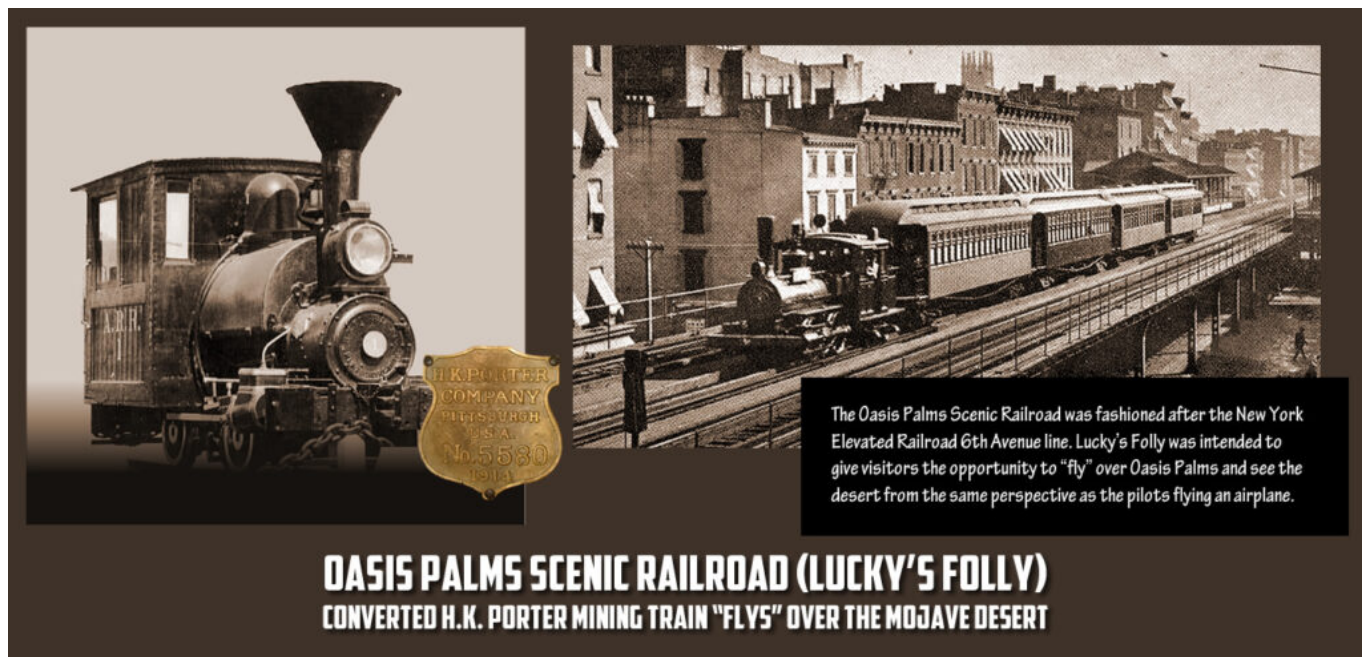


1953 – Lefty's Folly the Oasis Palms Scenic Railroad

With Lefty's triumphant P-38 promotion giving him confidence, he set his sights on an audacious idea that would forever transform Oasis Palms. Lefty conceived a bold plan to remake Oasis Palms into a family-friendly tourist destination. He imagined constructing an elevated train rail encircling the town, providing tourists with a chance to "fly" over Oasis Palms and witness the desert from the same perspective as the pilots soaring out of the new [Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center \(MCAGCC\)](#) located nearby in 29 Palms.

Lefty's grand vision received a fortuitous push in 1952 when the stick-built Oasis Palms Hotel was mysteriously engulfed in flames and destroyed the hotel, which remarkably was well insured. This tragedy conveniently cleared the path for the train tracks to be laid around the back of the hill, above the old Barco Gold Mine. Some speculated that Lefty might have played a role in starting the fire to facilitate the railway project, as there were voices both within the town and even the Smith family who at the time opposed the construction of the elevated railway. Many of the locals dubbed the railway "Lefty's Folly." However, Lefty remained undaunted, and his plan to clean up the image of Oasis Palms and become a more "family-friendly" destination, was achieved when the construction of the Oasis Palms Scenic Railroad elevated train track reached completion in 1953.



To inaugurate this exciting addition to Oasis Palms, Lefty managed to persuade Santa Fe to reroute one of their new EMD-powered [El Capitan](#) passenger trains through Oasis Palms and un-unbeknownst to Santa Fe management re-routed it over the elevated railway loop through town. Given that the support structure for the elevated track was not originally engineered for the weight of heavy-weight diesel, onlookers and the press watched with bated breath, unsure if the contraption would hold up under the strain of the streamliner. However, the Santa Fe El Capitan triumphantly completed its lap around the Oasis Palms scenic loop without any mishaps, creating excitement in the press and launching a new era in Oasis Palms history.

For the operating equipment of the Scenic Railroad, Lefty's original plan was to purchase an old Union Pacific porter and to make a couple of open passenger cars converted from aging Pullmans similar to original the NYC elevated railroad. But, since several years before Santa Fe had discontinued the Midnight Limited service and their fleet of aging Berkshires was being scrapped and replaced with diesel locomotives, Lefty seized the opportunity in 1954 and negotiated the purchase of Berkshire number 4105 and the worn-out Midnight Limited consist from Santa Fe. Lefty was even able to convince the new

president of MGM [Dore Schary](#) to “gift” the Meyers private car to Oasis Palms as a bonus. At the time, Schay was cutting costs at MGM after Meyer’s removal by the Board of Directors and it was unclear to Lefty if Schay’s gift was really about cost-savings or simply a snub to Meyers. In either event, the car was a welcome addition and that is how the Oasis Palms Scenic Railroad came into existence.



Lefty enthusiastically promoted this attraction as a day trip activity, targeting the growing number of motorists traveling along nearby Route 66. Visitors were enticed by billboards to embark on a one-hour scenic railroad tour that encircled Oasis Palms and visited the historic Barco Mine. Thanks to this innovative attraction and the post-war boom of vacationers in automobiles, day-trip tourism in Oasis Palms experienced a resurgence. Many even believe that Lefty’s trolley may have served as the inspiration for Walt Disney’s [Rainbow Caverns Mine Train](#) which was constructed a full 3-years later in 1956 in nearby Anaheim, California. Lefty’s vision not only revitalized Oasis Palms but also left a lasting mark on

entertainment and tourism in the region.