

ARKANSAS RAILROADER
The Arkansas Railroad Club Newsletter
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NARROW GAUGE LOCOMOTIVE DONATED TO CLUB. . . Mr. Philip W. Ragsdale of Little Rock has given a 12" gauge live steam model locomotive, tender and caboose to the Arkansas Railroad Club. The equipment was accepted April 5 by President Jim Wilson and a muscular crew including Bud Garrison, John Harper, John Martin, Phil Powledge, Earl Saunders, Kevin Saunders, and Jim Wakefield, who moved it to Wilson's home in Bryant.

The locomotive is not in operating condition, but hopefully it can be restored to service. It is a 2-4-0 but could easily be altered to a 4-4-0 and probably. Origin of the equipment is not known, but it was on display for some time at "The Cow Shed" on Highway 10 in Little Rock.

APRIL 12 MEETING WILL BE AT WHITEHALL. . . Speaking of live steam, a meet will be held April 10-12 at Whitehall (Poinsett County), The host is Austin Barr, operator of the Whitehall Southern. It was decided at the March meeting of the Arkansas Railroad Club that our April 12 meeting be held there too. Best route from Little Rock is east on I-40 to Forrest City, then north on Ark. 1. If you need transportation or can furnish it, please contact Earl Saunders at 663-2121 or Jim Wakefield at 225-5578.

THIS IS THE LAST FREE NEWSLETTER. . . The first three issues of the newsletter have been mailed to as many people as were thought to have a potential interest in our club and to all those who had attended any of the meetings. While future issues will be mailed to prospective members to interest and inform them, it will not be mailed regularly except to paid members. So if you want to join and keep up with club activities, send your dues to C. R. Byrd, 6815 Dahlia Drive, Little Rock, Ark. 72209. Annual dues are \$5.00 Regular (anyone) or \$3.00 Associate (outside Arkansas).

BEGINNINGS OF THE MISSOURI PACIFIC'S LOUISIANA DIVISION

by John Baskin Harper

The main line of the Missouri Pacific Railroad Co.'s present Louisiana Division extends southeast from Little Rock through Pine Bluff to McGehee, thence southward through Monroe, Louisiana, to a connection with the Texas & Pacific Railway at Alexandria, Louisiana. Though it is not commonly known, the first parts of the Louisiana Division were planned by then locally owned predecessor corporations prior to the Civil War. These corporations constitute what is probably the oldest operating section of the M P in Arkansas.

The first part of the division that is definitely known to have existed was the Mississippi, Ouachita and Red River Railroad Co., incorporated in Arkansas on January 8, 1851, with supplementing legislation dated January 22, 1854, and January 14, 1857. The M O & R R was to extend from Ferguson' Point, on the Mississippi River near

Arkansas City, west to the big bend of the Red River near Fulton, Arkansas. According to plans the line would cross the Ouachita River near Camden. Connections at Fulton would be made with the Cairo & Fulton, the Galveston, Houston & Henderson, and the Memphis, El Paso & Pacific (now the T & P from Texarkana to Sherman, Texas). At this time plans for the first transcontinental railroad were centered on a southern route from Charleston, S. C., through Vicksburg, Shreveport, El Paso, and on to San Diego. The M E P & P completed its surveys from the Red River to California in the 1850's, and it was the intention of the M O & R R to connect with the M E P & P's transcontinental route at Fulton. Plans for the southern transcontinental route were terminated by the Civil War. However, in the 1860's and 1870's the present Southern Pacific Company built eastward to Texas over the old M E P & P surveys, while the M E P & P and the T & P were trying to build west across Texas. T & P objections to the Southern Pacific's actions led to famous Gould-Huntington Agreement of November 26, 1881, in which the T & P was given the right to operate over the S P to the West Coast, rights it still has today.

Though the M O & R R did not complete any railroad prior to the Civil War, it did apparently complete its survey to Red River. Records are extremely vague at this point, but sometime prior to 1870 (but after the Civil War) the M O & R R constructed approximately 27.57 miles of railroad from the old town of Chicot (not the present Chicot, and perhaps more correctly called Chicot City) on the Mississippi River south to Arkansas City and thence west to Collins.

The most interesting part of the Louisiana Division was the Little Rock, Pine Bluff and New Orleans Railroad Co. which was incorporated in Arkansas on November 24, 1868. The L R P B & N O's early history is even more vaguely known than that of the M O & R R. Powell Clayton, the Reconstruction governor of Arkansas, mentions in his memoirs that the Little Rock and Napoleon RR, an antebellum line which became part of the L R P B & N O, was one of the railroads receiving state aid for construction. No mention of the L R & N has ever turned up in the M P's records, the only record so far being Powell Clayton's remarks. It must be remembered that the first important towns in Arkansas were the various landings on the Mississippi River. Napoleon was an old riverport near the confluence of the Arkansas River with the Mississippi (see map). It seems to have disappeared sometime around the Civil War, one reason apparently being that the Mississippi changed course. Whatever the case, the original line of the L R P B & N O was constructed from the corner of James and Bogy streets (now Fourth and Texas) in Pine Bluff southeasterly through Varner, Medford, Watson, and Tidwell to a junction with the M O & R R at Chicot, a distance of approximately 64.74 miles. Like the M O & R R this trackage was placed in operation sometime prior to 1870. Since the first 20 miles of the Little Rock and Fort Smith Railroad Co. were opened April 20, 1870, it appears that either the M O & R R or the L R P B & N O was the first part of the present M P to actually operate in Arkansas.

The degree of cooperation between the M O & R R and the L R P B & N O is not known today, but judging from the common terminal at Chicot, the proximity of the lines, and probable common stockholders it is reasonable to assume operations were closely connected. At any rate

the two railroads were consolidated on November 11, 1873, to form the Texas, Mississippi and Northwestern Railroad Co.

At this point the M O & R R and the L R P B & N O were principally locally owned lines whose main traffic consisted of the products used by the plantations and settlements they served. Money had been in short supply when the lines were built, so extremely conservative construction standards had prevailed. "Ties" were logs cut from the right-of-way, rail was extremely light, and grading was minimal. Business was so light that bondholders filed to foreclose on the T M & N W on March 15, 1875. As a result the line was sold to representatives of the bondholders on December 18, 1875. On this date the purchasers reorganized the property under the Little Rock, Mississippi River and Texas Railway, filing a certificate of organization to this effect on September 28, 1877.

The new owners found the line in a dilapidated condition for a number of reasons, including especially, high water. As a result a new main line was constructed west of the edge of overflow of the Arkansas River. It left the original main line about 1½ miles south of Varner and ran southeasterly through Judge Humphrey's plantation (now McGehee) to a connection at Bowie (now Halley) with the old M O & R R line, a distance of 39.18 miles. A branch was then constructed from Trippe Junction (see map) east to Arkansas City. When these new lines were completed the old lines from Varner to Chicot, and Chicot to Bowie were abandoned. The abandonment took place at a time variously reported as 1876 and 1879. It totaled 51.00 miles of the original 92.31 miles constructed by the L R P B & N O and the M O & R R.

As late as 1935, maps of the USC&GS still illustrated the old abandoned route of the L R P B & N O. Part of the old right-of-way is still in use today as a highway. The knowledgeable railroad historian traveling south on Arkansas Highway 1 from the Pendleton Ferry knows when he turns east on Highway 1 at Back Gate that he is driving down the old L R P B & N O right-of-way for the first two or three miles out of Back Gate. Several additional parts of the right-of-way may have been used to build parts of other state highways, such as Arkansas 4 near Arkansas City. Likewise, when traveling south on U S Highway 65 out of Varner, the knowledgeable traveler knows that the sweeping curve on the MoP R R about 1½ miles south of Varner that turns the Louisiana Division mail line to the southeast toward McGehee represents the point where the L R M R & T in 1876 turned the "new" highwater main line south away from the old river line toward McGehee.

Continued Next Month

