

## The History of Lee County's Railroads

The first Railroad Charter granted after Texas became a State, was introduced and sponsored by John W. Daney, Senator for the La Grange district, one of the earliest and ablest advocates of railroads. The charter was granted to the Harrisburg City Company on February 10, 1847 by the Legislature of the State of Texas. Among other things, the charter provided that the road should start at some point on Buffalo Bayou between Houston and Lynchburg (25 miles south of Houston), run to some point on the Brazos between Richmond and Washington, thence to the Colorado with rights to construct branches as deemed expedient. The name of this road to be the Buffalo Bayou-Brazos & Colorado Railway (B.B.B.&C.)/

Most of the capital was secured in the East. J. F. Barrett, a representative of Eastern Capital was President of the Company, William Hilliard, Secretary-Treasurer and John A. Williams, Chief Engineer, all of whom were from Boston, Mass. Among other incorporators were Sidney Sherman, Hugh McLeod, W. A. Van Alstyne, John G. Todd, John H. Stevens, B. A. Sheppard, W. J. Hutchins and W. M. Rice. Some of these men lived in Houston, some in Galveston and some in Harrisburg. General Sidney Sherman's records of progress and operations were destroyed by fire as were many State records. The road was

officially opened on September 7, 1853.

Reference to this road is mentioned here because of the fact that it later became a part of the Galveston-Harrisburg & San Antonio Railway and still later a large part of the Southern Pacific Railway Company, as did the Houston & Texas Central Railway Company.

The second railroad was chartered as the Galveston and Red River Railway Company on March 11, 1848 and to run from some point on Galveston Bay to some point on the Red River between the Eastern boundary line of Texas, and Coffen's Station as the said company may deem most expedient. This charter was granted to Ebenezer Allen and others. (This charter was later amended, changing the company name from Galveston and Red River Railway to Houston & Texas Central Railway Company, as will be shown later). Stipulated in the charter, as granted to Mr. Allen and others, it was given two years to begin work and five years to complete 100 miles. In 1849, time to begin work was extended, two years as was the time of completion. In 1850 it was given five years from February 14, 1852 to commence work and three years from that date to finish ten miles.

"Embittered farmers" in the little settlement in Washington County called Chappell Hill initiated the movement in 1852 which resulted in the building of the Houston & Texas Central Railroad.

Embittered because of the roads or lack of roads leading to Houston where they marketed their crops and bought their supplies, Major Joseph Willis, one of these farmers wrote articles for "The Texas Rangers" published at Old Washington and "The Telegraph" published at Houston urging better transportation from Houston to that section and discussing possibilities of a railroad. These articles aroused wide spread interest and the "Embittered Farmers" decided to call a convention at Chappell Hill to discuss the matter and Houston was invited to send delegates. On June 25, 1852 a meeting was held in Houston and after a hard fight, it was decided to send delegates to Chappell Hill--Paul Bremond was the leading Houston advocate--was responsible for the convention held in Houston on July 3, 1852. Houston delegates were Harvey Allen, W. M. Rice, W. A. Van Alstyne, James H. Stevens, B. A. Sheppard, W. J. Hutchins and Paul Bremond. Bremond was one of the real pioneers in Texas railroad building--he had little means of his own and could secure very little cash, but his faith was inspired in others. John K. Allen, one of two brothers who founded Houston, selected the site for the city and laid it off in 1836. Nineteen years later, Paul Bremond, with his own hands, upturned the first spade of dirt for the grade of the Houston & Texas Central Railway. Bremond completed only two miles in the first three years, but he now had the wholehearted backing of the Houston people. Among those contri-



buting to the enterprise were W. M. Rice, Cornelius Ennis, William J. Hutchins, A. S. Ruthven, James H. Stevens, the Allens, (A. C. & J. K. the founders of Houston), T. W. House, William R. Baker, Richard H. Peebles, W. A. Van Alstyne, Harvey W. Allen and Dr. Francis Moore, Editor of the Houston Telegraph, also the support of Ebenezer Allen of Galveston who consented for the work to begin at Houston instead of Galveston as provided in the charter and ratified February 7, 1853 by the Legislature. When Bremond started work, the State Law gave only eight sections of land per mile and no provisions for a loan. This charter was amended on January 23, 1856, to give the road the benefit of the General Land Grant law passed in 1854, entitling it to sixteen sections of land per mile and providing that 25 miles be completed within six months. It was also given the right to the benefits of the General law governing loans from the State School Fund. A contract for building the first 25 miles was awarded to J. W. Wells & Company of New York. The work was completed to Cypress, Texas by July, 1856 and service was opened between Houston and Cypress on September 30, 1856. Just prior to the completion of this 25 miles, the legislature had on September 1, 1856 authorized a change in the name of the road to The Houston & Texas Central Railway Company and the change became effective the same day. Application for a State School Fund loan of \$150,000.00 was made on March 21, 1857 and was approved on April 3, 1857. Bremond began work again and by May of 1857

ten more miles were built to Hockley. It was extended fifteen miles to Hempstead by June, 1858 and in 1860 thirty miles north to Millican, which was the terminus until after the Civil War. In 1858 the Legislature authorized among other things, to build a branch to Austin.

Under the original charter, as stated above, a branch line to Austin was authorized. However, Amendments to the charter apparently did not carry such authorizations. The people of Washington County then decided to build a railroad themselves from Hempstead to Brenham. They secured a charter on February 2, 1856. Contract for grading was taken by W. M. Browning, Nathan King and W. M. Sledge as a firm under the name of King, Sledge & Co. Sledge was also elected President of the Railroad. These men, and other subscribers were farmers and agreed to take payment for work and material in stock with the understanding that they would work on the grading when they could spare their Negroes and teams from their farm work. Work was begun in 1857 and finished eleven miles to Chappell Hill in 1859. The State loaned them \$66,000.00 and they were granted 236,160 acres of State land. Giddings & Giddings, among the leading farmers and merchants of Brenham, supplemented these advances from their own resources and by securing a loan from the County School funds to buy two engines and some rolling stock. They were able to begin operation from Hempstead to

Chappell Hill within one year after the H & TC reached Hempstead.

Despite the fact that the Civil War broke out before Brenham was reached, their enthusiasm and determination were so great that work was continued even after hostilities began and reached that city early in 1861. This road operated during the war and during the year following the war its receipts were \$44,000.00 and expenses, etc. paid out \$21,000.00 which was remarkable for only 21 miles of track. But it could not meet its obligations and on June 2, 1868 was sold under foreclosure to W. M. Sledge, one of the men who contracted to build the road and who owned three-fifths of the stock. Washington county people wanted it extended on to Austin. Mr. Sledge was not able to do so himself, so on March 11, 1869 he sold it to the Houston & Texas Central Railway Company. The extension of the branch was started soon and reached Ledbetter, 25 miles, in January 1871, McDade, 25 miles farther, by September, (It entered what is now Lee County presumably in February or March, 1871), Manor, 25 miles farther, by November and completed the 18.69 miles to Austin in December, 1871. Total length of this branch line is 115 miles.

Sometime during 1911 or 1912, the H & T C began the building right-of-way for the construction of a branch line between Giddings and Hearne. One of the road bed construction firms was Owens & Owens Construction Company whose headquarters was in Galveston. This was the company who brought the road



bed into Giddings proper. The purpose of this line was to shorten the Southern Pacific Lines distance between Dallas and San Antonio. H.&T.C. Railway and G.H.&S.A. Railway at that time had been acquired by Southern Pacific Lines and S.A.&A.P. Railway was operating under a lease agreement with Southern Pacific, who in 1925 acquired the S.A.&A.P. Railway. This was a connecting operation using H.&T.C. Dallas to Giddings--S.A.&A.P. Giddings to Flatonia and G.H.&S.A. Flatonia to San Antonio and was commonly known as the Dal-sa line, especially among the Railroad fraternity.

Material for building this piece of track was stock-piled in Giddings and the first rail was laid on October 12, 1912 in Giddings proper. Final completion to Hearne was sometime in 1913--this writer has been unable to learn the exact date of completion.

An interesting point in the construction was putting in place what was known to all of the Railroad personel as the "Puzzle Switch" connecting the Dal-sa line with the S.A.&A.P. Railway at the intersection of the lines and was at the same point of intersection as it is today. This Puzzle-Switch was necessary at that time due to the fact that there was a passing track paralleling the S.A.&A.P. just east of their main track, running north and only some ten feet between the two tracks necessitating crossing the passing tract to reach the S.A.&A.P. line. This was quite an intricate operation to get on to the

main S.A.&A.P. track instead of the passing track.

Many temporary switching tracks were necessary for the stock piling of materials and storage space. Numerous work trains operating into and out of Giddings necessitated a switch engine and yard master and crews. Giddings became quite a Railroad center for a number of years.

Records of the original S.A.&A.P. Railway (San Antonio & Aransas Pass) are not too plentiful. However, we do find that the State Legislature granted a charter to one Uriah Lott on August 28, 1884 -- Henry Elmendorf, A. C. Scryver, W. H. Maverick and George W. Breckenridge on his board of Directors - to build a railroad from San Antonio to Aransas Pass.

He started work early in 1885 and built thirty miles to Floresville. Mr. Lott lived in Corpus Christi at the time, having come from New York in 1868 with visions of improving Corpus Christi harbor and establishing steamship lines and building railroads to the interior.

He had very little means but relied on support from Corpus Christi, Rockport and Aransas Pass. It is not known why he used Aransas Pass instead of Corpus Christi. Floresville would have been the end of the road had it not been for one Mifflin Kenedy of Corpus Christi who had faith in Mr. Lott. Kenedy contracted to build the road and agreed to take stock and bonds as payment together with all bonuses from communities and individuals along the line. Corpus Christi contributed



some \$103,000.00, Bee County some \$55,000.00 and others some \$15,000.00, bringing a total of \$173,500.00, but the records do not show San Antonio as having made any contribution.

The line to the coast was completed in 1886 and was to Corpus Christi, 150 miles distance instead of to Aransas Pass because of the large bonus given by Corpus Christi.

Two years later a branch line was built to Aransas Pass and Rockport, a distance of 21 miles and a branch from Skidmore to Alice, 43 miles.

Lott had gradually expanded his plans to build a line to Shreveport, Louisiana through Houston and one to the Panhandle and another to Waco. Mr. Kenedy built the line from Kenedy, Texas to Houston, 171 miles from Kenedy and 232 miles from San Antonio and the extension to Shreveport was abandoned. The line to the Panhandle was built <sup>as</sup> far as Kerrville and was abandoned due to excessive cost of construction.

It was Mr. Lott's intention to locate the "shops" at Cuero, but Cuero would not pay the bonus asked by Lott and shops were located at Yoakum instead. The line to Waco was begun in 1888 and was begun at both ends. The line from Waco to Lott, 28 miles, was completed in February, 1889, and from Yoakum to Lexington, 85 miles, in December of 1889. Financial difficulties had arisen and in July 1890 was forced into Receivership. However, the Receivers authorized the building of the gap between Lott and Lexington and this was completed

in June 1891. The south <sup>portion</sup> ~~position~~ of this branch reaching Lee County in 1889 and connecting with the north and reaching Lee County in 1891.

The entire S.A.&A.P. Railway was under lease to Southern Pacific Lines for many years and finally purchased by Southern Pacific in 1925. We are sorry to note that this line from Giddings to Cameron was abandoned and the tracks have been removed.

Special Note:

A substantial portion of the "History of Railroads in Lee County" has been obtained from Mr. S. H. Reed's "A History of Texas Railroads" to whom we are deeply appreciative and owe our thanks. Mr. Reed was a 49 year veteran employee of the Southern Pacific Lines when he completed his book in 1941, having worked and lived at Victoria, Texas.

Other portions, especially the building of the Dal-sa Branch line was from memory, I having been employed by the Southern Pacific from July 1912 to October 1916 during the building of this line and being a member of the "Kelly Klan", would like to conclude this "history" by submitting the following article published in the May, 1957 issue of the Southern Pacific Bulletin, "137 continuous years of three generations of the Kelly family".

Three generations of service, totaling 137 years with Southern Pacific, came to a close on April 30 with the retire-

ment of H. L. Kelly, freight agent at San Antonio.

Last of the line that started with his grandfather in 1868, Mr. Kelly is justly proud of the family record and sorry that he has no children to carry on the tradition.

"Still," he says, "there'll always be Kellys working for Southern Pacific, even though they may not be directly related."

(SP's Personal Record Bureau currently lists 32 members of the clan, taking into account various spellings of the name.)

Three years after the Civil War, Confederate Veteran W. C. Kelly, who had served in the Tuskegee Light Infantry under General Robert E. Lee, decided to seek new opportunities in the West.

On the difficult trip from Alabama to Texas, Mr. Kelly, his young wife and infant son encountered bad roads, swollen streams and other difficulties. Despite their precautions, Indians stole their horses, and Willie, as Mr. Kelly was known, had to walk miles to the nearest town to buy a new team. The couple's second child was born while the family was camping near Nacogdoches.

Mrs. Kelly's brother, Cage Moore, had established a farm at San Saba, Texas, and Willie worked with him on shares for a brief period. Not caring for farming, however, he found a job with the pioneer Houston & Texas Central Railroad, now part of Southern Pacific, at Hockley, where he served as agent



for eight years.

He later served as agent at Ledbetter, Waxahachie and Manor, and in the Claim Department at Austin, retiring in 1903 with 35 years of service, during which he had seen the H&TC grow from a little isolated line into part of a great transcontinental system.

When he passed away at 79 in 1922, a newspaper account of his death stated that he had "won the respect of all railroad men who knew him, from officials down to trackmen, and the friendship of the public he served."

His son, G. E. Kelly, father of San Antonio Freight Agent H. L. Kelly, started railroading at 17. When he was 19 he was appointed agent at Manor and was the youngest station agent on our railroad at the time. He became agent at Giddings in 1890, holding this post for 48 years until his retirement in 1937. He served a total of 54 years with Southern Pacific and was regarded as the dean of station agents on our Texas and Louisiana lines. His death came in 1952, when he was 84 years old.

Learning telegraphy from his father, H. L. Kelly got his first Southern Pacific job as night operator at Giddings in July, 1909. During World War I, he served as agent at Hockley, following in his grandfather's footsteps.

He was Southern Pacific's first agent at Harlingen, when the line was built from Falfurias to Brownsville in 1927, and

he recalls that his office was in a boxcar until the station was built.

He was appointed general agent at Brownsville in 1930 and served as agent at Dallas for 13 years before transferring to San Antonio as freight agent in 1947. His retirement marked the end of 48 years of service.

In addition to his father and grandfather, H. L. Kelly has several other relatives who worked for Southern Pacific. Three of his father's brothers served as agent-telegraphers and one E. L. Kelly, still living in San Antonio, retired as a fireman. Two of his father's sisters also married Southern Pacific men. H. L. Kelly's own brother, G. L. Kelly, now an auditor in the state comptroller's office in Austin, also worked as a telegrapher for SP.

Honored at a retirement party given by his SP friends and associates, Mr. Kelly completed his working career on April 30, but his hobbies and interests will continue to keep him busy. He and Mrs. Kelly plan to spend much of their time on their ranch at Giddings, where they have a small lake well-stocked with bass and bluegills.

By: G. L. Kelly, Sr.