

HISTORY CENTER

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

The Earliest Automobiles

Now that automobiles have made their appearance in this county with the purchase of one by John Peterson of Los Osos, the people will be interested in knowing that the Supervisors of San Francisco have passed to print an ordinance limiting the speed of these modern vehicles to eight miles an hour inside the city limits. It will probably be a long time before the city lawmakers of San Luis Obispo will be called upon to pass such an ordinance.

July 11, 1901, the county reckons with the new technology of the era

The Automobile Arrives in San Luis Obispo

An Automobile.

J. Peterson, of Los Osos, passed through town in an automobile this morning.

I have often asserted that, technology aside, our predecessors in this county lived very similar lives to the ones we lead today. I thought this week was a good opportunity to stop putting technology aside and rather take a close look at the adoption of something we today consider basic, almost necessary, but not that long ago was a frightening novelty - the automobile.

The first recorded appearance of an automobile in San Luis Obispo

While there are some indications of self-powered

It was not too many years after that, in 1901, that we have the first recorded sighting of the new contraption published in the semi-weekly San Luis Obispo Breeze. A Mr. John Peterson of Los Osos, who was 61 years old at the time, is briefly noted as passing through San Luis Obispo.

August 6, 1901 Semi-Weekly Breeze (San Luis Obispo) p. 1

VERY NARROW ESCAPE

F. B. Nelson Badly Hurt in a Run- away.

Horse Becomes Frightened at an
Automobile on the Los Osos
Road This Morning.

From Saturday's Daily

A serious accident occurred on the Los Osos road about six miles from this place at ten o'clock this morning, and F. B. Nelson, of San Francisco narrowly escaped with his life. A runaway horse was responsible for the misfortune and an automobile was responsible for the runaway.

This morning Mr. Nelson, who is the manager of the "Dairyman's Union," got a horse and rig from Rowan's stable to take a drive out through the Los Osos. Julian Estrada went along as driver and no trouble was experienced until they were about six miles from town, near H. M. Warden's place. Here they met John Peterson, Sr. and his son, John Peterson, Jr. in

Peterson immediately put him in the automobile and brought him into town as quickly as possible. He was placed under the care of Dr. E. A. Dial who dressed the wound and stitched the scalp back in place. The wound was of a most ugly nature and extended from the forehead to the crown, the entire scalp being torn from the skull. Fortunately the skull was not fractured at all, and with proper care the man will be able to return to his home in a few days.

After his wound had been dressed, he was taken to the French Hotel, where he has been stopping for the past few days.

The stories of those who saw the accident, and those who were in it, differ somewhat in regard to the particulars, but it is doubtful if anyone is to blame. The driver says he motioned to Mr. Peterson to stop when he noticed that the horse was becoming frightened, but he is not sure whether he did or not. "The horse ran up against the fence," he said, "and then started to kick. He kicked over the dashboard and Mr. Nelson then tried to get out. I told him to sit still, but just then the horse made a sudden lurch, the seat was broken off and I was thrown from the buggy. When I got up I saw Mr. Nelson lying there in the road with his head cut open. He was put in the automobile and brought into town while I caught the horse and brought him in."

When an interview was sought with Mr. Nelson he said he was scarcely able to think and could make no statements. He says he did not jump from the buggy, and does not know whether he struck his head on a rock when he fell or was kicked by the horse.

Mr. Peterson says "We saw the

... Mr. Peterson says, "We saw the horse when they were about two hundred yards in front of us and we cut the speed of the machine down. We were coming up slowly and when about one hundred yards from them the horse commenced kicking and then turned and threw the men from the buggy. The young man states that Mr. Nelson was kicked by the horse, and not thrown on a rock. Mr. Peterson is extremely sorry that he should have been the innocent cause of the accident and says he is always extremely careful when on the road with the Auto.

... their automobile. The horse became frightened when he saw the horseless carriage coming down the road at full speed, and the driver motioned for them to stop. They did so, but it was too late, for the frightened animal had shied into a wire fence and then turning suddenly had thrown the occupants from the buggy and dashed down the road. The driver escaped unhurt, but Mr. Nelson, it is supposed, struck his head on a rock and tore his scalp almost entirely off. Mr.

Mr. Peterson says, "We saw the horse when they were about two hundred yards in front of us and we cut the speed of the machine down. We were coming up slowly and when about one hundred yards from them the horse commenced kicking and then turned and threw the men from the buggy. The young man states that Mr. Nelson was kicked by the horse, and not thrown on a rock. Mr. Peterson is extremely sorry that he should have been the innocent cause of the accident and says he is always extremely careful when on the road with the Auto.

It was only a month later that we have the first recorded injury from an incident involving a car - and it involves the same Mr. Peterson.

November 28, 1901 p. 2

A Mr. F.B. Nelson of San Francisco was riding in a horse-drawn carriage down Los Osos Road when Peterson came along driving in the opposite direction. The horse panicked and attempted to bolt, throwing the passengers from the buggy. Nelson sustained a serious head injury in the fall, and was driven by Peterson to town to seek medical attention.

Automobiles are continuing to smash the records. No one would object to this if they didn't smash anything else.

Judging from the way the automobile factories are overwhelmed with orders, the horseless carriage must have to go.

AN ORDINANCE

Regulating the Speed and Conduct of Automobiles on the Public Highways of San Luis Obispo County, California.

The Board of Supervisors of the county of San Luis Obispo do ordain as follows:

Ac
"Fo
"Sit
will
weel

G
on e
ante
new
with
fact
our
for
Tab

Section 1. No person shall be allowed to drive an automobile or motor vehicle propelled by steam, electricity, gasoline or other source of energy within the limits of San Luis Obispo county, save in accordance with the provisions of this ordinance.

Section 2. Every automobile or motor shall be provided with good and sufficient brakes, and shall also be provided with a suitable bell, horn or other signal. Every automobile shall, while being propelled in this county, exhibit during the period from one hour after sunset to one hour before sunrise, one lamp in front of such vehicle, or a lamp on each side, the same showing white lights visible within a reasonable distance in the direction in which the automobile is proceeding.

Section 3. No person driving and in charge of an automobile or motor vehicle running on any road or driveway in any thickly populated district in this county, shall run at a greater speed than ten miles per hour, and in other portions of this county shall not maintain a speed greater than is reasonable and proper, having regard to traffic and use of highways, or so as to endanger the life or limb of any person.

Section 4. Every person driving an automobile, on arriving within three hundred feet of any vehicle propelled by animal power, or of a person leading or driving domestic animals, shall slow down to a speed not exceeding six miles per hour, and shall not increase such speed until such vehicle or animals have been passed, and every person driving an automobile shall, at request or signal by putting up a hand by a person riding or driving a horse or horses, or leading or driving domestic animals, cause the automobile to immediately stop and remain stationary so long as it may be necessary to allow said horses or domestic animals to pass or get out of the way, and on all mountain roads the automobile shall, when meeting any vehicle propelled by animal power, take the outside of the grade.

Section 5. Any person violating the provisions of this ordinance shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and shall be pun-

M

mo
for
tak
Re
ter
Wo

V

thi
adv
ho
\$1
pa
fro
rie
cle
Ma

V

nu
da
bo

or
Re
co

V

V

=

nished by a fine not exceeding twenty-five dollars, or by imprisonment in the county jail not to exceed fifteen days, or by both such fine and imprisonment.

Section 6. This ordinance shall take effect and be in force fifteen days from and after its passage.

J. W. GILLIAM,
Chairman of the Board of Supervisors of San Luis Obispo County.

Attest my hand and the seal of said Board this 3d day of September, 1901.

JOHN WHICHER,
Clerk.

[Seal.]

The foregoing ordinance was passed and adopted by the following vote, to wit: Ayes: Supervisors Gilliam, Pfister, Freeman, Payne, Smith. Noes: None. Absent: None.

Witness my hand and the seal of said Board this 3d day of September, 1901.

[Seal] JOHN WHICHER,
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors.

Apologies for the poor quality of the scan - the original was not in great shape.

G. J. WALTERS' AUTOMOBILE.

Purchased in San Francisco and Brought Down by Mr. and Mrs. Wright.

It has been known for some time to a good many that G. J. Walters, Southern Pacific chief dispatcher, contemplating adopting the automobile as a means of locomotion. It now transpires that he has bought a machine and that it will likely arrive here today.

W. H. Wright went to San Francisco for Mr. Walter's automobile, which is a very fine one, and brought it down overland as far as Paso Robles, arriving there last night. Today by daylight he will probably bring it over the mountain. Mrs. Wright accompanied Mr. Wright from San Francisco to Paso Robles, and being in a hurry to get home, they came over on the local last night.

Even years later, it was still considered newsworthy when someone bought a car. This article is from 1903.

Regulation

The county wasted no time and by early September of 1901, the Board of Supervisors passed the first ordinance regarding the regulation of automobiles. A speed limit of 10 mph was enacted in populated areas, while on less-populous roads speed must be "reasonable and proper".

Provisions were put in place for interactions between automobiles and livestock, as well as between horse-drawn and non-horse-drawn vehicles.

Today, we still see efforts to find a balance between cars and alternate forms of transportation, with groups like [Bike SLO County](#) advocating for space for non-car transportation.

And so, it is worth remembering that we are not so very far removed from a time when things moved slower.

Virtual Tours

We now have three virtual tours to choose from! You can visit the Dallidet Adobe, the Octagon Barn, and the Jack House live via Zoom.

For information or to register, [click here](#).



Even More Tours

Our friends at the lighthouse are getting into the act!

Take a docent-led virtual tour of the Point San Luis Light Station, a Central Coast hidden gem. Travel with a docent back in time to 1890, delve into the history of the light station, and see all the places you'd see on an in-person tour, plus more.

[Register here](#)



The Dallidet Family enjoy their garden with some, ahem, minor alterations

Dallidet Gardens Open

Have you ever seen a Mongolian Sunflower? Or a 130-year old Avocado tree? Are you looking for some outdoor tranquility? Then you should visit the Dallidet Gardens.

Every Sunday through Labor Day, the gardens will be open from 11 am to 3 pm. The State's [guidelines for Outdoor Museums](#) will be strictly followed, so please bring your mask.

1185 Pacific Street, San Luis Obispo

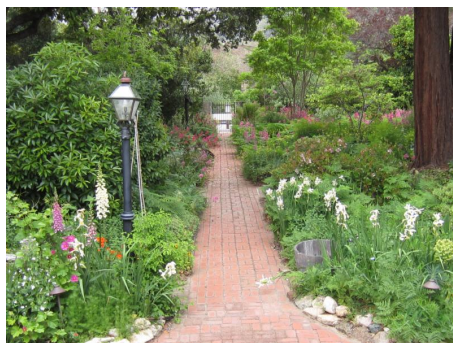
Mindfulness in the Gardens

We are very excited to announce the return of guided meditation to the Dallidet Gardens. Engage your senses - sound, sight, touch - by sitting, walking and exploring in silent contemplation

Starting August 18th and continuing weekly through the end of September, your skilled guides will help you to enjoy this 1½ hour fresh, yet timeless, approach.

Safety protocols for Covid will be observed, which includes a limited number of spaces.

To learn more or to register, [please visit our website](#).



Looking for more to do?

- Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or [Instagram](#). With posts like Mystery Monday and Throwback Thursday, we'll be sharing photos from our collection.
- Take a [virtual walking tour](#) of historic San Luis Obispo. These video series feature short vignettes about significant local landmarks.

If you have any ideas of content you'd like to see, share it with us! And if you enjoy what we share with you, and if you are able to, would you please consider [supporting us](#)?

Thank you for being a part of our community. Everybody stay healthy and safe.

Sincerely,



Thomas Kessler
Executive Director

History Center of San Luis Obispo County

696 Monterey Street, SLO | (805) 543-0638 | historycenterslo.org
[Become a member now, click here!](#)

STAY CONNECTED:

