

A short run . . . and short life

By Roger Swanson

The century was still in its teens when a two-year-old girl rode the Los Angeles and Mt. Washington Railway to the Mt. Washington Hotel, a lavish headquarters for play and relaxation during its short life.

Even shorter — and little remembered save for only a few people — was the life of the incline railway which ran from the base of the hill at Ave. 43 and Marmion Way to the hotel.

One of those who remembers is the two-year-old girl, now Miss Virginia Scott, who lives at the former hotel she once visited as a toddler.

"My family was visiting from Omaha for the winter when we rode on the railway," Miss Scott recalls. "I really don't remember much about it because I was so young but I do remember the building at the top of the hill that housed the wheel used to pull the cable."

That building today is used for offices by the Self Realization Fellowship which purchased the former hotel in 1925.

After moving to the west coast, Miss Scott met Paramahansa Yogananda, founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship who she had heard lecture, and in 1943 moved to the SRF where she became a resident devotee.

LAND PROMOTION

The railway, which operated over a distance of 2900 feet pulled by a cable under wooden planking, was born as a gimmick to stimulate land sales in the Mt. Washington area. Robert Marsh, a pioneer realtor in Los Angeles, and Arthur St. Clair Perry, a manufacturer of electric equipment, founded and built the railway. Marsh hoped that the cable railroad would attract visitors to the Mt. Washington area who would purchase land and build homes. In that he was successful. Mt. Washington became a desirable residential area, home of many of the city's distinguished citizens.

Marmion Way and Ave. 43 were little more than dirt paths in 1908 when plans for the incline railway were approved. The powerhouse on the grounds of the hotel contained the grip wheel which pulled the cars along the moving cable under the planking.

Two cars, named Florence and Virginia, operated simultaneously, one leaving at the foot of the hill and the other heading down the mountain from the hotel.

5 CENT FARE

At mid-point in the 2900 foot route, the two cars passed each other at a turnout where the conductor in the ascending car would step over to the descending car and collect the five cent fare. The car leaving the hotel was without a conductor until the mid-point was reached.

The hotel helped foster the image of a dynamic, alive community. Stars of the new movie colony in Hollywood and other luminaries who moved in fashionable circles were frequent guests. May Sutton played tennis at the hotel which afforded an unobstructed view of Catalina Island. Fourth of July celebrations were grand affairs with baseball games, athletic competition, picnics and the traditional fireworks display.

Life of the incline railway, however, was short lived. In January of 1919 the Board of Public Utilities ordered the railway to cease operation due to unsafe operating conditions.

LOSING PROPOSITION

It was noted in a city file that in 1916, 1917 and during the first nine months of 1918 the railroad had an operating deficit of approximately \$3800 a year, resulting in a lack of maintenance and repairs.

A city file of September 18, 1922 reported: "Two cars still tied together midway of mountain. Power house machinery is partially dismantled."

In October of 1922 the franchise of operation was revoked "for failure on the part of the company to comply with the orders of the Board of Public Utilities to resume the operation of said railway, and also failure to remove certain objectionable conditions constituting a menace and nuisance to the public."

The hotel failed shortly after the incline railway stopped running and became a boys' school before the Self Realization Fellowship purchased the property in 1925 for its international headquarters.

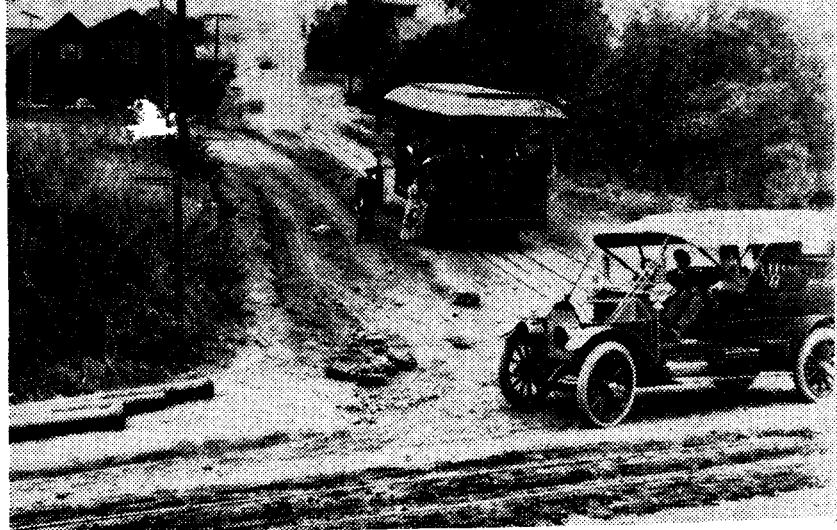
Portions of the cement conduit which housed the cable could still be found as late as the 1960s. In 1968 the SRF built a residence hall and buried the final remnants of the line under a sloping field of iceplant.

Fate of the two cars,

Virginia and Florence, are not known. "Virginia" was named for Mrs. Isaac Milbank, whose relationship with the builders is not known, and "Florence" was named for the daughter of Robert Marsh.

Still standing, however, is the former passenger waiting depot and concession stand at the corner of Marmion Way and Ave. 43. The building was later a market and today is a residence, appearing much the same as it did in 1909.

(Editor's Note: Northeast Newspapers wishes to thank Westways Magazine, which published an article on the old rail line in 1956, and to the writer, Art Ronnie, for helping provide material for this feature).

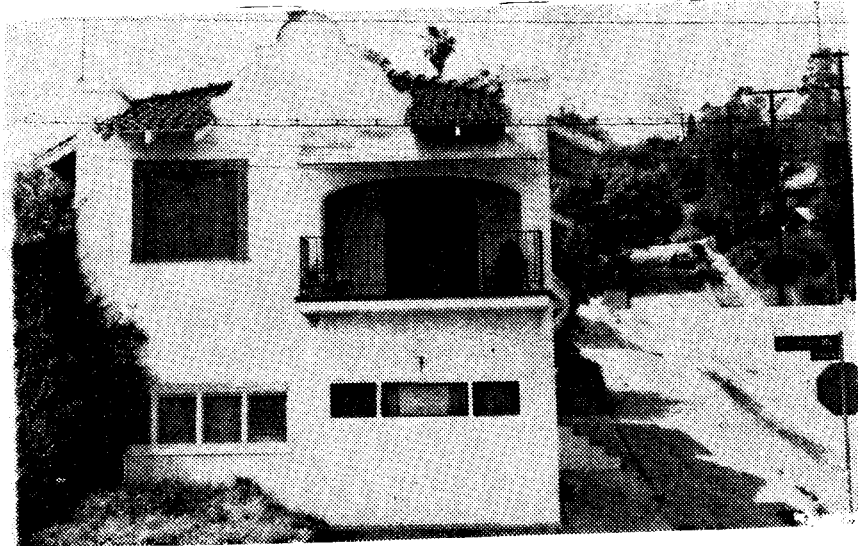


OLD L.A. AND MT. WASHINGTON RAILWAY — Heading up the hill from Ave. 43 and Marmion Way from 1909 to 1919 was the L.A. and Mt. Washington Railway's two cars, Florence and Virginia. Photo at left, probably taken on inaugural run in 1909, shows Arthur St.

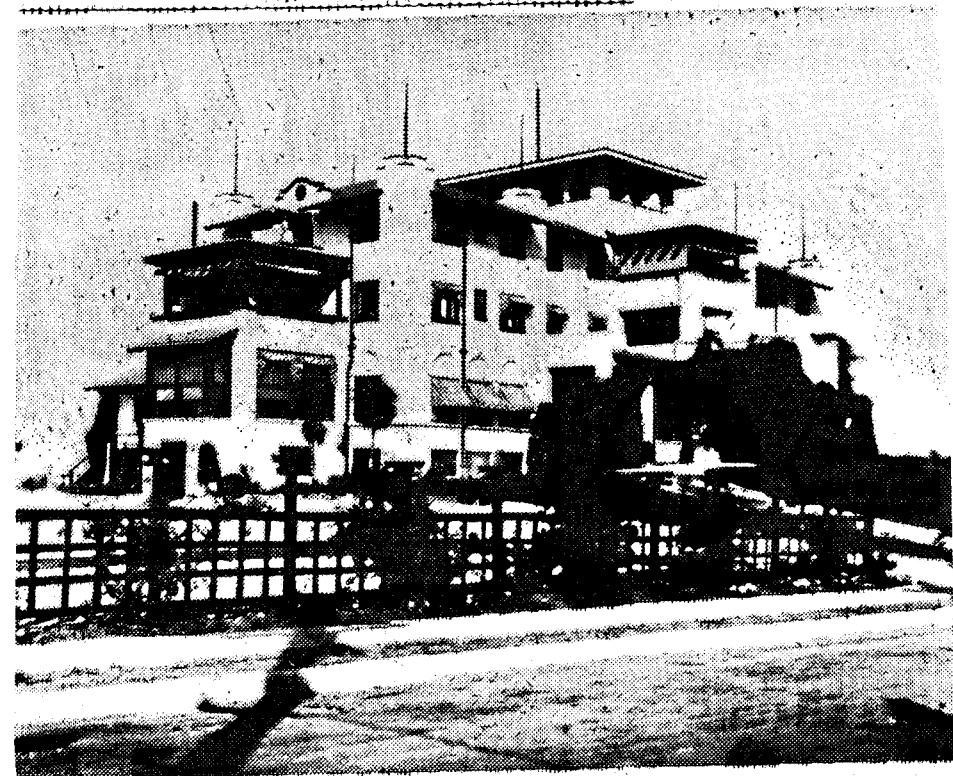
Clair Perry at extreme left railway car. Robert Marsh is at wheel of Pierre Arrow and his father, Joseph, sits beside him.



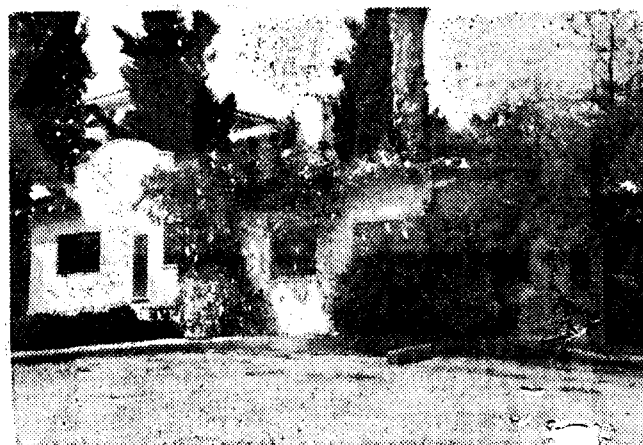
(Historical photos reprinted from Westways Magazine, Copyright 1956) Center photo shows confection stand and waiting room for passengers in building at Ave. 43 and Marmion Way that was later used as small market



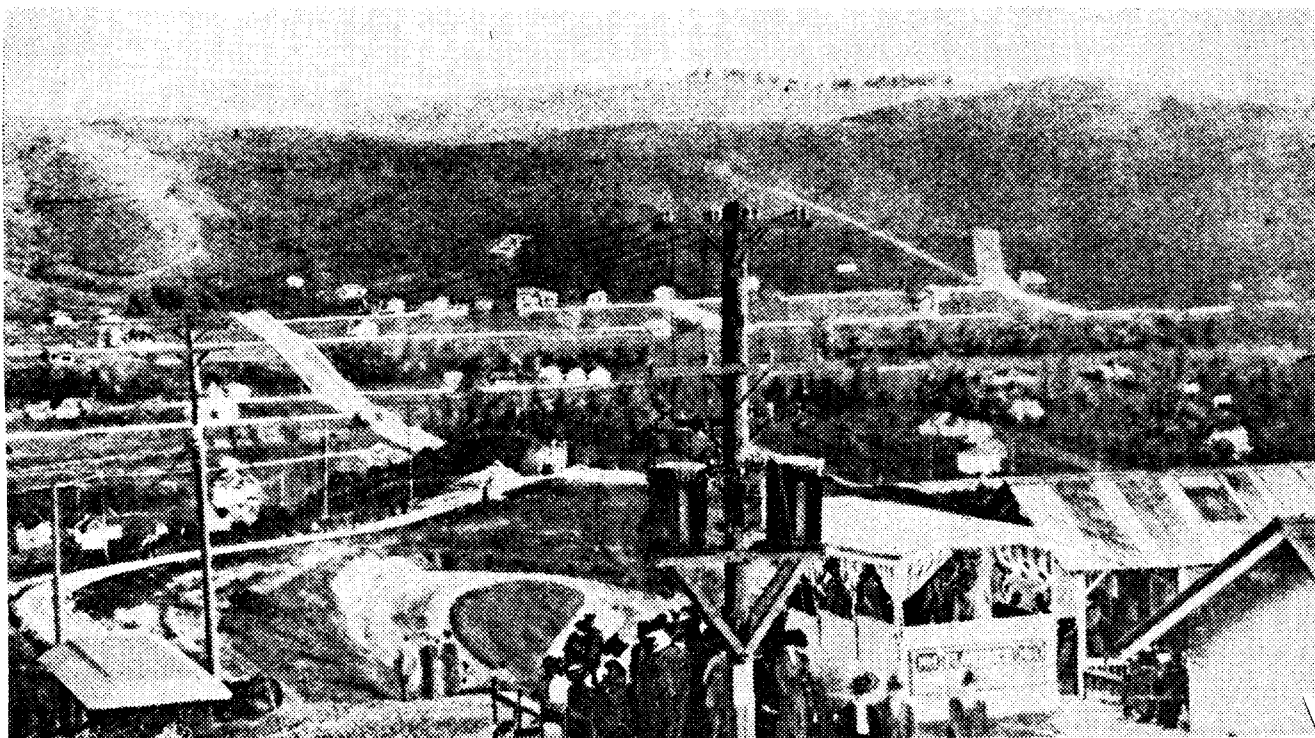
and still stands today (right) as residence. Cars travelled to fashionable Mt. Washington Hotel, buildings of which are still used by Self Realization Fellowship. Photo at left courtesy of Mrs. Louis Hamilton; center, courtesy of Miss Virginia Scott.



MT. WASHINGTON HOTEL — Fashionable Mt. Washington Hotel received many guests via the L.A. Mt. Washington Railway from 1909 to 1919. Structure was purchased in 1925 by Self Realization Fellowship for its international headquarters. (Photo Courtesy of Miss May Belle Myers. Reprinted from Westways Magazine, Copyright 1956.)



OLD POWER HOUSE — Building located on Self Realization Fellowship grounds and used as office once served as power house for the L.A.-Mt. Washington Railway. (Photo by Art Ronnie)



VIEW FROM THE TOP — Photo above taken sometime between 1909 and 1919 is view from old Los Angeles and Mt. Washington Railway hilltop depot where part of the Self-Realization Fellowship world headquarters are now located. Street at left running toward hills in background is Ave. 43 as it

crosses Carolota, Homer St., the Arroyo Seco, and Griffin Ave. Lowland area had few houses in those days as photo indicates.

(Photo courtesy Miss May Belle Myers, from Westways Magazine, copyright 1956)