East Texas and the Transcontinental Railroad

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EAST TEXAS AND THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD

by Emilia Gay Means

During the 1850s, railway promoters, both North and South, projected many drawing-board routes to the Pacific Coast. However, the cost of a railroad would be so great that for a time there could be only one line. Location of the terminus thus became a subject of debate. Would it be North or South? The South, knowing that the favored section would reap rich rewards in wealth, population, and influence, and that it was losing the economic race with the North, was eager to extend a railroad through adjacent Southwestern territory to California. Jefferson Davis, as Secretary of War, arranged to have James Gadsden, prominent South Carolina railroad man, appointed Minister to Mexico. Finding Mexico in need of money, Gadsden negotiated a treaty in 1853 which ceded to the United States the Gadsden Purchase area for $10,000,000.

The Gadsden Purchase enabled the South to claim the coveted railroad with great insistence. A southern track would be easier to build. Texas was already a state, and New Mexico with the Gadsden Purchase added was a formally organized territory.

As immigrants began moving west, citizens of East Texas realized that a railroad between the thirty-second and thirty-third degrees of latitude would aid in the development of the state of Texas. In the 1850s six counties near the Red River in northeast Texas produced 50,000 bags of cotton yearly. The other forty-four counties of northeast Texas exported 50,000 head of beef cattle and 20,000 head of sheep per year. Many of these counties produced a large amount of flour which had to be hauled in wagons for a distance of 200 or 300 miles to market. To help, James D.B. DeBow of New Orleans, publisher of DeBow’s Review, urged the building of a railroad from Shreveport westward through Marshall and on to the waters of the Trinity River.1

The Texas Western Railroad Company was to be a major link in the great transcontinental southern route. This company was chartered by the state of Texas on February 16, 1852 for the purpose of building a railroad from the eastern boundary line of Texas to El Paso. The list of incorporators included Samuel Bogart, a participant in the Battle of New Orleans in 1815 and member of the Texas legislature in the 1840s and 1850s; William T. Scott of Harrison County, builder of the first church and school in the town of Scottsville and largest slaveholder in Harrison County; James Webb Throckmorton, participant in the Mexican War, member of the Texas legislature in the 1850s, practicing physician in McKinney, later congressman from Texas and governor of the state; and James C. Hill, later to serve as a Republican in the Mississippi legislature during

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Reconstruction. Others included Rufus Doane, Lucius Clopton, Willis Stewart, E.E. Lott, L.B. Camp, and J.D. Todd.²

Capital stock was divided into shares of $100 each, and no one was eligible to be a director unless he owned at least five shares of stock. A right-of-way through public lands was granted, but it was not to exceed 200 feet in width. For every mile of track completed the Texas Western would receive eight sections of land from the state of Texas. However, no land was to be donated until the company had completed ten miles of track within five years from the date of the charter. If construction had not begun within five years, or at least twenty miles had not been completed within six years, the charter would be null and void.¹

Approximately two years later, on January 30, 1854, the Texas legislature passed an act that would be of great benefit to the Texas Western. This act provided that when a railroad had constructed twenty-five or more miles of track it was entitled to receive sixteen sections of land from the state for every mile of track constructed and placed in running order. The Texas legislature passed another act on August 13, 1856, which provided that for every mile of road constructed a railroad was entitled to a loan of $6,000 from the Board of School Commissioners of Texas. Since the Texas Western was to connect with a railroad from an adjoining state it was entitled to a loan when it had built ten miles of track and had graded ten additional miles.⁴

On August 16, 1856, legislation changed the name of the Texas Western Railroad Company to the Southern Pacific Railroad Company. This act listed the following incorporators, many of whom had been affiliated with the Texas Western: Rufus Doane, James C. Hill, William T. Scott, Willis Stewart, Samuel Bogart, E.E. Lott, L.B. Camp, James W. Throckmorton, J.D. Todd, Joseph McDougal, Thomas H. Rodgers, Adam Sullivan, Joshua Starr, C.B. Holbert, Mason Mosely, and Jacob Fisher. However, the name change did not extend the time limit for the completion of twenty miles of track and did not release the company from any obligations performed under the name of Texas Western.⁵

On October 5, 1856, the stockholders met in New York and accepted the act which changed the name of the company. At this meeting the stockholders chose the board of directors for 1857, including Charles Stewart Todd, member of the Kentucky legislature in the 1820s, United States Minister to Russia in 1941, and resident of Texas in the 1850s; Horatio Allen, civil engineer from New York and active in railroad construction in that state; Richard T. Archer, planter from Fort Gibson, Mississippi; R.M. Dimond of Rhode Island; T. Butler King of Georgia; R.M. Stratton of New York; George D. Post of New York; R.J. Walker of Washington; Edwin Post of New York; Michael G. Bright of Indiana; S.F. Buttersworth of New York; W. Cook of New Jersey; William T. Schoot, M.J. Hall, J.P. Henderson, W.R.D. Ward, and J. Taylor of Texas.⁶ The next day the directors met and elected Horatio Allen of
New York as president, Edwin Post of New York as vice president, and S. Jaudon as secretary. E.A. Blanch of Marshall, Texas, was appointed as chief engineer. 7

Because of the time limit provision in the charter the Southern Pacific chose Swanson's Landing as its eastern terminus. Swanson's Landing, which was named for Peter Swanson, a civil engineer and surveyor, was located on the southern shore of Caddo Lake approximately on the Texas and Louisiana state line and was chosen because supplies for building the road could be landed there by steamboats which came up Red River and entered Caddo Lake by way of Twelve Mile Bayou. 8

The Louisiana, the first locomotive for the Southern Pacific Railroad, arrived at Swanson's Landing on July 29, 1857. Great interest was shown by the settlers who lived along Twelve Mile Bayou, as onlookers from miles around gathered at Swanson's Landing to see the machinery unloaded. Locomotives were colorful then, and the Louisiana had bright red driving wheels, an apple-green boiler jacket, a large funnel-like smokestack, a polished bell, and a long, pointed cow-catcher. The Louisiana, which weighed twenty-five tons, was built in 1854 by Richard A. Anderson's Tredegar Iron Works in Richmond, Virginia. 9

On February 11, 1858, twenty miles of track, which began at Swanson's Landing and extended through Jonesville, Texas, in the direction of Marshall, were completed and the first train of cars was placed in operation. E.A. Blanch, chief engineer of the company, and a group including C.A. Frazier, Judge of the Sixth Judicial District, passed over the line on a train of cars for an examination to make certain that the charter requirements were fulfilled. 10 On September 20, 1858, five additional miles of track were completed which extended the line almost to Marshall. 11 By the end of 1858 the rolling stock of the company consisted of two locomotives and five platform cars. 12

During 1859 the Southern Pacific completed the building of warehouses and cotton sheds at points along the line and a wharf and warehouse at Swanson's Landing, where connections were made with steamboat lines. A new locomotive had been ordered and enough iron was owned to construct an additional twenty-five miles of track. 13

The trip on combined freight and passenger trains from Swanson's Landing to the terminus near Marshall took two hours. In May 1860, a group of about eighty ladies and gentlemen from Marshall boarded the cars in the morning for a day of fishing, boating, and dancing at Swanson's Landing. On the way they were joined by twenty or thirty others at Scottsville and other points along the line. The railroad was reported in excellent order. A new passenger car, which was built in the company's shops at an approximate cost of $1,000, had just been placed on the track and was described as large, elegant, and beautifully painted with nicely
cushioned seats. The Sam Houston, the new locomotive, had arrived by this time.\textsuperscript{14}

During 1860 the railroad built an additional wharf which extended far out into the water at Swanson’s Landing where steamboats could unload freight without difficulty. Only the new locomotive, the Sam Houston, was in running order however, the other two, the Ashuelot and Louisiana, both old and in disrepair, were out of service.

In 1861 the effects of the Civil War on the Southern Pacific railroad came clearly into view. The number of miles run by the company’s trains increased because of the numbers of troops and supplies being moved in the area. However, as with most railroads operating in the Confederacy, the Southern Pacific transported supplies and troops free of charge. For this year the equipment remained about the same - five freight cars in good condition and the Sam Houston in constant use.\textsuperscript{16}

On September 6, 1861, the Southern Pacific Railroad Company was reorganized. The stock was divided into shares of $100 each, and shares of a former stockholder were to be acknowledged unless he had aided the enemies of the Confederacy. Officers were: James S. Holman, a Houston businessman, president; A.T. Smith, a resident of Texas, secretary; E.A. Blanch, a resident of Marshall who later served in the Confederate Army in Virginia, chief engineer; and Charles E. Hynson of Texas, superintendent. All officers and stockholders were residents of Texas. Stockholders were: John M. Waskom, for whom Waskom, Texas was named; Robert W. Loughery, owner of the \textit{Texas Republican}, a Marshall newspaper; Pendleton Murrah, resident of Harrison County, former member of the Texas legislature and later to serve as Confederate governor of Texas from 1863 until 1865; Benjamin Long, a lawyer from Rusk County; Joseph Field, a participant in the Texas Revolution and author of \textit{Three Years in Texas}, published in 1836; George B. Adkins, C.B. Gregg, and A. Pope.\textsuperscript{17}

In 1862 the engineer of the Southern Pacific submitted a report to the Board of School Commissioners of Texas that described the condition of the twenty-five miles of existing track. The gauge was five and one-half feet in width, the iron was either English or American T-rail weighing fifty-eight pounds per lineal yard, the cross ties were either post oak or cypress, and most of the culverts and bridges were constructed of timber because suitable stone was not available. With the idea of joining the Vicksburg, Shreveport, and Texas Railroad at the Louisiana state line, the company had graded and bridged a line for a distance of five and ninetenths miles beginning at the Jonesville, Texas, depot and continuing eastward towards Shreveport. A connection with Shreveport would be most valuable.\textsuperscript{18}

With the approach of 1863, Swanson’s Landing was losing the riverboat traffic because there was no longer a reason to ship goods there. It became an inconvenience to load supplies and materials at Marshall, ship
them sixteen miles to Jonesville, Texas, where the tracks turned northward to Swanson's Landing, and take them off and reload them on wagons for Shreveport.

During the year ending in May 1863, the amount of freight transported by the company's trains was reduced because of the decrease in commerce on the Red River. Only a few steamboats made the trip up the river, and those that did usually terminated their voyages at Shreveport. Goods shipped in wagons from Shreveport westward would continue on that means of transportation since it was an inconvenience to reship them by train for fifteen miles and then reload them on wagons. After the capture of New Orleans by federal troops the amount of freight carried eastward by the company's trains was reduced because the Marshall area was deprived of a market. In order to avoid the inconvenience of transshipment the Confederate Army transported its provisions and supplies by wagons completely rather than by railroad. Passengers were affected also by the inconvenience of traveling partly by train and partly by stage. In May 1863, Arthur Fremantle, author of *Three Months in the Southern States: April-June, 1863*, traveled from the west to Marshall and arrived at 3:00 A.M. He boarded the Southern Pacific train the next morning at 7:00 A.M. and journeyed for sixteen miles. He changed to another stage and reached Shreveport at 3:00 P.M.

In an attempt to connect Shreveport and Marshall by rail the Southern Pacific Railroad Company leased from the Vicksburg, Shreveport, and Texas Railroad for twenty years the portion of its line from Shreveport westward to the Texas state line. Previously the Vicksburg, Shreveport, and Texas had procured enough iron for laying the track for this distance; however, the Confederate government seized the iron rails to construct gunboats and casemate batteries at Gordon's Landing near Shreveport.

In the summer of 1863 Lieutenant General E. Kirby Smith, commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, ordered the Southern Pacific to connect its railroad with Shreveport as a military necessity. In August 1863, the company proceeded to take up that portion of the track extending from Swanson's Landing to Jonesville, Texas, a distance of twelve miles, and relay the track from Jonesville toward Shreveport. To enable the company to carry out the order, Kirby Smith furnished it 200 laborers, a number of overseers, rations, and mule teams. By May 1864, eleven miles of track had been laid which extended the line to Greenwood, Louisiana. The distance between Greenwood and Shreveport was graded and ready for the iron to be laid. The company already possessed enough iron to lay an additional five miles of track, and the Confederate government was preparing to bring a sufficient number of rails to complete the track to Shreveport from the Ouachita River. Two previous attempts had been made by Kirby Smith to bring the rails to Shreveport, but each time his forces were prevented by the approach of the enemy to Alexandria, Louisiana, and the occupancy by them of Harrisonburg and Trinity on the
Ouachita River. Because of the lack of iron, most of the laborers were discharged temporarily. However, the Confederate government and the Southern Pacific Railroad Company seemed to have little doubt that the connection with Shreveport would soon be completed.  

After the surrender of Kirby Smith's army, Edmund R.S. Canby, Brigadier General, United States Army, ordered the connection completed. However, he had to cancel the order because the Union force in northeastern Texas was diminished by the discharge of volunteer troops. At the end of the war the company had the same amount of rolling stock as it had earlier except that it had acquired an additional locomotive of twenty-two tons capacity from the Vicksburg, Shreveport, and Texas Railroad.

In 1866 the Southern Pacific owned three engines, one passenger car, two box cars, three platform cars, and five construction cars. Two new passenger cars had been ordered from Louisville, Kentucky. Strenuous efforts were made to complete the track between Shreveport and Marshall. In May 1866, the steamer Alabama brought to Shreveport 480 bars of iron, 163 bundles of railroad chairs (fastenings), sixty-seven kegs of spikes, and 120 laborers to work on the line. A contract was made with the firm of Taylor and Abney to furnish 20,000 cross ties. Colonel John M. Waskom, president, estimated that the connection with Shreveport and Red River would give the company a profitable business.

The track between Shreveport and Marshall was completed on July 28, 1866, and on the next day approximately 150 to 200 Shreveport citizens boarded the cars and made the journey to Marshall. The group included a full car of representatives from the Caddo Gazette and the Shreveport News. All of the visitors to Marshall seem to have had a delightful time traveling over the new railroad, but favorable reports were not to continue for any length of time.

Sources report unfavorably on the physical condition of the Southern Pacific during the period of operation following the completion of the connection from Marshall to Shreveport. T.H. Hallinquist, state engineer of Texas, in a report dated February 21, 1867, described the general condition of the railroad. Hallinquist stated that the cross ties were in bad condition, and many of them were so rotten that the weight of trains had broken them in the middle. Of the three locomotives owned by the company, only one was in operation at the time, and fourteen of its flues (fire tubes) were plugged so that not more than one-third of its power could be exerted. The rolling stock consisted of two passenger cars, two box cars, and seven flat cars. The trains ran with great irregularity, and the duration of the trip could only be conjectured. There were many complaints from citizens in the area that the railroad was of no service to anyone. Many considered it a nuisance. The railroad had expelled the wagons from the route but had not taken their places. Hallinquist advocated that the state take possession of the railroad.
Others substantiated Hallinquist's report. Alfred Flournoy, a resident of Greenwood, Louisiana, rode the Southern Pacific train in 1867. The passenger car was "a box car with benches for seats." The Jay Bird, the engine, burned willow wood for fuel, had no spark arrester, and coughed out large cinders. The passengers were "lucky that the train did not catch on fire."30

Theodor Kirchhoff, a German traveler in 1867, described the Southern Pacific Railroad as the "worst in the world." Kirchhoff wrote:

...after we waited in the coach for almost an hour after the scheduled departure time, the locomotive 'Ben Johnson' announced itself with a cowhorn-like howl and hooked itself in front of the train. In a nearby tavern the engineer and fireman poured another swallow of whiskey behind the tie and lit their short clay pipes. ...In the coach the whiskey bottles made the rounds... The passengers fell into joyful excitement - when suddenly an ominous crash sounded beneath us and the coach. After a few vigorous jumps the coach came to a stop which mixed up passengers, trunks, valises... Thank God no one was hurt... It was afternoon. The passengers, after drinking whiskey, made offensive remarks about the conductor and other officials of the renowned 'Southern Pacific Railroad'... An oxwagon was stopped at the side of the road... The driver of the oxwagon made the friendly offer to the conductor to let him hitch his oxen to the train, and they would get to Shreveport quicker. The conductor... challenged the oxdriver to a duel. The fight was ended... the victor challenged everyone who was a friend of the railway to a duel. ...the train ran off the track and broke in the middle... the passenger car with the 'Jay Bird' was in the back... At nine o'clock at night we reached Shreveport... We made forty English miles in exactly forty hours.31

With such reports as above, it comes as no surprise that 1868 produced the lowest rate of return for the entire postwar period of operation.32 By 1868 earnings showed some improvement, and the number of miles run by trains increased. Four engines were owned, and the rolling stock consisted of twelve box cars, fifteen platform cars, and two passenger cars. During this year the company had placed an emphasis on improving the safety of the track from Marshall to Shreveport by placing approximately 25,000 new cross ties on the line. Efforts were made to extend the line a short distance west of Marshall. Twelve hundred tons of iron rails had been purchased, and contracts had been made for obtaining cross ties and for performing the work of bridging and grading the extension.33

By 1870 the track was extended fourteen miles west of Marshall, and the town of Hallville developed at the end of the line. Here the Southern Pacific located its shops and began building its own freight and passenger cars. Efforts were underway to extend the track further west, and 500 men were at work between Hallsville and Earpsville, ten miles west.14

By 1872, the last year of independent operations, the Southern Pacific had extended its tracks from Shreveport to Longview, Texas, for a total
of sixty-six miles which once completed had brought a profitable freight and passenger business.

The period of operation previous to and, during the time of the Confederacy, was financially unsuccessful for the Southern Pacific Railroad. In the first two years of operation, 1858 and 1859, the railroad lost $5,955.57 and $12,204.00. In the three years 1860, 1861, and 1862 the company was able to earn a slight profit of $5,712.88, $2,296.69, and $14,650.19 respectively. However, when steamboats began to decrease their number of journeys to Swanson’s Landing in 1863 the Southern Pacific suffered a loss of $20,174.56. In 1864 and 1865 the cost of attempting to complete the construction of a line between Shreveport and Marshall increased the company’s loss to $33,985.54 and $37,800.86 respectively. In spite of its reputation as the “world’s worst railroad,” between the years 1866 and 1872 the railroad never failed to earn a good profit and was a most rewarding business. In 1866 net income amounted to $142,090.74. Net income increased to $200,208.98 in 1867 but decreased to $45,608.70 in 1868. In 1869 income increased to $60,000, with a huge increase to $252,013.52 in 1870. During 1871 the net income of the Southern Pacific amounted to $317,884.81, the largest amount in its entire history, and in 1872, the last year of operation, net profit came to $288,655.74.

On March 21, 1872, the Southern Pacific Railroad was consolidated with the Texas Pacific Railroad Company. The Texas and Pacific paid $3,000,000 for all of the franchises, track, road bed, lands, buildings, rolling stock, engines, and property. The Texas and Pacific assumed the floating debt of the Southern Pacific, not in excess of $700,000, and the debt to the state of Texas, not to exceed $250,000.

The Texas and Pacific Railroad Company was chartered by the United States Congress on March 3, 1871, for the purpose of constructing a railroad along the thirty-second parallel beginning at Marshall, Texas, continuing to El Paso, Texas, and terminating at San Diego, California.

The Texas and Pacific immediately began efforts to materialize the Southern Pacific’s dream of a transcontinental railroad. By August 1873 the Texas and Pacific inaugurated service between Dallas and Longview. In the July 20, 1876 issue of the Fort Worth Daily Democrat the editor wrote:

At last the day has come - Yesterday morning at 23 minutes past 11:00, Engine No. 20 of the Texas and Pacific Railroad uttered its shrill scream within the corporate limits... carrying joy to many anxious hearts who have waited long and patiently for the sounds that reverberated through the hills and valleys around the beautiful city of Fort Worth.

No additional mileage was added to the line during 1877, 1878, or 1879.

In January 1880, Jay Gould was elected a director of the Texas and
Pacific Railroad Company. With General Granville M. Dodge as chief engineer, the steel rail of progress moved westward. Weary of struggle, Thomas Scott, Texas and Pacific president, sold out to Jay Gould.

Thus ensued a westward race to build track on the part of Gould's Texas and Pacific from Fort Worth and Collis P. Huntington's Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio westward from San Antonio and eastward from El Paso. Ninety miles east of El Paso the construction crews of the Texas and Pacific met the eastward building crews of Huntington's railroad on December 16, 1881. Fortunately for the safety of the lives and limbs of the rival crews, Jay Gould and Collis P. Huntington previously had reached an agreement which eased the tension under which the crews were building.

While the rail race was going on, Gould and Huntington were fighting in the courts. The Texas and Pacific, which had surveyed and located its line all the way to the Pacific Coast, claimed that Huntington's California based Southern Pacific was building eastward from San Diego on its right of way, and brought suit in the Federal Court in New Mexico. The Southern Pacific brought suit against the Texas and Pacific in Arizona. Finally, in New York on November 26, 1881, the men signed an agreement which settled their differences. The Texas and Pacific agreed to release, relinquish, and convey to Huntington's Southern Pacific all of its properties west of El Paso under the charter of March 3, 1871. Gould must have thought he would fare better with Huntington as a friendly connection. Thus the Texas and Pacific was stopped short of its transcontinental railroad, but the tiny Southern Pacific of East Texas became a link in the system from Shreveport to El Paso and on to San Diego by way of Collis P. Huntington's Southern Pacific.

This tiny East Texas railroad is now a part of the first transcontinental railroad system - the great Union Pacific, completed with such great ceremony and a telegraph message to the entire country on May 10, 1869. The same three railroads - Texas and Pacific, Missouri Pacific, and Union Pacific, which were once under control of the ruthless and disliked Jay Gould, are now part of the Union Pacific Corporation. The merger between Missouri Pacific, parent of Texas and Pacific, and Union Pacific occurred on December 22, 1982.

NOTES

5Charter and Other Legislation, pp. 27-28.


"Blanch to Archer," February 11, 1858, Dewey A. Somdal Collection, Shreveport, Louisiana; Blanch to Houston, January 23, 1860, Railroad Papers, Box VI, Texas State Library Archives, Austin, Texas.

Anderson to Davis, January 23, 1872, Railroad Papers, Box VII, TSLA, Austin.

"Fowlkes and Wiley to Comptroller of Texas," October 1, 1858, Railroad Papers, Box VI, TSLA, Austin.

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Deed of Consolidation for the Texas Pacific Railroad Co. with the Southern Pacific Railroad Co., Railroad Papers, Box VII, TSLA, Austin.
J. B. Shores, From Ox Teams to Eagles; A History of the Texas and Pacific Railway (Dallas, 1946), pp. 28-30.