

15 May 1969

Mr. Fred Newcomb
4640 Noble Avenue
Sherman Oaks 91403

Dear Fred,

Thank you for sending me the April Probe with your exceedingly interesting article on the mystery of the train. You have no need to apologize for your writing: it is clear and correct, and well-structured. It conveys the story that you want to communicate. There is no occasion for self-consciousness about your writing style as such, in my opinion, and I certainly do not invite you to stick to artwork alone. (I am a sometimes Sunday painter, and I suspect that you might, on seeing my productions, advise me to stick to my writing.)

I have given the article a "first reading," and intend to read it again, more slowly and carefully. My remarks are subject to that second reading. The quality of the photos as reproduced in Probe is such that I am not convinced by the photos alone that there was a train behind the grillwork. But what does hit with powerful impact is the unmistakable and irrecconcilable (in terms of perspective) divergency of the tree foliage, as seen in Figure 17. But here I would ask if it is not possible that the foliage was faked in the Betzner photo rather than doctored out of the Willis. (I don't think you dealt with that possibility in your article, but maybe I read it too hastily.) The reason I say that is that I recall many, many photographs which show the arcade and the pergola, in which the tree corresponds with the Willis rather than the Betzner. I recall one photo which shows a man and woman on or just above the three shallow steps in front of the grillwork, which I believe was in Dick Sprague's collection, and various other photos in a variety of places. It seems more logical that one Betzner photo was altered rather than the numerous other photos which conform to the Willis.

But be that as it may, the central and crucial point is that you have demonstrated still another case of doctored photographs, in which a federal agency or agencies are culpable and possibly in collusion. That in itself is so strong and so damning that I am not sure that the elaboration of a hypothesis of Bowers' involvement, or similar hypotheses about the purpose of the train and attempts to suppress evidence of its presence, do not dilute rather than strengthen the basic argument—that is, the systematic and deliberate alteration of photographic evidence for purposes which can only be sinister, if not criminal. This is a question, really, not a comment or a criticism—a question that I am putting to myself as well as to you.

What I do regret, as you suspected I might, is the omission of citations. They would have strengthened the article immensely. I mean that as a general principle, not in terms of this specific study. The indication of sources is just indispensable in any work of scholarship, as I think you would readily agree (I am not sure I understand what you mean in your letter when you say "even though the reasons I gave as to why this was done may puzzle you").

I may write again after a more careful reading of the article, as soon as I have time. Meanwhile, my congratulations on this very creditable study.

Yours hastily,

*Really
Very Expressive*