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PASSENGER SERVICE ON THE M.P. CENTRAL DIVISION  
by Bill Pollard

Passenger service over the Little Rock to Ft. Smith segment of the Missouri Pacific Central Division began with the completion of the Little Rock & Ft. Smith Railway in the latter part of the 19th century. An 1896 St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern timetable advises "two trains daily over the L. R. & Ft. S. Ry. connecting with Iron Mountain trains to all points at Little Rock."

By 1912, three trains were operating daily between Little Rock and Kansas City, including #119-120, the plush Kansas City-Hot Springs Express, which operated through to Hot Springs. In addition to through coaches, chair cars, a diner and several drawing room sleepers, the train carried an open-end cafe-observation between Ft. Smith and Hot Springs. Additional service along the line was provided by a local train operating north daily from Russellville to Ft. Smith and south from Russellville to Little Rock. These pairs of trains, known locally as the Slickers, were scheduled for morning arrivals in their destination cities and evening return runs to Russellville, allowing the day to be spent in either Ft. Smith or Little Rock.

In 1911, a secondary line had been completed from Denning, near Ozark, through Alix to Hartman, paralleling the original line through Altus and Coal Hill. Alix and Coal Hill were also connected by the former Lloyds branch which had been constructed in 1901-1902. At this time, only one local passenger train and the Russellville-Ft. Smith Slicker provided passenger service through Alix.

During World War I, the United States Railroad Administration discontinued the Kansas City-Hot Springs Express, and by 1919 had replaced the Russellville to Little Rock Slicker with a Spadra to Little Rock mixed train. The mixed allowed shoppers from the booming coal mine town of Spadra, near Clarksville, to spend the day in Little Rock. Only two mainline trains, both unnamed, were operating during this period.

By 1927, Missouri Pacific was operating the Rainbow Special, Nos. 117-118, and the Southerner, Nos. 115-116, between Kansas City and Little Rock. The Rainbow Special operated over a cut-off from Knoxville to Spadra (completed in the early 1920's) which bypassed Clarksville and Lamar, and carried a Monnette, Mo., to Little Rock Pullman, connecting with the Frisco at Ft. Smith. The Southerner carried a through Kansas City to New Orleans Pullman, and also an Omaha to Hot Springs sleeper. Unnamed local passenger trains Nos. 103-104 also operated between Coffeyville, Kan., and Little Rock during this period. By this time both the Spadra to Little Rock local and the Russellville to Ft. Smith Slicker steam trains had been replaced by gasoline powered motor cars. Of all this service, only the Russellville-Ft. Smith motor car operated over the line through Coal Hill, Alix and Denning.

In 1928, locals Nos. 103-104 were replaced by a daily except Sunday mixed train operating from Van Buren to Little Rock, a Sunday only local passenger train providing service on the seventh day. This same arrangement was used with the portion of Nos. 103-104 runs between Van Buren and Coffeyville. Because of the slower schedules necessary for local freight/mixed trains, it would have been impossible to ride through from Coffeyville to Little Rock on the mixed, without an overnight stay at Van Buren. Where Nos. 103-104 had been able to make the

entire Coffeyville to Little Rock run in approximately one day, it took the mixed train one day over each segment of the route, from Coffeyville to Van Buren, and from Van Buren to Little Rock.

Apparently, the above mixed train arrangement proved unsatisfactory, and as of April, 1931, the mixed had been rescheduled again as a local daily passenger train. Both the Spadra to Little Rock and the Russellville to Ft. Smith motor cars had been discontinued as economy measures forced on by the depression. Within two months after this time, service had been permanently reduced to only two trains daily: the Rainbow Special, now carrying only a Kansas City to Hot Springs sleeper (besides the usual compliment of chair cars, diner, etc.), and the Southerner, carrying a New Orleans to Kansas City sleeper.

By early 1932, all passenger trains had been rescheduled through Altus and Coal Hill, but in 1936 all were rerouted from Hartman through Alix to Ozark. The Hartman-Coal Hill-Altus line was subsequently abandoned in the spring of 1938. The Alix-Coal Hill branch survived until early 1941.

The Rainbow Special was renumbered Nos. 117-124 in June of 1937, and the Little Rock to Ft. Smith Pullman was dropped. The Southerner was renumbered Nos. 116-125, and carried a recently inaugurated Denver to New Orleans sleeper.

Before World War II, in early 1940, the diner-parlor cars were replaced by grill coaches on the Rainbow Special, a foreshadowing of things to come. About the same time, the sleeper route on the Southerner was cut back to operate only Denver to Little Rock.

The wartime traffic surge gave these trains a boost, and full dining car service was restored for the duration. However, by 1948, the Southerner had become a coach and grill coach local, and although the Rainbow Special still retained sleeper service, its meal facilities had declined to a grill coach also, which was operated only between Little Rock and Van Buren.

Effective with the 6-5-49 timetable, #116-125 became an unnamed coach only local between Little Rock and Ft. Smith, being discontinued north of that point. Within three months, even this last portion was gone. (The portion of the train from Little Rock through Monroe, La. remained in service at this time, still under the name of the Southerner.)

The curtain was slowly closing for passenger service on the Central Division. About 4-25-54, the Rainbow Special lost its final Pullman route, from Kansas City to Little Rock. On 5-30-54, the Rainbow Special, Nos. 117-124, was replaced by unnamed daytime locals Nos. 125-126.

In June of 1959, the grill coaches were removed from 125-126, leaving no meal facilities whatsoever. No meal stops were listed on the timetable, perhaps in an attempt to discourage the remaining passengers.

After this time, the equipment of the train consisted of a Railway Post Office-baggage combine, a passenger-baggage combine, and one or two coaches, all of which was heavyweight equipment. The train was usually powered by a single PA or E-7 diesel.

Finally, on October 21, 1959, Missouri Pacific announced the inevitable; a petition for discontinuance had been filed with the ICC under Section 13(a) of the then recently passed transportation act of 1958. On March 21, 1960, the ICC ruled, as expected, in favor of discontinuance. The Little Rock to Kansas City route was to become the third route in Arkansas to go "freight only" due to the notorious Section 13(a). (Passenger service on the Cotton Belt and the MP's New-

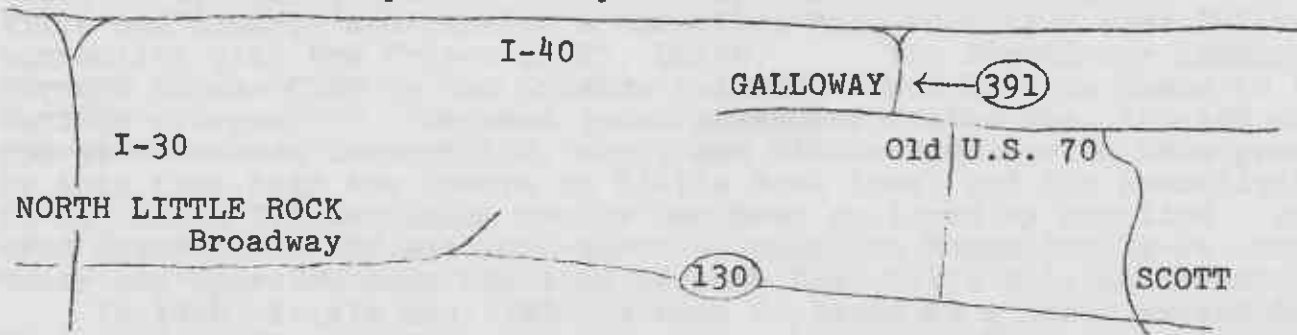
port to Kansas City local over the White River division had been the first and second casualties.)

On March 28, 1960, Nos. 125-126 rolled into oblivion, bringing the end of an era in railroad passenger service along their route. The head end crew on the final northbound run was composed of George and Lee Lamberson. Jack Kennedy and Fred Middleton were the passenger crewmen, according to Mr. Dale Ingram, a former R.P.O. clerk.

Even in their final days the trains proved immensely fascinating, especially to a boy of 9 who was privileged to ride occasionally between Little Rock and Russellville. It was quite a thrill to walk out on the concourse at Little Rock Union Station, and board the train after reading the big black sign, "No. 126 to KANSAS CITY" over gate 2 or 4. As the train left Conway, a crewman would always walk back to the electrical locker and flip on the coach lights for the short trip through the tunnel. While staying in Russellville, it became necessary to make a daily pilgrimage to the depot to see "the nine o'clock train" come south in the evenings. Shortly after the block signal north of town had turned red, the train would roll in, the Mars light on the locomotive tracing a big horizontal figure 8 in the darkness. Often one of the trainmen, the late Mark Carruthers, would walk over to visit during the brief three minute stop. Then, all too soon, the engineer would sound two short blasts and the train would glide out of the station and accelerate quickly into the darkness. Although the trains are gone, the memories will remain.

THERE WILL BE WORKING STEAM AT SCOTT FOR OUR APRIL 9 MEETING COURTESY OF THE DORTCH PLANTATION MUSEUM AND THE R. A. GRIGSBY COLLECTION

Bob Dortch and Richard Grigsby with the aid of several volunteers have been busy getting ready for our meeting there April 9. However there is still plenty of work to do. If you would like to wield a paintbrush or a spike maul in a good cause, give Bob a call. His number is 961-9226. He would especially appreciate help this Friday and Saturday before the Sunday meeting. Woodburner No. 1 will be steamed up and No. 201 is scheduled for new flues in time to be serviceable at the meeting as well. Official starting time is 1:00 p.m. Bring your own food. Soft drinks will be available. The most direct route is state highway 130. A bit longer route, but probably faster, is east on Interstate 40 to the Galloway exit, then two miles east on old U.S. 70, then south on a paved county road to Scott.



ROCK ISLAND LINES from John Martin. . . . The Rock Island has acquired about thirty F units from the Union Pacific, both A's and B's. They are being used on the Southern Division and are frequent visitors to Arkansas. One of the A units has a snowplow on the front that reaches the top headlight! The Rock also has put on two new through trains, Nos. 37-22, from Memphis to western points, and a local that does all the switching from Perry to Danville, tying up at Perry.