



During the 1880's, the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad rushed to compete with the Southern Pacific for Southwestern rail traffic. The AT&SF's first objective was to reach a Pacific Coast port, when the SP was already in Los Angeles and the affiliated Central Pacific was already in the San Francisco Bay Area. The AT&SF first reached tidewater at Guaymas, Sonora, Mexico (south of map area), in 1882, via its New Mexico & Arizona Railroad (1882) and Sonora Railroad (1882). The AT&SF built the NM&A southward from Benson, Arizona (on SP's Sunset Route), along the San Pedro River to Fairbank, then west up the tributary Babocomari River to grasslands at Sonoita, then over a low pass in the Conejo Hills to follow Sonoita Creek southwestward through the town of Patagonia (this location) to the Santa Cruz River at Calabasas (also known as Rio Rico), and finally south along the Santa Cruz River to Nogales, on the border with Mexico and the connection with the Sonora Railroad.

The AT&SF was busy building to other ports. The AT&SF reached the Pacific Coast at San Diego in 1885 (via its Atlantic & Pacific (1883) and California & Southern (1885) railroads), Los Angeles in 1887 (via the California Central (1887) and other lines), and the San Francisco Bay in 1900 (via its San Francisco & San Joaquin Valley (1900) and other railroads). The line to Guaymas became less important to the AT&SF. In 1910, the SP-controlled Tucson & Nogales Railroad completed a line south from Tucson to Calabasas and used the NM&A grade from there south to Nogales. In 1929, the segment of the NM&A (1882) between Calabasas and Patagonia (this location) was damaged by floods and abandoned, and the line from Benson to Patagonia became a branch line of the El Paso & Southwestern Railroad and then the SP, which was abandoned later.

Northeastward view of the NM&A/EP&SW/SP depot at Patagonia. This was the end of the line after the segment from Calabasas to here was abandoned in 1929.





Train order semaphore on display at the Patagonia station.

TRAIN ORDER SEMAPHORE

Train order semaphores were used to signal approaching trains whether to stop at a depot or to proceed onward. The arm to the right, and at night, the light at the top of the mast, as seen from an approaching train, is the one that governs. When the arm is extended horizontally, or in addition a red light is displayed, it indicates "stop". When the arm is inclined downward at an angle of 60 degrees or in addition a green light is displayed, it indicates "proceed". The original semaphore at the Patagonia Depot was a wooden pole mounted to the cargo platform with steel cables to operate the signal arms and a kerosene lantern to light the colored signal lenses.

In 1929 a catastrophic flood destroyed an extensive section of the railroad line between Patagonia and Nogales, which the Southern Pacific Railroad (SP) decided not to rebuild. Instead, a turntable was built to turn locomotives around at the west end of town and Patagonia became the end of the line. At that point, the original semaphore was removed as it was no longer needed. In 1965 the depot building was acquired by the Patagonia-Sonoita Rotary Club, who rescued the building from demolition by moving it out of the right of way for the construction of State Route 82. During Rotary's ownership of the depot, they learned of another depot scheduled for demolition, that had been retrofitted with SP's modernized 1906 semaphore which was fabricated entirely of steel and cast iron, used mechanical rods to operate the signal arms, and was much more durable than SP's earlier wooden models. Rotary transported the salvaged semaphore to Patagonia, placed the steel mast in the ground adjacent to the depot building, but did not complete the installation of the remaining components. As a result, over-time, some of the original components of the semaphore were lost or misplaced.

In 2007, with funds provided through an Arizona Department of Transportation Enhancement Grant and supplemental grant funds from the Southwestern Foundation, the Town of Patagonia contracted with Arizona Rail Car, Inc. to remove the mast, fabricate missing components, repair, repaint and restore the semaphore, and to reinstall it in fully functional condition. This historic preservation effort, which involved the collaboration of local historians, the Town's employees, and local contractors and tradesmen, was completed in December 2008. It is estimated that only two-dozen of the 1906 model SP semaphores remain in existence and this unit is approximately 90% original stock.



Southward view of a fill grade on the NM&A/EP&SW/SP, one mile northeast of Patagonia.