

A Company History: Santa Fe Employee's Hospital Association

Coast Lines – An Abbreviated History

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1. 19th Century Origins & Civil War Precedents

The present employer-provided healthcare system in this country began in the 19th century when the fledgling railroad industry, especially in the West, found itself in the unique position of being the only organization with sufficient expertise and resources—both financial and manpower—to take on the responsibility of public safety and leadership. In small towns across the West, the railroad was the de facto administrator, law enforcer, medical practitioner, and communications center. It was said that the Southern Pacific Railroad ruled California from its office at the foot of Market Street in San Francisco.

In the 1870s, Union Pacific Railroad officials proposed a scheme in which their employees would be 'vested' after staying with the company for a period of ten years, at which time they would have a guaranteed lifetime job with medical care and a pension. This idea was scrapped when the infant union movement took root, as employers considered joining a union an act of disloyalty to the company.

This did not, however, prevent Union Pacific from organizing a medical department around 1880. The need was too great and the advantages too self-evident. After all, the railroad had to ensure that its employees, especially engineers and conductors, were healthy and fit to operate their trains. With accidents so prevalent, the railroad had to provide for the treatment and care of injured passengers and crewmen anyway, so it made sense to have its own medical department. With most railroad presidents and other officials being former Civil War military officers, it was a logical thing to pattern the railroad medical departments after the Civil War medical corps. This extended to referring to company doctors as 'surgeons,' as most of the medical care they would be giving was the repair of torn limbs, broken bones, and bodily lacerations.



Figure 1: The Santa Fe Hospital in Los Angeles, erected in 1905 on land purchased from Elizabeth Hollenbeck.

2. Santa Fe System Expansion to the Pacific (1859–1889)

The Santa Fe Railway followed a similar pattern in forming its hospital associations. The first and original company was chartered in 1859 as the Atchison and Topeka Railroad for the purpose of connecting Topeka, the principal city of Kansas, with the Missouri River at Atchison. The name was changed in 1863 to the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad as, in building west towards the coal fields, the more ambitious plan of building along the Santa Fe Trail to its namesake city in New Mexico came to the fore.

As it turned out, the city of Santa Fe was not a viable railhead as it provided little traffic. Therefore, Santa Fe Railroad expanded its vision and set its goal on reaching the Pacific Ocean. After being defeated by the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad in its quest to build west up the canyon of the Arkansas River (which included gunfights between opposing track crews), it won a similar confrontation at Raton Pass and gained control of the route along the Rio Grande River to El Paso. After gaining control of the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad (Frisco Lines), it acquired joint ownership with Frisco of the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad, extending its lines westward to Needles, California.

“By 1889, Santa Fe had built a 7,100-mile rail system stretching from Chicago to Denver, El Paso, and San Diego—securing exclusive Pacific access and setting the stage for organized corporate healthcare.”

The Atlantic & Pacific Railroad, built through the vacant lands of northern New Mexico and Arizona, generated little traffic, and potential bridge traffic from San Francisco was diverted by Southern Pacific Railroad over its lines through Ogden and Yuma. Santa Fe's solution to this problem was two-fold:

1. Strategic Line Swap: It traded rights on its lines in Mexico to Southern Pacific for a lease on Southern Pacific's line between Needles and Mojave, California, with trackage rights over Southern Pacific between Mojave and Bakersfield. Santa Fe President William Barstow Strong chalked up a significant and rare victory over Southern Pacific President C. P. Huntington in this 1884 business negotiation.

2. Tidewater Access via San Diego: It acquired a line south from Waterman (later Barstow), California, through an arrangement with the California Southern Railroad, which had built north from National City (just south of San Diego) to San Bernardino. By this means, it acquired exclusive access to the Pacific Ocean via the port of San Diego, thus thwarting efforts by Southern Pacific to block its access to tidewater in California.

Therefore, by 1889 the termini of Santa Fe's lines were in Chicago, St. Louis, Galveston, El Paso, Denver, San Diego, and Guaymas, for a total system of 7,100 miles.



Figure 2: Vintage Santa Fe passenger locomotive #72 operating along Western rail corridors.

3. Predecessor Rail Lines in Southern California (1880–1895)

In Southern California, eighteen predecessor lines were built—either with Santa Fe money or in anticipation of it—all of which eventually came totally under the control of Santa Fe:

Rail Line Company & Build Year	Route & Historical Termini
California Southern R.R. (1880)	National City to San Bernardino via Fallbrook.
California Southern Extension R.R. (1881)	San Bernardino to Barstow.
California Southern R.R. (1882)	Consolidation of above two companies.
Los Angeles & San Gabriel Valley R.R. (1883)	Los Angeles to Duarte.
Riverside, Santa Ana & Los Angeles Ry. (1885)	San Bernardino to Los Angeles via Orange.
Los Angeles & Santa Monica R.R. (1886)	Los Angeles to Mesmer (near Inglewood).
San Diego Central R.R. (1886)	Oceanside to Escondido.
San Bernardino & San Diego Ry. (1886)	Richfield (later Atwood) to Fallbrook Jct.
San Bernardino & Los Angeles Ry. (1886)	San Bernardino to Duarte.
San Bernardino Valley Ry. (1887)	San Bernardino to Mentone via Redlands.
San Jacinto Valley Ry. (1887)	Perris to San Jacinto.
California Central Ry. (1887)	Consolidation of above eight companies.
Redondo Beach Ry. (1888)	Inglewood to Redondo Beach.
Southern California Ry. (1889)	Consolidation of California Southern, California Central, & Redondo Beach.
San Bernardino & Eastern Ry. (1890)	San Bernardino to Mentone via Highland.
Santa Fe & Santa Monica Ry. (1892)	Mesmer (near Inglewood) to Santa Monica.
Southern California Ry. (1892)	Consolidation of former Southern California Ry. & above two last named.
Elsinore, Pomona & Los Angeles Ry. (1895)	Elsinore to Alberhill.

All the above owned mileage in Southern California was formally conveyed by the Southern California Railway Company to The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Company in 1906.

4. Formation of the Hospital Association & Local Surgeons (1891–1905)

The Santa Fe Hospital Association traces its ancestry back to 1891, when the Southern California Hospital Association was formed on June 29 of that year. As seen in the chronological listing of Santa Fe's earlier Southern California lines, the Association was formed under the auspices of the original Southern California Railway Company, which had been incorporated in 1889 and contained almost all the rail lines in Southern California (with minor exceptions later constructed between Elsinore, Alberhill, Porphyry, Richfield, and Fullerton).

“The first surgeon directory in Timetable No. 51 (July 1, 1900) listed Chief Surgeon N. H. Morrison in Room 444 of the historic Bradbury Building in downtown Los Angeles alongside 12 station surgeons.”

As stated earlier, one of the main reasons for forming railroad medical departments and hospital associations was to provide immediate treatment and care for passengers and crewmen injured in railroad accidents. For this reason, it soon became apparent that a directory of local surgeons should be provided to railroad crews to be referred to whenever needed. This became standard practice across almost all Western railroads, including Santa Fe, Southern Pacific, and Union Pacific.

These surgeon listings were arranged not alphabetically, but in station order along the lines of applicable employee timetables. The first listing for the Southern California Hospital Association appeared in Timetable No. 51 of the Southern California Railway Company, dated July 1, 1900. It listed Chief Surgeon N. H. Morrison with offices in Room 444 of the Bradbury Building at Broadway and Second Street (where it still stands in downtown Los Angeles) and 12 local surgeons with offices across Los Angeles, San Bernardino, San Diego, Perris, Santa Ana, Oceanside, Fullerton, Orange, National City, and Barstow.

All in-patient hospital care was initially provided through the facilities of the old St. Vincent's Hospital of the Daughters of Charity in Los Angeles. This arrangement continued until 1905, when a dedicated Association hospital was erected on three and one-half acres of land purchased from Elizabeth Hollenbeck and her husband in 1901.



Figure 3: Modern Santa Fe freight locomotive #519 traversing the rail system, carrying on over a century of railroad heritage.