

ARKANSAS RAILROADER
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Little Rock & Napoleon
by Clifton E. Hull

A little Railroad in southeast Arkansas, with a most ignoble beginning, was predestined by the gods of fate to become known as the "Valley Division" of the Missouri Pacific, as we know it today. There were many facts of its youth and growth cast into the realm of oblivion, due to the neglect and the failure of the newspapers of that time to take note of the events concerning this enterprise. Nevertheless, the attempt shall be made to assemble what material there is available.

On the 12th day of January 1853, the General Assembly of the state of Arkansas passed an act incorporating the Little Rock & Napoleon Rail Road Company. Public notice was duly published in the Pine Bluff Republican newspaper, requesting the citizens of Pulaski, Jefferson, Arkansas and Desha counties, to hold meetings in their neighborhoods, to elect delegates to a convention which was to be held at Village Church, in Arkansas county. The purpose of this convention being to take initiatory steps for the organization of the company, under the charter of the Little Rock & Napoleon Rail Road. The summons was responded to by all the counties, with one exception - Pulaski. The reason for ignoring the invitation was never given.

This convention was held on April 27, 1853, commissioners were appointed. Then the convention was adjourned, to meet again on the 17th of May, 1853. At this time a resolution was passed, requesting General James Yell and Mr. B. W. Lee to secure the services of an engineer for the purpose of surveying the route. Also, books were opened to obtain subscriptions to the capital stock.

It is worthy of note that with less effort than was probably ever made on any new railroad, the magnificent sum of \$250,000 of stock was subscribed. At the same time, there was assurance given that a greatly increased subscription would be made when the books were opened again. Surprisingly, there was received the assurance of substantial aid to be given by the merchants of New Orleans, who were deeply interested in the success of this road. Pine Bluff was the trade center for the cotton-growing area of the delta country, and Napoleon was a very small and hitherto unimportant town about 65 miles southeast. With a railroad connecting these two towns, Napoleon would take on new and greater significance, for it was situated on the Mississippi River and was a port of outlet to the city of New Orleans. This would open the way for Arkansas products to the markets of the whole world.

Due notice was given and the stockholders met at Pine Bluff on the 4th of July, 1853, and elected a board of directors. On the second Monday in August, the directors met and elected the officers; they being B. W. Lee, president; R. V. McCrackin, secretary and Drew White, treasurer. Mr. Lee was, at the time he was elected president, away from the state on a visit to Virginia. Due to his absence, Governor John S. Roane was elected president pro tem, and a resolution was made and passed instructing him to secure the services of an engineer to make a preliminary survey of the proposed route. Under these instructions, Governor Roane and General Yell immediately opened correspondence with several engineers. The letter written to Mr. B. W. Lee, informing him of his election to the office of president did not reach Virginia until after he had departed on a continuance of his journey.

It finally caught up with him in Kentucky in the month of September. Immediately upon receipt of the letter, he sent a telegram to Mr. Lloyd Tilgman, at Paducah, Kentucky, and received a reply stating Mr. Tilgman's acceptance of the appointment as chief engineer of the road. This was the same man who surveyed the Mississippi, Ouachita & Red River road. At the time of Mr. Tilgman's appointment, funds were deposited in the bank at Louisville, Kentucky, for the purchase of instruments and for outfitting of the survey party. Within less than a month from the date of Mr. Tilgman's appointment as chief engineer, he had selected his survey party, organized them and made arrangements to procure the camp equipment from the Mississippi, Ouachita & Red River.

The survey party commenced work at Pine Bluff on the 19th of October, 1853, under the direction of the first assistant engineer, Mr. William M. Johnson. It was at this time suggested by Mr. B. W. Lee, that this road be connected with the proposed Little Rock & Ft. Smith road, and that be considered as one road, and should be called the "Arkansas Valley Railroad." Mr. Lee was of the opinion that the extent of the Arkansas Valley, lying between the dividing ridges of the White River and Ouachita, and the fertility of the soil, the variety of its products and the mineral deposits would give this valley railroad greater advantages than was possessed by the same extent of country anywhere upon the continent of America. This seems to be a rather broad and emphatic statement; but, at the same time, the eagerness with which these people looked forward to having the advantages of a railroad can be understood. If they were guilty of "gilding the lily", I believe they had some justification. An operating railroad was, indeed a most wonderful thing to these folks.

A railroad in this particular location would not be interfered with, so as to lessen its profits by the construction of a parallel road by a competitor. This had been done in other states, where a railroad had been found to be profitable. Thus, Mr. Lee reasoned, they were assured of a constant increase of travel and freight, without the possibility of any other road taking it away from them.

The advantages of location for a railroad was given by Mr. Lee, as follows: "...commencing at the Mississippi River, it will pass through what is now admitted to be the finest cotton lands in the South, in regards to production and staple. The country above Little Rock, when we come to the hilly part of it, is stored with a great abundance of coal, iron and lead. The water courses falling into the Arkansas River, on either side, affording an abundance of water-power for manufacturing purposes, together with a climate unsurpassed for health by any portion of the state; and upon the completion of the Arkansas Valley Road, will open a finer field for the capital and manufacturers of other states, than any other that can be found in the Union at the present day."

By casting an eye across the Mississippi River, upon examining a map, it could be seen that a connection could be made with the great Mississippi Central Railroad, passing through the richest portion of the state. It was theorized that the town of Napoleon, being the natural depot of the valley of the Arkansas, could, in a few years, become a great commercial city. With the region of the lower Arkansas Valley being destined for all time to be a cotton growing country, they would be dependant upon the products of the country along its upper reaches - bacon, lard, flour, butter, cheese, potatoes, apples, corn, etc. There was nothing to prevent the establishment of academies and colleges in the healthful springs area of northern Arkansas. Many thousands of dollars were spent outside the state for the education of the children,

which could be kept at home by building a railroad from Napoleon to Ft. Smith.

Another favorable factor was the forming of huge sandbars upstream from Pine Bluff and the resultant reduction of boat traffic on the Arkansas River. Mr. Lee and the stockholders were most anxious for the state legislature to designate Napoleon as the terminus for an eastern branch of the Cairo & Fulton Railroad. The road was to build from Cairo, Illinois to Fulton, Arkansas. If the road from Little Rock to Napoleon were made a branch of the C & F, it would share in the land grant made to the C & F by the legislature. The grant was made to the C & F and legalized by the Cairo & Fulton Railroad Act of Congress on February 9, 1853. Lands were granted to the railroad and extending a distance of 15 miles either side of the road. The Little Rock and Napoleon was not fortunate enough to receive any of the grant, though.

Mr. Lloyd Tilgman began his preliminary survey at Pine Bluff, and conceived the idea of proceeding to Napoleon by way of a straight line. The beginning point was established at the intersection of Main and Lindsey streets, and his survey line toward Napoleon had a bearing of South 66 degrees East. He continued on this line a distance of 25½ miles, to the plantation of Thomas Douglas. Here it was necessary to bear a little more to the north in securing a more suitable crossing of Cypress Creek and Oaky Wood Bayou; and to avoid the low swamp lands contiguous to these streams. Continuing about two miles, he swung again to the south, striking the projected straight line just south of General Mitchell's plantation. From there to the Mississippi River at Napoleon, there was slight variation from the contemplated air line, passing just south of Calvin Strand's place, north of Secrese's and south of Birt;s. Mr. Tilgman said the route could be considered as an air line, and the distance to be 59 miles and 940 feet, depending on the terminus location at Napoleon. The total fall from the intersection of Main and Lidnsey streets, at Pine Bluff, to the bank of the Mississippi River at Napoleon, was just 70 feet, a rate of 1.16 feet to the mile. This would be an advantage in construction cost as well as in operation. The lack of curves made it possible to use lighter rails and lighter locomotives. The greater wear upon the rails by heavy motive power, on curved lines, would be avoided and the higher annual expense of roadbed repair could be materially reduced.

Cypress Creek was crossed by a trestle of white oak timbers, readily available adjacent to the road, most securely bolted and tied with iron bolts. The channel clearance was made sufficiently large, to guard against any future contingencies. Choctaw, Oaky Woods and several smaller bayous, were crossed by small beam truss bridges of 30-foot spans. Mr. Tilgman said the real character of the line could be described by the fact that a passenger train could easily, and with complete safety, make the trip of 59 miles in one hour. The cost of construction from Pine Bluff to Napoleon was estimated to be as follows;

535,780 cu. yds. of earth from ditches @ 16¢.....	\$85,724.00
Trestle work, 2,000 ft., @ \$5.....	10,000.00
Drains, 1,000 ft., @ \$2.....	2,000.00
Bridging Timbers.....	2,100.00
Clearing & grubbing 58 miles.....	14,500.00
Total	\$114,324.00

Immediately after completing the survey to Napoleon, the party returned to Pine Bluff, to begin the route to Little Rock.

In order to avoid various obstacles, it was found necessary to head west from Pine Bluff a distance of four miles. This took the road out of the broken and low grounds bordering the river. From this point the line headed North 28 degrees West, for a distance of 18½ miles, passing near McAllister's place. From here it was necessary to bear slightly west to avoid the old river, thence heading North 7 degrees West, passing just east of Judge Campbell's. From there the line passed by way of Pennington's Mill, Lee's Ferry, Widow Rose's, McCreigh-ton's and Clark's, passing the Granite mountain, about a mile west of the road, then into the city of Little Rock, terminating in front of General Hempstead's house.

The cost of construction from Pine Bluff to Little Rock was estimated as follows:

Earthwork, 606,383 cu. yds. @ 18¢.....	\$109,148.00
Rock 3,400 " " @ \$1	3,400.00
Trestle work, 1,000 ft. @ \$5	5,000.00
Bridging & culverts.....	50,000.00
Clearing & grubbing 59 miles.....	9,750.00
	<u>\$177,298.00</u>

Pine Bluff to Napoleon.....	114,324.00
Total	<u>\$291,622.00</u>

Superstructure

79 tons "T" iron rails per mile @ \$65.....	\$ 5,135.00
2,640 cross ties @ 20¢.....	528.00
5,860 lbs. spikes @ 5¢.....	293.00
8,000 lbs. chains @ 4½¢.....	360.00
Track laying, straightening & curving iron.....	600.00
Total per mile	<u>\$ 6,916.00</u>

Locomotives & Cars

3 passenger engines, 16 tons each @ \$8,000.....	\$ 24,000.00
3 freight " 18 " " @ 9,000.....	27,000.00
1 engine for miscellaneous work.....	8,000.00
5 first class passenger cars.....	12,500.00
2 second class, emigrant cars.....	3,000.00
2 express and mail cars.....	2,600.00
50 freight cars.....	30,000.00
10 gravel cars.....	2,000.00
10 crank cars.....	1,000.00
	<u>\$109,000.00</u>

Shops & depots	100,000.00
Engineering	30,000.00
Track, including sidings & depot track	726,180.00
Grading Cost	291,622.00
Total cost of Road	<u>\$1,257,402.00</u>
Cost per mile	<u>\$ 12,669.00</u>

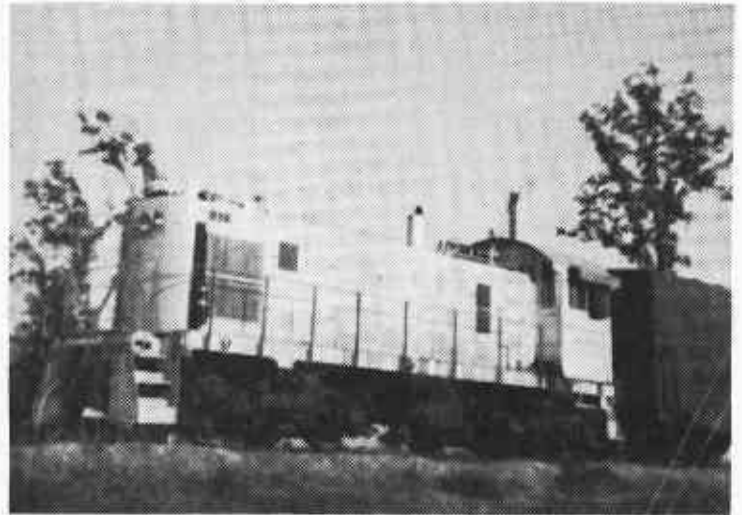
Very little work, if any, was accomplished when the rumblings of trouble were heard throughout the land. The people became jittery, then they became scared, the money situation was most precarious. Catastrophe struck the nation in the form of the Civil War.

After the war, the state found itself nearly destitute, and was unable to think much about building railroads. Finally in 1868, conditions had improved, and the bright rays of hope began to quicken the hearts and minds of the citizens.

To be continued

RAILROADING IN ARKANSAS TODAY by Wayne Porter

This Alco switcher was built in December 1940, S/N 69403. It puts in a hard day's work, five days a week, switching and spotting cars for the Nekoosa Edwards Company, Inc. paper mill at Ashdown, Ark. It was previously owned by a railroad in Wisconsin, the Kewaunee, Green Bay & Western Railroad Company. It was KGB&W No. 103.



This switch is in the Kansas City Southern yards at Ashdown, about a block north of the KCS depot. One switch stand throws all four sets of points, so regardless which way a train enters, the switch won't be hurt. The problem is knowing which way to come out. As the switch stand has no light or target, it is a puzzle for the brakeman to line the switch for the right track. Such switches are fairly common in congested big city terminals but are rare in southwest Arkansas.

READER DOUBLE-HEADER EXCURSION IS SUCCESSFUL OUTING. Our third club sponsored excursion was operated on October 29, this time pulled by Nos. 108 and 1702. The weather was poor but there were no complaints heard from the passengers. The wet rail made for some good sound effects as the locomotives sometimes lost their traction. About one hundred and twenty passengers made the trip.

NEXT ARKANSAS RAILROAD CLUB MEETING is November 12, 1972. The time is 2:00 p.m. in Room 305, Missouri Pacific Union Station, Little Rock. We will have a report on our double header as well as other features.

The ARKANSAS RAILROAD CLUB is a non-profit corporation dedicated to the furthering of interest in railroads - past, present and future. It meets the second Sunday of each month. Annual dues are \$5.00 for regular members (Arkansas residents) and \$3.00 for associate (outside Arkansas). P. O. Box 5584, Little Rock, Arkansas 72205