

GUSTAVUS SWIFT

By Jacquelyne Kious

Though Gustavus Swift died in 1903, he had a tremendous impact on the Town of Baden and the future of South San Francisco.

To Swift, Baden was the perfect place to break into the west coast market. It was close to San Francisco to take advantage of its labor source and port, but a world away in rural San Mateo County offering commercial and political independence.

It was Swift who set in motion the purchase of Lux's Baden property which led to the formation of the South San Francisco Land and Improvement Company in 1891. The land company was established to sell lots and start building the infrastructure for the new industrial town.

Even though the weather--the prevailing winds from the west would blow the noxious, foul smells from the meatpacking plant out into the bay--and the location were perfect, Baden did have one major drawback - transportation. Charles Lux negotiated with Southern Pacific for a mainline stop at Baden, but it was far west of Pt. San Bruno where the Western Meat Co. was located. Since track would need to be laid to out to the bay to serve Swift's meatpacking plant it was included as part of the land company's charter. The tracks were owned by the land company and leased to Western Meat Co.

As more industries located in the Pt. San Bruno area more tracks were laid to service the factory sites leading to the incorporation of the South San Francisco Belt Railway in 1907.

The function of the belt railway was to switch railroad cars from Southern Pacific's main line to points along the 3.57 miles of track and vice versa. By 1920, the belt railway served 13 factories although Western Meat Co. remained its biggest user.

Southern Pacific took control of the belt railway in 1940. Many of the switching tracks still exist today just east of 101 at the South San Francisco train stop. Although much of the belt railway is long gone, every once in a while you'll see a Southern Pacific locomotive slowly transverse what is left of the railway crossing at Gateway Blvd with its horn blaring as it approaches busy E. Grand Avenue at Forbes and on to the bay.