



In 1883, the California Southern Railroad, a subsidiary of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, had to cross the Southern Pacific Railroad mainline at Colton, California, to complete its route from San Diego to Barstow. The AT&SF could not reach San Diego or any point on the southern California coast without this crossing. California Southern engineer Fred T. Perris ordered the crossing built and acquired the track, which was delivered to National City (CS southern terminus several miles south of San Diego) via ship. However, SP officials hired the sheriff in National City to seize the track and prevent its installation. The sheriff kept the track under 24-hour guard, but Perris's men were able to retake the track while the sheriff napped, loaded the track on a flatcar, and started northward on completed CS tracks up Temecula Canyon, through the location that was later to become the town of Perris, to the Colton crossing. On August 11, 1883, Mr. Perris obtained a court order that allowed the CS to install the new track across the SP tracks.

Jacob Victor, the CS foreman at Colton and whose name would later be honored by the future town of Victorville on the future CS between Cajon Pass and Barstow, thought it advisable to have the court order printed and each SP employee served. He wrote to the president of the CS that the danger of a riot was so imminent that he had the order telegraphed to the sheriff in San Francisco to serve the SP president. In the meantime the sheriff in Colton had organized a posse and was waiting for the court order to clear the track of SP resistance. Perris' crew was ready to install the crossing as soon as SP's Overland Mail train passed, but instead of the mail train an SP locomotive arrived at the scene pulling a single gondola and stopped. The engineer of the SP locomotive then drove the train back and forth slowly at the crossing point in an effort to prevent the CS crew from installing their track. The SP had hired the famed lawman Virgil Earp to guard its tracks in Colton and he rode in the cab.

The citizens of Colton supported SP, but the SP had bypassed nearby San Bernardino, whose residents wanted the CS. On the morning of September 13, 1883, events reached a head in a confrontation that was dubbed the "Battle of the Crossing." Citizens from Colton and San Bernardino gathered on either side of the tracks — San Bernardino residents on the north and Colton residents on the south — with the SP locomotive between them. Men on both sides carried picks, shovels, shotguns and revolvers. Virgil Earp stood in the gangway between cab and tender facing the San Bernardino mob, his revolver in hand. The gondola reportedly held a number of SP men with rifles and other weapons who crouched below the walls of the car so as not to be seen.

The governor of California Robert Waterman was at the scene and ordered San Bernardino County sheriff J.B. Burkhart to enforce the court order. Burkhart deputized 10 men and personally escorted the governor to the crossing site. Waterman stood between the SP locomotive and the San Bernardino mob and read the court order. The governor said the locomotive must be cleared away at once. He told Virgil Earp that if he made any move with his six-shooter, Burkhart and his deputies were authorized to shoot. Earp realized that further resistance was hopeless and he holstered his weapon. The track was cleared, the crossing was installed, and San Bernardino had a railroad. In 1885, after constructing the first railroad over Cajon Pass, the CS connected with the AT&SF-leased SP tracks at Barstow, and San Diego became the AT&SF's new western terminus.

This is what all the fuss was over in 1883. This eastward view shows the SP (now Union Pacific) mainline fading into the distance, crossed by the north-south CS (now BNSF) line.



Northward view at same location as previous. The UP (former SP) single track is crossed by the BNSF (former CS) double track. The far overpass is the I-10 Freeway and the near overpass is a new UP grade separation, replacing the old crossing.



The Colton Crossing flyover project was completed in August 2013 and carries the UP (former SP) grade over the BNSF (former CS) double track. The new Colton Crossing speeds rail traffic for the more than 110 trains that pass here each day each day.



The busy BNSF (former AT&SF) classification yard is 2 miles north of Colton in San Bernardino. The San Bernardino Mountains in the background are part of the Pacific Crest.



The Santa Fe (AT&SF) Station in San Bernardino is now an Amtrak station and houses some government offices.



The AT&SF yard and station in San Bernardino is the beginning of two branch lines. This track is the beginning of the Redlands Loop, completed in 1888 by the CS.



The CS Redlands Loop on the left, where it enters the San Bernardino yard.



The second AT&SF branch line at San Bernardino heads west and follows the original Los Angeles & San Gabriel Valley Railroad. The LA&SGV was founded in 1883 to bring a rail line to Pasadena from downtown Los Angeles. The first rail was laid in Pasadena in 1884 and on September 16, 1885, a celebration was held in Pasadena for the completion of the railroad from downtown LA following the Arroyo Seco to East Pasadena. The LA&SGV started a boom in Pasadena in the late 1880's, and the buildings of that era form the core of today's trendy Old Pasadena. In November 1886, the LA&SGV started building a line east of Pasadena and by January 1887 the rail had crossed the San Gabriel River in Azusa. In May 1887, the LA&SGV was sold to the California Central Railway, a subsidiary of the AT&SF, and the CC completed the line to San Bernardino in the same year. Although the AT&SF (now BNSF) mainline runs north-south from Cajon Pass to Colton, the yard at San Bernardino is all east-west, following the trend of the 1887 CC line.

The container train in this westward view of the San Bernardino yard and the Amtrak loading platform will turn either north (inland) or south (to the port). Only Amtrak and maybe some local freight run on the former CC-LA&SGV line to Pasadena.