committee of finances and depot site and Ben M. Maddox was named a committee of one to obtain rights of way. Tulare city undertook to assist and agreed to obtain rights of way from a point midway between Visalia and Tulare south to the county line.

About \$12,000 was raised in Visalia and, after a year of activity, all rights of way were obtained. Construction was started in 1896 and on Admission Day, September 9, 1897, the line was completed to Visalia and a monster ~~xxxx~~ celebration was held. Excursion trains brought more than 2000 persons from Fresno, Hanford and other points. Others came from other ~~xxxx~~ towns and remote points in the county.

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On that same day, the first Southern Pacific agent arrived in Visalia. The Visalia-Goshen line a short time before had been bought by the Southern Pacific and with completion of the competing railroad, the Southern Pacific made efforts, through improvements in service and equipment, to retain a share of its patronage. A short time later, the Southern Pacific expressed a desire to extend its road to Exeter to connect with the branch line. George W. Stewart and John F. Jordan were appointed by the Visalia Board of Trade to assist and soon obtained all rights of way and the road was constructed the next year.

The Valley line soon passed into the hands of the Santa Fe.

Construction of the Visalia Electric railroad was started in 1906. A ~~xxxx~~ corporation with Mr. C^ossett at the head was organized to build and operate an ~~xx~~ electric line from Visalia to Lemon Cove, by way of Exeter. Tracks of the Southern Pacific between Visalia and Exeter were used. From Exeter, the line was ~~extended~~ extended along the foothills through the citrus section and reached Lemon Cove in 1907. The road later was extended up the river to the property of the Ohio Lemon company. Leaving the main line a short distance northeast of Lemon Cove, a branch was constructed crossing the Kaweah river near McKay point and thence extending westerly to Redbanks, with a spur running north to Woodlake. ~~xxxxxx~~ This ~~xxxxxx~~ line ~~xxxxxx~~ now is used only for ~~xxxxxx~~ for handling freight.

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ad six railroads

A company was organized in 1909 for the purpose of building a railroad from Tulare city to the town of Springville, by way of Woodville and Porterville. F.U. Nofziger was president of the concern and Holley and Holley of Visalia were engineers.

Residents along the line were anxious for such a road and rights of way were obtained easily. Work quickly was started on that portion of the project between Porterville and Springville, called the Porterville North Eastern road. On September 9, 1911, residents of Springville celebrated completion of the line. The road later was absorbed by the Southern Pacific and in 1935, the latter company abandoned the three-mile stretch from Globe to Springville but continues to operate from Porterville to Globe.

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