



Episode 008 – Turkey Crossing (transcript)

Introduction

You're listening to rememBURBANK, a podcast featuring stories from the history of Burbank, California, produced by the Burbank Public Library. Check out our collection of historic Burbank photos at burbankinfo.org.

Story

And now for today's story.

If you've been driving around Burbank's Empire Center this fall, you've probably noticed a lot of activity from CalTrans. The new Empire Interchange at the I-5 has opened. Freeway ramps on Burbank Blvd. are being closed in anticipation of the new bridge construction, which is expected to begin in January 2020. But all this change is nothing new. As far back as the 1890s, the area was a hub of activity.

This area of Burbank was ranch land, bisected by the Southern Pacific railroad. In 1928, Alan Lockheed moved his business, with 50 employees, to a two-story brick ranch house on the corner of Empire Avenue and San Fernando road. This intersection was known as Turkey Crossing. Due to demand for war aircraft, the number of employees at Lockheed expanded rapidly between the world wars. In 1940, an underpass was built under the railroad tracks so Lockheed employees wouldn't have to cross what was considered one of the most dangerous railroad crossings in the county. But what was this Turkey Crossing and how did it get its name?

Much of our research about Turkey Crossing came from the historical archive Burbankia, found at WesClark.com/Burbank. Burbankia is a website chock full of intriguing stories, photos, and videos about modern and historical Burbank, hosted by Burbankers and local authors Wes Clark and Mike McDaniel. We spoke to Wes Clark about how he learned of the Turkey Crossing and its origins:

Wes Clark:

The first time I heard the mention of turkey crossing was in 2003, just after Mike McDaniel and I started the Burbankia website. He sent me a picture and on that photograph, featured where San Fernando Rd. crossed the railroad tracks, marked it turkey crossing. At the time I looked at it and asked him: "Turkey crossing? Why is it called turkey crossing?" And he said: "I don't know." Well, in 2010 I received an email from an internet correspondent named Marti and she asked me about turkey crossing. Once again I contacted Mike and we talked about it, and I wondered why it was that I could be raised in Burbank, graduated from high school there, and been all around the town – I've known Mike since 1972 – How is it he knew about a turkey crossing and I didn't, and why didn't we ever use that phrase? Well, by the time 2010 came

along I had access to the archives of the Los Angeles Times. So I started doing some research, and the story was interesting because it was a lot older than I thought it was.

The story of turkey crossing dates all the way back to 1899, in December of that year in fact. There was a 38-year-old rancher named Daniel Curtis, he did live 55 miles from LA (Los Angeles) on a ranch and he had turkeys, and he wanted to bring these turkeys down to sell them for the Christmas season. Well, he made his way into Burbank, with another rancher who had a wagon full of turkeys by the way, and what happened was, one rancher made it through okay – the other rancher that is – but he got hit. As his wagon was crossing the railroad tracks on San Fernando Rd. the owl train, which is the train that was headed from San Francisco to Los Angeles, came barreling down and hit his wagon. Flinging turkeys everywhere. It also injured Daniel Curtis, he wound up with a broken thigh. The engineer of the train halted the train, backed it up, picked up Curtis, and brought him into Los Angeles for medical treatment. What happened was that he claimed that he did not hear the train coming because of bushes, growth, that kind of thing. I don't know what that intersection looked like in 1899 but apparently it was the type of thing where somebody could be riding up a wagon through and get hit by a train. Maybe the train didn't sound its whistle at that point, I don't know. But for whatever reason, in December of 1899 the rancher was hit, his turkeys went everywhere, and the locals called the intersection turkey crossing.

Well, fast forward several decades and what began to happen was that the memory of this incident started to fade because we find later mentions of the site as being turkey neck crossing which suggested people forgot about the original story and assumed it was called turkey crossing because of the way the route went by the railroad tracks. I guess it made them think of a turkey neck, or something like that it's kind of hard to tell. But that's the story of turkey crossing, it dates back to 1899.

Due to traffic improvements by CalTrans in 2014, Turkey Crossing is no more.

So there you have it, the origin of the Turkey Crossing goes back to December 1899, and 120 years later on December 2019, it was our pleasure to revisit this interesting tidbit of obscure Burbank history with Burbankia. Go to our show notes to see some pictures of Mike McDaniel standing at the former Turkey Crossing, as well an aerial shot of what Turkey Crossing looked like in 1928.

News from Burbank

And now for the news from Burbank.

Today's news comes from the October 10, 1941 *The Lockheed-Vega Star*:

“Everything but the Horse and Buggy

Thanks to the magic of the photographer's art, the P-38 superimposed on the above picture completes a visualization of all modes of transportation, except the horse and buggy, which feature the vicinity of Lockheed Plant 1 during the 3:30 shift-changing time. Clearly apparent are the various problems that confront the company and the City of Burbank in solving the traffic problem in the vicinity of the plants. Except for the plane, the picture is an actual photograph taken at 3:30 on a week-day afternoon. In

addition to trucks and autos, a freight train, a pedestrian and a cyclist can be seen. And when those cars start coming off the railroad right-of-way, some one is certainly going to be late getting home.”

And that's the Burbank news from 1941.

End Credits

rememBURBANK was researched and edited by Cesar Garcia, written by Laura McMahon, and hosted by Melanie Renfroe. A special thank you to Wes Clark for taking the time to share the origin story of the Turkey Crossing. For more Burbank history and lore check out Burbankia, where you'll always find interesting facts and memories about our town.

Funding for the podcast came from the Friends of the Burbank Public Library, a nonprofit group dedicated to promoting books and the library to the Burbank community. The proceeds from their fundraising efforts help fund Library programming and purchase special equipment for the library.

The music you hear now, and at the beginning of the podcast, is Burbank's 1924 official song "In Burbank" by Code Morgan.

You can find show notes for this episode, learn more about the show, and view historical photos of Burbank at burbankinfo.org

Thank you for joining us today.