



COTTON BELT RAIL HISTORICAL SOCIETY TYLER TAP CHAPTER SEPTEMBER 2014 NEWSLETTER



The Gang Car Project

Brandon Muckelroy's mother has a friend in Lufkin, TX that had a Texas & New Orleans Fairmont A5-ZU Motorcar buried in a field on her farm. She was more than happy to donate the car to the Museum if it could be removed from the mud. Brent

Muecke, Shane Murphy, and Brandon spent the better part of a day rescuing the car and bringing it to Tyler. The "Crew" are working on restoring it for display and, if possible, putting it back on the rails someday.

Manufacturer	Model	Years of Manufacture	Number Made	Length	Weight	Wheelbase	Wheel Size	Capacity (Persons)	Engine(s)	Transmission(s)
Fairmont	A5-ZU	1935-1945	183	104"	1600'	44"	16" stamped steel	9	Waukesha ICK 4cyl L	Warner T-9 4sp fwd/rev



Stuck in the mud.



Back in the sunshine



Ready to go to Tyler



The crew.



Stripped to the basics



Working on the engine



Axels and differential



Supervisors

Cotton Belt's Texarkana to Corsicana Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) Panel Has Returned to Tyler

Glenn Wilkins and Shane Murphy went up to Pine Bluff and picked up the CTC panel that was used by the Cotton Belt to control trains from Texarkana to Corsicana. Thanks go to the folks in the Arkansas Railroad Museum for their help in preparing the unit for the trip back to Tyler.

The Cotton Belt, never a double-track road, realized that one of the most important factors in expediting trains, and thus giving better service, was the centralized traffic control program. In 1956 the Cotton Belt completed, at a total cost of \$5 million, the program begun in 1941, and as of 1957 operated over 752 miles of signal-protected track from St. Louis, Missouri, to Corsicana, Texas.





Centralized traffic control is an electronic system of signals to control train movement. Train wheels act as contacts in an electrical track circuit to

actuate signals and indicate exact location of all trains. The electric impulses light lamps on a track model board located in the dispatcher's office. Seated at his board he can control train movements for hundreds of miles. By flipping levers and pushing buttons on the panel before him, the dispatcher opens and closes railroad switches, shunts slow trains on to sidings, and expedites the meeting of trains running in opposite

directions on the same track. With centralized traffic control a single-track railroad is able to handle up to 80 per cent more traffic with greater speed, efficiency and safety.



The plans are: 1) to cosmetically restore the panel; 2) restore the function to the relays; 3) replace the lights with LED bulbs; and 4) install automation to simulate a train, or trains, moving through the routes.

MOTORCAR TRIP ON THE COTTON BELT by Shane Murphy Tyler, TX

In late June I received a phone call from a fellow Cotton Belt Rail Historical Society member Brent Muecke "Hey Shane" he asked, "Would you like to make a motorcar run with me on July 5th?" After answering in the affirmative, Brent sent me an email detailing the trip on the Blacklands Railroad, between Greenville and Mt. Vernon. Not only would this be a good long trip but would also be on former Cotton Belt tracks which saw passenger trains #1 and #2 the Lone Star (Memphis-Dallas) # 5 & #6 The Morning Star (St. Louis - Dallas) , and super hot named freight trains like the Dallas Streak

After a safety meeting with our host Myron Malone, we sped off towards Commerce. The track is mostly jointed 39 ft rail



sections making for that familiar clickety-clack sound and the wheels pass over each rail joint. We did encounter one section of welded rail which made for a smooth quiet ride, but most of the trip was over

old rail on rotten ties. Blacklands Railroad puts a speed restriction of 10 MPH for their trains on this line. While most of the railroad is quite rough, the bridge sections have been worked on and are well maintained.

We traveled as a group at a nice pace, keeping a safe distance between our car and the car in front of us, and made Commerce in about an hour.

We arrived in sleepy Commerce almost without being noticed by the local population on this Saturday morning. It is hard to believe that Commerce was once home to a steam locomotive roundhouse and fueling facility, a large freight car sorting yard,



We met early on July 5th in Canton and rode together to Greenville, unloading Brent's motorcar at the empty site of Greenville's former Cotton Belt station. Brent's motorcar is a model

MT19 A3 built by the Fairmont Railway Motors of Fairmont, Minnesota. It was purchased by Union Pacific RR, assigned UPRR #MT-2497 and shipped to Grand Island, Nebraska in 1984. The car has a 20 HP two cylinder, air cooled Onan gasoline engine with a Fairmont two speed forward and reverse transmission. The brakes are mechanical along with a factory installed hydraulic turntable which enables the unit to be turned around on the track and travel the other direction. These small motorcars were used by track workers and track inspectors to make quick and nimble runs on the railroad for track maintenance purposes, while easily getting out of the way of the big fast trains.



and a busy passenger depot. At one time, trains from Dallas, Fort Worth, Sherman, Paris, and Mt Pleasant all met at Commerce, and was a beehive of activity day and night. It is all

gone now, save for a small brick freight house and a few weed filled tracks. On one of these side tracks we encountered a string of brand new gondola cars, probably earning storage fees for the Blacklands Railroad.

After carefully crossing a couple of busy highways, we rattled on towards Sulphur Springs, crossing many creeks on old wooden trestles. The railroad dipped and curved much more as we got closer to Sulphur Springs. After about two hours of running we arrived at the Sulphur Springs Cotton Belt depot, now the home office of Blacklands Railroad. Upon arrival we were met by a hopper car being unloaded into a semi-trailer with a hose blocking our passage further towards Mt.

Pleasant. Since we were the guest of Blacklands RR, and the execution of the unloading in front of us was a paying customer, we were forced to end our eastward run and head back to Greenville.



While the other cars were turned around using brute strength of its occupants, we raised Brent's motorcar using his hydraulic lift, easily spun the car in the opposite direction, and then gently lowered it back down on the rail. One of the motorcars in our group, a beefy A5 gang car, took 5 men to turn it about.

After checking out our equipment, off we went back westbound. Brent safely operated our motorcar back towards Greenville in the left hand seat, while I daydreamed, in the right hand seat, that I was in charge of a high stepping 4-6-0 oil burning steam engine with chrome cylinder heads, polished rods, Scullin disk drive wheels, and a cast bronze Cotton Belt plaque on the valve chests, hurrying my iron steed with an oversold compliment of passenger cars in tow, for an on time arrival in Dallas. Back to reality, we arrived in Commerce

again and took a break for lunch at the local Braums Ice Cream store, parking our motorcars on the Hwy 11 bridge.



After a nice meal and good company, we made a dash for the final leg to Greenville, across the black gumbo clay that made Greenville

a hotbed for cotton growing and supported the Cotton Belt railroad by shipping cotton bales by the trainload. We cut through creek beds of oak and pecan hardwoods that supplied the local timber industries, but today only serve to keep us shaded and cool and we scooted westward.

We finally pulled into the former station site at Greenville and loaded our motorcars on their respective trailers, bid farewell to our fellow railway motorcar enthusiasts, and headed back home. It was a great day to be a Cotton Belt rail fan.



James P. Douglas, Founder of Tyler Texas' Two Railroads: The Cotton Belt and Kansas and Gulf Short Line

DOUGLAS, JAMES POSTELL (1836–1901). James Postell Douglas, Confederate artillery officer, the oldest son of Alexander and Margaret Tirzah (Cowsar) Douglas, was born near Lancaster, South Carolina, on January 7, 1836. He moved with his family to Talladega, Alabama, in 1838 and to Texas in 1847. In January 1848 the Douglas and Cowsar families settled at Tyler, where Douglas attended such public schools as were available. Generally, however, he was self-educated; he learned Latin with the aid of a neighbor in Talladega. Among his earliest jobs was delivery of the mail from Shreveport, Louisiana, to

Nacogdoches, Texas. When his father died in 1854, the seventeen-year-old became head of the Douglas household, served as principal of the Tyler Male Academy by day, and read law at night. Although licensed to practice law, he purchased a half interest in and edited the Tyler *Reporter*, now the Tyler *Courier Times*, in 1859.

With the outbreak of the Civil War Douglas was commissioned by Col. Elkanah Greer to raise a fifty-man company in Smith County to man half a field artillery battery to be attached to

Greer's Third Texas Cavalry. Douglas was commissioned first lieutenant and named second in command of the battery on June 13, 1861. He was promoted to captain and commander in July 1862. The battery was variously known as the First Texas Battery, the Dallas Light Artillery, the Good-Douglas Battery, and Douglas's Battery, and became the only unit of Texas artillery to serve east of the Mississippi River. Douglas's battery was paroled at Mobile, Alabama, on May 12, 1865, and Douglas returned to Tyler.

He resumed his work with the *Tyler Reporter* and in 1870 was elected to the Senate of the Twelfth Texas Legislature, where he was noted for his anti-Reconstruction attitude and activities. He was the organizer and first president of the Texas branch of the Cotton Belt Railroad, the so-called Tyler Tap, which was later sold to Jay Gould. Douglas was also instrumental in the establishment of the Texas and St. Louis and the Kansas and Gulf Short Line railroads.

As a planter, he was greatly interested in agricultural experimentation and owned a large peach orchard, said to be the first in East Texas. He owned a chain of canning factories, the first in Tyler, to market produce from his farms. When Major Douglas became interested in the fruit industry, he naturally looked for some faster means of shipping this commodity outside the production area.

In 1870, he petitioned the Twelfth Legislature of Texas to pass a special act of incorporation granting to him and others the right to locate, construct, own, operate, and maintain a railroad, with a single or double track, for a distance not exceeding 40 miles from Tyler to connect with some other railroad, to be selected by the directors. The legislature granted his request on December 1, 1871. This railroad became the Tyler Tap.

The actual construction of the Tyler Tap evidently began sometime in the summer of 1875. One year later, in 1876, the grading was completed to one mile north of Sandy Switch (now Big Sandy, Texas), a station on the Texas and Pacific Railroad, in Upshur County, making a little over twenty-two miles in length. Another road gang had graded a continuous roadbed between Mt. Pleasant and Tyler, Texas. At this particular time the gauge to be used was in doubt. Financial difficulties determined that a three-foot gauge would be more in proportion to the money available.

The actual date the road was put into operation was October 1, 1877. In that year General U. S. Grant had stepped down and Rutherford B. Hayes had just been inaugurated president of the United States. Alexander Graham Bell only a year before had invented a device called the telephone. The South was in the grip of a great depression. There was only one mile of siding

and yard track, which was enough to operate the limited equipment. This equipment included one passenger car and sixteen freight cars. The passenger train schedule called for a round trip each day. Iron rails weighing between thirty and thirty-five pounds laid on new cross ties constituted the first track. In the fall of 1878, the grading reached Mt. Pleasant, but no rail had been laid north of Big Sandy at the time the road was reorganized into the Texas and St. Louis Railway Company.

During the entire life of this little railroad, it remained strictly a community enterprise, built by local capital, augmented by state, and officered and manned by local people. From the very outset, it became an essential part of the economic life of the communities through which it passed. Every person along the line had a direct interest in its welfare. Conceived as a relief for the stagnant trade conditions, it gave new impetus to Tyler and the surrounding vicinity of East Texas.

On May 17, 1879, the Texas and St. Louis Railway Company was organized with James P. Douglas as President. Originally, the purpose of the Texas and St. Louis was to operate as a feeder to the Iron Mountain, using the Tyler Tap beginning at Texarkana and extending to Waco, Texas, a distance of 266 miles.

Douglas had become interested in another railroad, the Kansas and Gulf Short Line, which proposed to build from Tyler to Lufkin. When J. P. Douglas relinquished his position as president of the Texas and St. Louis Railway Company in 1880, he immediately organized this company in order to give Tyler a direct outlet to the Gulf. Most of the men who helped him build the Tyler Tap became subscribers to the stock of this new enterprise. Incorporated under the laws of Texas on February 18, 1880, it was given the right to construct a line from Tyler south to Sabine Pass, Texas, on the Gulf of Mexico.



The successful completion of these two railroads was due to the combined financial and constructive ability of Major James P. Douglas. Representing not the classical example of early American railroad builders such as Gould, Huntington, or Scott, he sacrificed personal gain for community service. By reviewing his life, we can understand why the Cotton Belt started out on a firm foundation.

Tyler Area Model Railroaders

Tyler area model train enthusiasts are invited to meet every second Tuesday of each month at the Cotton Belt Depot Museum.

Time: 7:00 PM

Address: 210 E. Oakwood Street, Tyler, TX

Additional info: phone or text Shane Murphy 817-888-5421