Ann and Lee Lawrence East Texas History Series

Volume No. 6

STEAM IN THE PINES:

A History of the Texas State Railroad



By

Jonathan K. Gerland

EAST TEXAS HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Jonathan K. Gerland, STEAM IN THE PINES: A HISTORY OF THE TEXAS STATE RAILROAD (Nacogdoches: East Texas Historical Association, 2004)

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Ann and F. Lee Lawrence

Cover Photo: *Engine 300 returns its train to the Rusk station on the afternoon of March 15, 2003. Temple Industries of Diboll donated the 83-ton 1917 Baldwin 2-8-0 type to the State Railroad in 1972.* Photo by the author.

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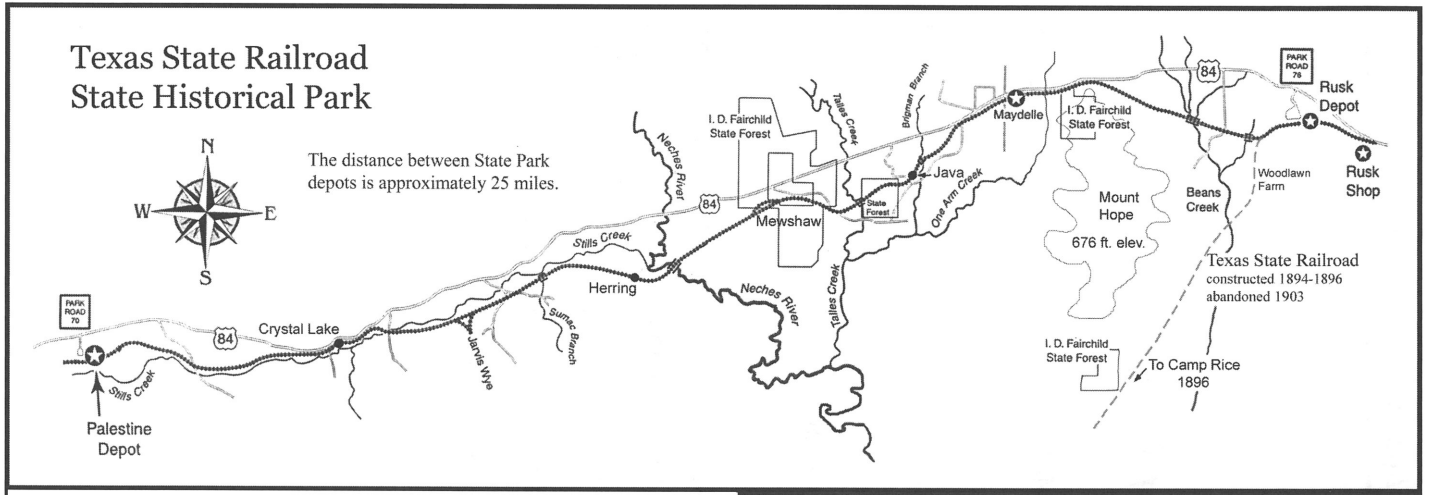
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Table of Contents

Introduction by Archie P. McDonald.....5
Acknowledgements.....7
An Unlikely Beginning.....9
Making Tracks.....13
A New Start Under Governor Hogg.....16
New Life Again.....23
State Railroad Operations 1909-1921.....31
The White Elephant Railroad 1909-1921.....39
The Lease Years 1921-1969.....44
Tourist Railroad and State Park 1970-2004.....49
A Note on the Sources.....65

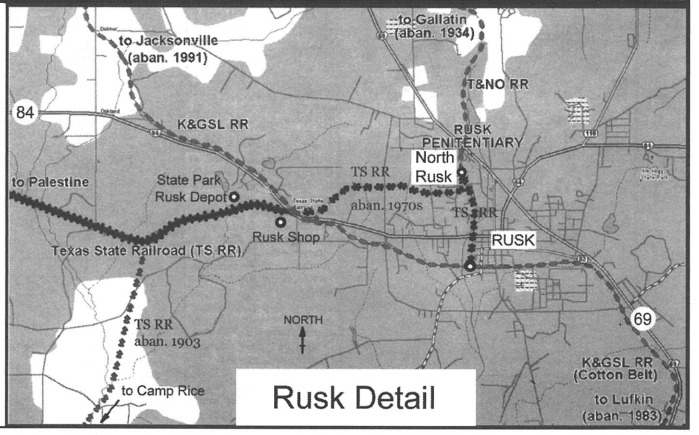
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Texas State Railroad
Mainline Construction and Abandonment



1882-1883 constructed 1.3 miles between Rusk and North Rusk.
1893-1896 constructed approx. 9 miles between North Rusk and Camp Rice.
1903 abandoned approx. 6 miles between Camp Rice and Woodlawn.
1903-1904 constructed approx. 6 miles between Woodlawn and Camp Searcy Baker, renamed Wright in 1907 and Maydelle in 1909.
1907-1909 constructed 22 miles between Wright (or Maydelle) and the city of Palestine.
1970s abandoned 2.1 miles between Rusk Shop and North Rusk and 1.3 miles between North Rusk and Rusk.



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Introduction

Comes now Volume VI in the Ann and Lee Lawrence East Texas History Series. The vision, and resources, for the series came from F. Lee Lawrence, one of the founders of the East Texas Historical Association. Lee had spent many evenings in hotel rooms while lawyering in East Texas and his inquiring mind always wanted to know about the history of his host city. Usually, nothing was available to quench his curiosity. So he and Ann endowed this series to make available site-specific monographs about various historical locations in East Texas.

Previous publications in the series include Fred Tarpley's *Jefferson: East Texas Metropolis*; Robert W. Glover's *Camp Ford: Tyler, Texas C.S.A.;* Gail K Beil's and Tom Watson McKinney's *The Texas and Pacific Depot in Marshall*; Theresa Kurk McGinley's *Just A Whistle Stop Away, The History of Old Town Spring*; and John and Betty Oglesbee's *San Augustine: A Texas Treasure*. All except *Camp Ford* remain in print.

Jonathan Gerland directs activities at The History Center, located in Diboll. One of the Center's most obvious artifacts is an old steam engine. Gerland and trains go together naturally, and in *Steam In The Pines* he provides the thousands of visitors who ride the Texas State Railroad from Rusk to Palestine and back annually an opportunity to learn more about the history of the line. From beginnings with the Texas prison once located in Rusk to a working line during the heart of the twentieth century, the Texas State Railroad now carries visitors back in time to a slower method of travel and a vastly different way of life. *Steam In the Pines* is their ticket to an even broader learning experience.

Archie P. McDonald
Director, East Texas Historical Assoc

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Mounted in the cab and leaning out the window in timeless fashion, steam engineer William J. Morrison scans the track ahead of Texas State Railroad Engine 500, a 1911 Baldwin 138-ton 4-6-2 Pacific, in 1981. Photo courtesy of The History Center, Diboll.

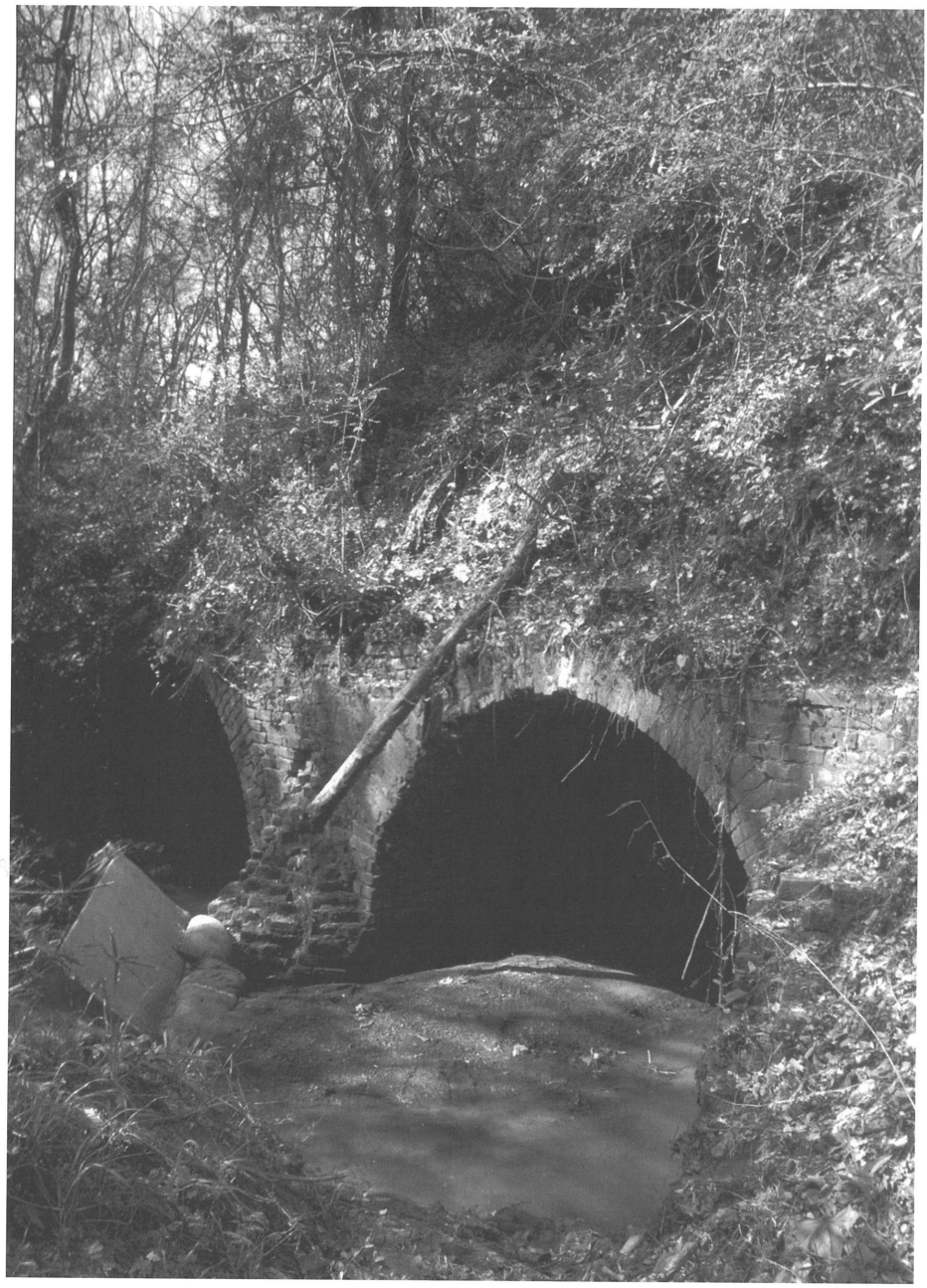
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Acknowledgements

This history would not have been possible without the help of many friends. I would like to thank foremost George Werner of Katy, perhaps the dean of Texas railroad historians, who not only provided encouragement but unselfish research assistance throughout the project. Also providing essential support was Joe Dale Morris of Austin, who kindly took me to dinner one evening in Austin after having only spoken with me once by telephone. Providing professional and friendly access to valuable state records were Donaly Brice, John Anderson, and Laura Saegert of the Texas State Archives. Donald Walker of Texas Tech University provided encouragement in addition to a requested copy of a rare publication. Grady Singletary of Alto was a tremendous help in sharing his knowledge of local history and donating related photographs to The History Center in Diboll, where I work. John Charles of Tomball, Paul Culp of Sam Houston State University, and Louis Landers of The History Center, each assisted me in several important ways. Appreciation as well as gratitude goes to all past and present staff of the Texas State Railroad, especially Curtis Pruett, Blair Lavell, Ed McLaughlin, Robert Crossman, Danny Byrd, Bill Langford, and Mark Price, who were always willing to help me. I also thank William "Mr. Jay" Morrison of Lufkin and Cloyce Reinhardt of Corrigan, who aided me in this project in so many ways. Special thanks go to Carol Riggs of the Texas Forestry Museum and Archie P. McDonald of the East Texas Historical Association for suggesting this project to me, and also Mark Barringer of the East Texas Historical Association for providing much appreciated editorial assistance. Lastly, and certainly not least, I am indebted to my wife Jill and son Joseph for enduring my many absences from home and family in pursuit of this book.

Jonathan K. Gerland

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The Texas State Railroad's original prison spur crossed One Eye Creek in 1882 as shown here in March 2002. The abandoned roadbed is about twelve feet above the bottom of the creek, which still drains through these two ancient brick culverts. Photo by the author.

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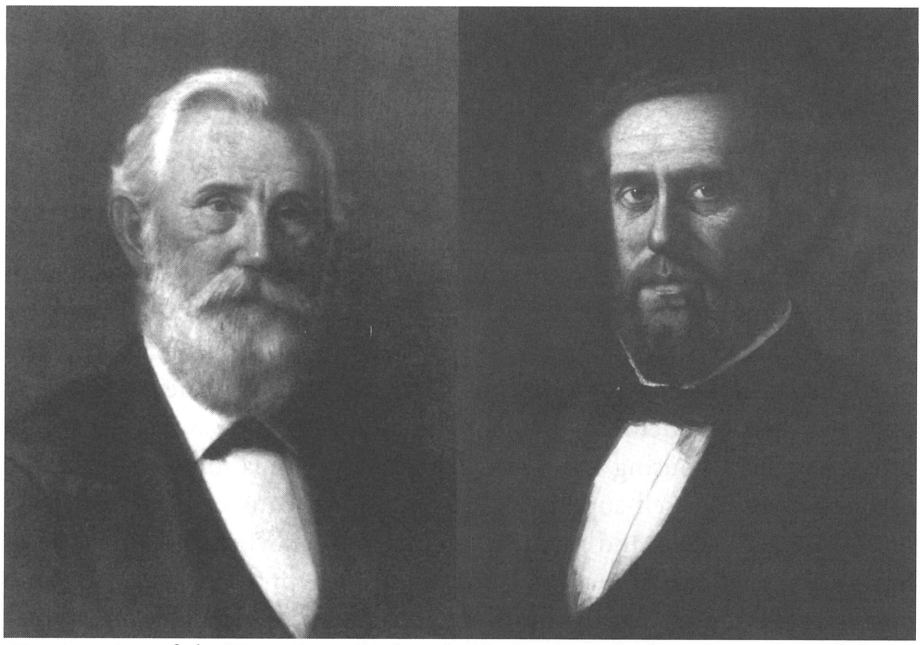
AN UNLIKELY BEGINNING

More miles of railroad were constructed in Texas during 1881 than in any other year. Yet despite the state's transportation advances, Governor Oran M. Roberts spent much of that year at an impasse. Texas had expended no small fortune during the previous four years building a new, 1,056-bed prison at Rusk in Cherokee County. Officials hoped the new facility would provide needed housing for a growing prison population and make the corrections system self-supporting by employing convicts to extract iron ore from nearby hills and manufacture pig iron and finished implements for commercial sale. There was one significant problem: Rusk had no operational railroad, and the hope of getting one, reported administration officials, was "exceedingly gloomy."

The situation was not always so bleak. When a governor's commission had selected the new prison site five years earlier, Rusk's citizens were completing construction of a railroad between their town and Jacksonville, fifteen miles to the north. Two railroads had bypassed Rusk in 1872. They combined the following year to become the International and Great Northern Railroad Company (I&GN). One line passed east-west through Jacksonville and joined the other, a north-south line, at Palestine in neighboring Anderson County. Fearing the Cherokee County seat might move to Jacksonville, Rusk community leaders lost no time and organized the Rusk Transportation Company in May 1874 to build their own railroad to Jacksonville. The charter named twenty-two individuals as directors, none of whom had real railroad experience. Remarkably, the road was built and placed in operation in less than a year without outside assistance.

Initially, Rusk's little railroad seemed a tremendous achievement. The state press applauded it, but the venture was ill-fated from the beginning. Four-by-four-inch heart pine rails cut from neighboring forests were substituted for more expensive iron or steel rails, and proved unreliable

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Construction of the Texas State Railroad spur between Rusk and North Rusk began about 1882 under the administration of Governor Oran M. Roberts (1815-1898), left. The administration of Governor John Ireland (1826-1896), right, completed the road in 1883 and directed that the state purchase a locomotive and begin operating the line in 1886.

under the weight of even the lightest of steam locomotives. Steep, three-percent grades (a rise or fall of three feet per 100 feet of track) and tight curves added to operating difficulties. The enterprise was soon in financial trouble, service abandoned, and the road sold at foreclosure on January 7, 1879, two weeks before Governor Roberts took office.

While construction of the new prison continued, work on the blast furnace and related facilities did not even begin. Realizing that an iron industry could never be developed without an operating rail connection, penitentiary officials warned Governor Roberts that the entire project, including the prison itself, was in jeopardy. A solution seemed forthcoming in February 1880 when Tyler businessmen, among them experienced railroad builders, incorporated the Kansas & Gulf Shortline Railroad Company (K&GSL) to construct a railroad from Tyler to Sabine Pass, connecting in

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Angelina County with the Houston East & West Texas Railway (HE&WT), a project then under construction by noted railroad builder Paul Bremond, who was also a K&GSL director.

Any assumption that the new road would pass through Rusk, however, was erased in May and June 1881 when surveyor E.H. Wells of Tyler, later namesake of the Cherokee County town of Wells, located a route that passed several miles east of Rusk. The matter became complex, yet oddly hopeful for the state, when K&GSL hired the contracting firm of Cunningham & Ellis, lessees of the penitentiary, to build the road. Cunningham & Ellis were well into their fourth year of a five-year penitentiary lease that had proved lucrative to themselves and the state. Already they had built most of the new Rusk prison, made significant improvements to the Huntsville prison, and had hired out convicts to work on farms and railroads. They became over-extended, however, upon taking the grading contract with K&GSL. Since nearly all the convict labor was occupied elsewhere, Cunningham & Ellis asked the state for use of its longtime prisoners—those serving long sentences because of the character of their offense—to build the road, prompting immediate action from the governor's office.

Working longtime convicts outside of prison walls was against penitentiary rules, but Governor Roberts believed that securing a railroad for the prison was of such "paramount interest to the state" that an exception could be made if the route was changed to the state's benefit. Negotiations with K&GSL officials and Cunningham & Ellis resulted in an agreement late in June by which the use of longtime prisoners would be allowed if they were not taken more than twenty miles outside the Rusk prison walls and the new railroad would pass within one-and-one-half miles of the prison. K&GSL officials would build no closer to the prison, they argued, because it was on the east side of a three-mile long and 710-foot high hill north of town. Besides, K&GSL already owned the right-of-way of the defunct Rusk Transportation Company, so the new road would use parts of this route to enter Rusk from the west just south of town, avoiding as much of the prison hill as possible.

The only remaining need was a railroad spur to the prison. K&GSL officials refused to build it, basically for the same reason they would not build the mainline as wished, so the state purchased a right-of-way and

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began constructing the spur itself. For years before and after, the state hired out convicts to construct private railroads; now convicts were building a railroad, although one of only one-and-one-third miles, for the state itself. Construction involved significant grading and bridging since One Eye Creek separated the prison from town. By the fall of 1882, grading and bridging was complete, crossties were on hand, and the iron rails were on order. The road was completed sometime later in 1883 during the first term of Governor John Ireland.

K&GSL operated trains over the spur between Rusk and the prison but notified the state in January 1886 that it was ceasing service. The prison was then in the middle of fulfilling a large contract for iron castings to be used in constructing the new state capitol in Austin. Governor Ireland, who ironically was known as "Oxcart John" because of his opposition to land grants for railroads, directed penitentiary officials to purchase a locomotive and provide rail service themselves. After acquiring a lightweight 2-6-0 type locomotive and one flat car from the Texas & St. Louis Railway Company, an allied interest of the K&GSL, prison officials reported to Ireland late in 1886, saying the engine was "very useful, we do not know how we could get along without it." Because the state's spur was barely more than a mile in length, its locomotive's whistle was heard easily from one end of the line to the other. Thus Texas not only owned a railroad but operated it as well.

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MAKING TRACKS

The short prison spur served a vital need, but it by no means addressed the prison's many transportation requirements. To access state-owned forests south of Rusk, which provided fuel for the charcoal-fired iron blast furnace, prisoners built additional rail spurs off the K&GSL mainline to "coaling" camps. The first such prison camp was established four miles south of Rusk in November 1883. Later, others were located farther south, most notably near Alto and Wells, where the state spurs reached lengths of approximately five miles each. North of the prison, the state built another railroad to access surface ore beds. At various times this road was between one and five miles in length. Mules provided the initial motive power on both the ore and the charcoal roads, but state locomotives eventually replaced them as the extractive operations—digging ore and cutting wood—progressed.

From the beginning, the state identified charcoal production as the "costliest item" of operating the Rusk prison. A significant part of the cost was transportation, which influenced further development of the state's railroad operations. When the prison furnace was in operation it consumed approximately 3,750 bushels, or six rail car loads, of charcoal per day. To supply this fuel demand, the state purchased forestlands in southern Cherokee and northwestern Angelina counties, and owned more than 12,000 acres by 1890. As many as 230 convicts sawed and chopped at least 150 cords of wood per day at the camps and made charcoal in earthen pits covered with leaves. The state hired civilian colliers to supervise the work. Although hardwoods, especially oaks, made the best quality charcoal, all timber, including pine, was cleared and burned.

The operations were unrelenting. An official of the State Geological Survey of 1890 lamented after visiting the camps: "Much of the timber is of such an excellent quality and of such large size as to cause regret that it should be sacrificed for burning into charcoal." So complete was the clear-

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ing that some of the cutover lands became peach orchards and fruit farms with little additional work.

The state made charcoal at the camps, rather than at the prison, for two reasons. First, although the state operated trains over its own tracks between Rusk and the prison and between the camps and the K&GSL mainline, the cars still traveled up to twenty-seven miles over K&GSL rails between the state connections. Second, since the state had to pay freight charges to the K&GSL, it was cheaper to transport charcoal as a comparatively light finished product than to ship heavy cordwood as a raw material. Prison officials once sought permission to use a state locomotive to move the cars the entire distance between the camps and the prison, estimating a yearly savings of $7,000 in freight charges; not surprisingly, K&GSL managers refused the request.

Located deep in virgin timber at the ends of railroad lines, charcoal camps were not comfortable places. Crude cabins, shelters, and other structures to house prisoners and guards literally were hewn from the forest in the most economical fashion. Because of the secluded, heavily-timbered locations of the camps and their close proximity to the Neches and Angelina rivers, they were often plagued by escapes and sometimes killings. Between 1888 and 1890 there were thirty-nine escapes and three murdered guards at one camp outside Alto alone.

One of the most notable and tragic camp incidents was the train robbery of a state locomotive crew near Wells 1894, which resulted in the murder of Dr. A. F. Drury of Rusk, a dentist in the state's employ. On Saturday afternoon, August 18, Dr. Drury traveled from Rusk to Wells on the passenger train to perform dental work on officers and guards at the nearby prison camp. At Wells he met the state locomotive convict crew of engineer and fireman, and they proceeded to the camp at about twelve miles per hour. According to Dr. Drury's testimony, given on his deathbed and published in the *Houston Daily Post*, the three had traveled only about half a mile when a man "with a false face" came running toward the engine. At that point the crew noticed crossties obstructing the track, and the engineer reversed the engine, jumped, and yelled "robbers!" as he fled. The fireman also jumped and ran, leaving Drury alone on board. The disguised

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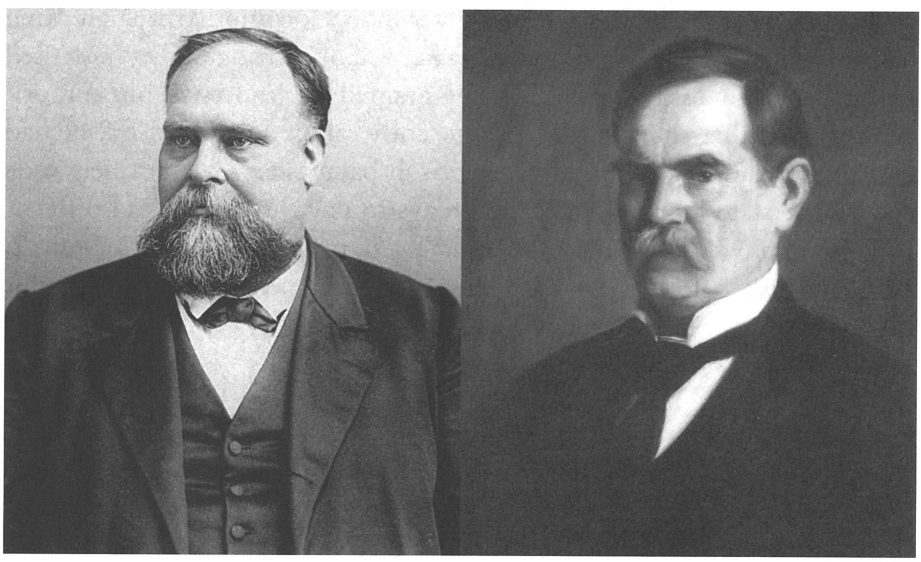
man rushed aboard the engine and fired a pistol as Drury leapt from the other side. He was wounded in the hip. Helplessly lying on the ground, Drury pleaded for his life as the gunman jumped down and shot him several more times, taking Drury's gold watch and chain, $5 in silver, $15 in bills, and a $25 check drawn on the First National Bank of Rusk. The gunman fled to the woods as the unmanned, reversed engine slowly continued back to Wells.

The convict crew chased and overtook the engine, rushed into town, and returned to the mortally wounded Drury with help. Drury spent Saturday night in Wells, and was taken to his home in Rusk on Sunday morning. He died there at noon on Monday, survived by a wife and seven children. With tips from area citizens, a Cherokee County deputy sheriff captured and arrested the gunman Sunday afternoon on the northbound passenger train just south of Jacksonville. The fugitive was identified as George King, about twenty-three years old and a former prisoner at the Wells charcoal camp, where he had worked occasionally as a locomotive fireman. King had items taken from Drury and a pocket full of cartridges like those used in the ambush in his possession. He maintained his innocence, but authorities reasoned that since he was only recently released from prison, he had returned to the area to ambush the prison paymaster who routinely rode aboard the state locomotive on Saturdays to pay the guards and officers. King was convicted for the murder of Dr. Drury and hanged on July 2, 1895, in Rusk, before an estimated crowd of 5,000 people, still claiming his innocence.

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A NEW START UNDER GOVERNOR HOGG

Although the state endeavored to bring the K&GSL to Rusk, even helping to build it, prison officials were never pleased with the railway. Dissatisfaction stemmed from one simple, inherent weakness: the K&GSL was a narrow-gauge road. Its rails were three feet apart, while most railroads in the United States, including Texas, had their rails at four-feet, eight-and-one-half inches apart, a national standard generally accepted by 1883. While narrow-gauge railroads were cheaper to build and operate than standard-



Governors James Stephen Hogg (1851-1906), left, and Thomas Mitchell Campbell (1856-1923), right, both were born in Cherokee County near Rusk and experimented with government-owned railroads through the state's prison system. Governor Hogg directed the initial State Railroad extension to Palestine in 1893 and Governor Campbell completed it in 1909.

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gauge ones in theory, they were impractical for interchanging cars with standard-gauge connecting lines, especially when shipping heavy commodities such as iron products.

The Rusk prison produced pig iron as well as castings, including railroad car wheels, stoves, plows, hollowware, ornamental iron, and water pipe and culverts. The most successful product was water pipe, although the most enduring products are probably the castings, columns, pedestals, bases, and caps used in construction of the state capitol building and dome between 1885 and 1887. All these heavy products moved by rail and interchange between different gauge roads was expensive. As prison officials reported from Rusk as early as 1884, "breaking bulk at Jacksonville and transferring freight to and fro is a very costly matter."

Less serious was the good-humored ribbing the narrow-gauge received. In November 1887 a traveling newspaper correspondent visited what he called "the Wilds of East Texas" and particularly noted his journey over K&GSL rails. Writing from Rusk, he called the railroad "a little cross-country narrow gauge" that "begins nowhere and ends nowhere." Its timetable "is based only on taking the country people into Tyler in the morning so as to do their trading and get them home for milking in the evening." Speeds were limited to ten miles per hour, he explained, or else passengers would "be sent to judgment. Perhaps the experience of getting to Rusk over this rickety, bumpety little road serves a purpose in reconciling the convicts to stay here."

Added frustration with Rusk's imperfect railway facilities stemmed from the fact that the K&GSL was the area's only railroad. From the beginning it was hoped that the state's development of the iron industries would attract additional railroad lines, especially after private iron-making interests established the town of New Birmingham south of Rusk late in the 1880s. But New Birmingham failed dismally in only a few years, and some undaunted state officials believed that if another railroad could not be induced to build to Rusk—getting the first one was difficult enough—then the state itself ought to build one. Recommendations that the state build a railroad from Rusk westward to a connection with the International & Great Northern were made throughout the 1880s. Strangely, it was not until Jim Hogg, a young, railroad corporation-fighting Texas attorney general, became

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governor that any hope for the idea materialized.

Born in Rusk, James Stephen Hogg became Texas' first native governor in January 1891. Voicing the public's growing impatience with corporate railroad "abuses," he kicked off his gubernatorial campaign in his hometown in the spring of 1890, identifying railroads as public highways that should serve the public interest. He vowed to create a state commission to regulate railroads and easily won the governor's race that fall and helped establish the Texas Railroad Commission the following year. Although Governor Hogg repeatedly voiced his opposition to government ownership of railroads, especially during his successful reelection campaign in 1892, he seemed unbothered by the state owning one or two operated by the state penitentiary.

To avoid paying freight charges to the International & Great Northern for carrying logs to a sawmill at the Huntsville state prison, Governor Hogg directed that the prison build and operate five miles of narrow-gauge railroad through state-owned forests south of Huntsville late in 1892. Early in 1893 a Rusk state locomotive engineer transferred to Huntsville to run its newly-acquired engine, which was reportedly "painted up in excellent style," according to the *Houston Daily Post*. It was named "F. R. Lubbock" after the former governor and longtime state treasurer. Known as the Star State Railroad, the Huntsville line was eventually to connect with the Santa Fe railway at or near Conroe, about twenty-three miles to the south, but this never happened.

Hogg turned his attention next to Rusk. Intending to solve Rusk's fuel problem, he directed that the prison build a new standard-gauge railroad westward, to access untapped state forests and eventually connect with the I&GN at Palestine or some other advantageous point. Since no freight charges would be incurred on the new state road, cordwood and even full logs could be hauled directly to the prison, where charcoal would be made rather than at camps in the woods. Timber would not only fuel the furnace but also supply a new state sawmill at the prison.

On Wednesday, November 15, 1893, construction on the new Rusk railroad began with more than 100 convicts and dozens of mules clearing, plowing, grubbing, scraping, and hauling earth for the grade. The new road left the spur track about 1,000 feet south of the prison, continued south about 500 feet, then curved west, skirting the south base of the prison hill,

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gently curving south and then west again. The road crossed the mainline of the K&GSL, which by now was known as the Tyler Southeastern Railway, two-and-one-tenth miles from the prison. Remains of the state crossing can be seen in high grass just north of where U.S. Highway 84 crosses the State Railroad near the State Park locomotive shop. One convict gang hewed crossties from trees cleared along the right of way, while other gangs made the grade. Iron culverts manufactured at the prison were placed for drainage where needed.

The state built the roadbed and laid ties at standard gauge, but temporarily laid the rails at narrow gauge. The tracks were converted to standard gauge in the spring of 1894, after the state purchased a standard-gauge locomotive that ~~had been~~ would be operated for many years by civilian locomotive engineer Joe Ramsour. At the same time a third rail was added to the narrow-gauge prison spur so the standard-gauge engine could pull cars of either gauge between the prison and Rusk, while standard-gauge freight cars for the new road were built at the prison. By February 1894 a state surveyor and his assistants had located the road to a point seven miles west of the prison. Between 100 and 225 convicts worked daily on the road, and by October 1894, seven miles were graded and nearly five miles were tracked to a point just east of Bean's Creek.

The State Railroad extension continued under the administration of Governor Charles A. Culberson. After clearing adjacent lands along the right-of-way east of Bean's Creek, the state established Woodlawn Farm in the spring of 1895. There they produced 3,000 bushels of corn that year as well as the next, in addition to crops of potatoes, peas, and other vegetables for use at the prison. Portions of the long-abandoned roadbed in this area are still visible south and east of Farm Road 1248, south of the State Railroad's present route. In the Woodlawn area, construction of the road proceeded in a straight southwesterly direction across generally flat, sloping land along the creek and plain.

The railroad crossed Bean's Creek approximately five-and-a-quarter miles from the prison in 1895, and reached a length of approximately nine miles by the fall of 1896. The road terminated between Bull Creek and the Neches River in the vicinity of the Sardis community, also known as Manila. The state owned more than 1,700 acres of forest land in the immediate area for

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Portions of the Texas State Railroad's original Palestine extension can be seen east of Farm Road 1248 as shown here in March 2002. Note the elevated ground at the edge of the tree line. This particular portion of roadbed was constructed in 1894 and abandoned in 1903. Photo by the author.

charcoal production. A 200-acre unit of the five-unit, I.D. Fairchild State Forest, established in 1925, is all that remains of the state lands near Sardis.

Convicts from the charcoal camps located outside Wells moved to the area in May 1896 when the state established Camp Rice, named for penitentiary financial agent Jonas S. Rice, also a prominent banker and lumberman who later served as penitentiary superintendent. Since the state installed charcoal ovens, or retorts, at the prison, convicts at Camp Rice now only cut cordwood. The State Railroad hauled the cordwood directly to the prison, where other convicts made charcoal in the ovens.

Throughout Culberson's second term as governor, the press continued to report that the state road eventually would reach Palestine and be opened for public traffic. In January 1899, however, Joseph D. Sayers became governor, and the prison iron operations, including the State Railroad, were curtailed severely. From the beginning, the Rusk prison had been unprofitable, and Sayers' advisers suggested that the state's "long years of expensive experience" justified the permanent abandonment of the iron industry. Iron operations diminished, and the state disbanded Camp Rice in February 1900. With restricted furnace operations, the few remaining woodchoppers traveled back and forth on flat cars between the prison and forests. Over the next couple of years, the prison did extend the railroad as needed to reach available timber, but plans of previous administrations to cross the Neches River and connect with the I&GN were dropped despite

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efforts of enterprising and hopeful Palestine boosters. In April 1902 the I&GN made a much-publicized bid to buy the state road, but a deal never materialized.

The uncertain situation at Rusk changed completely with the inauguration of Governor S.W.T. Lanham in January 1903. Determined to make Rusk profitable, Lanham's administration added more than $200,000 in permanent improvements, including a new and larger furnace—fueled by coke instead of charcoal—and began again to extend the State Railroad toward a connection with the I&GN in less than two years. When Lanham took office, Rusk held barely 400 prisoners. Within six months the population doubled, and by June 1904 more than 1,000 prisoners were confined at Rusk and worked in the ore beds and in State Railroad construction gangs.

Early in 1903 the state began acquiring a new right-of-way for the railroad, while abandoning more than six miles of track from the end of the line back to a point near Woodlawn Farm. This point can be located a little more than one mile west of the Rusk State Park depot as a pronounced curve turning northwest. From here the road passes north of the 676-foot high Mount Hope, while the original route had curved south in 1894 to go around the impenetrable north-south ridge of more than three miles.

To construct this new route, the builders' first challenge was raising a massive fill across a deep ravine located east of what is now called Oakland Crossing. The steep fill of approximately twenty-five feet is still impressive. The next challenges included constructing an 800-foot long trestle across Bean's Creek, five miles from the prison, and digging and scraping a deep and long cut through the north slope of the red-clayed Mount Hope about seven miles from the prison. The Mount Hope cut, at more than twenty feet deep, remains the highest point on the entire Rusk-Palestine line at a track elevation of 480 feet. Built at a two-and-one-half percent westward ascending grade on a long curve, it is also the toughest climbing grade on the line. Today, State Railroad train crews refer to the notorious stretch of track as Fairchild Hill because part of it is in a unit of the I.D. Fairchild State Forest. The hill remains a hard pull up one side and a fast roll down the other which challenges the skills of steam locomotive crews.

During Lanham's two terms as governor the state purchased four

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additional locomotives for the Rusk prison, which already listed three engines on its books in 1900. The additional engines probably replaced one or more of the older ones. The state also purchased a new steam shovel for use in the ore beds sometime between fall 1904 and early 1906, too late to help in constructing the railroad's Oakland fill and Fairchild cut.

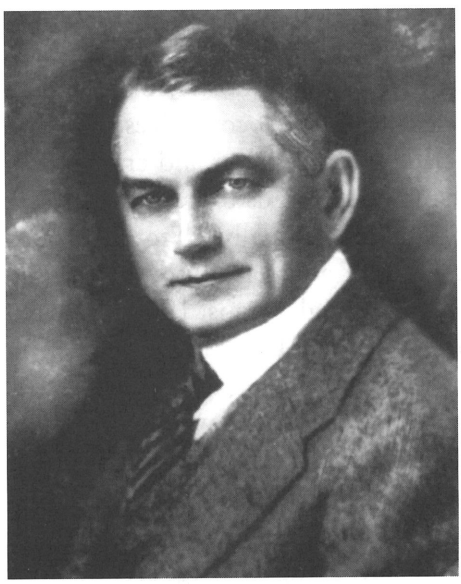
By July 1904 the new road extension had reached a point a little more than nine miles from the prison, or about five-and-three-quarter miles from the old point near Woodlawn Farm. At the end of the line a prison logging camp named Camp Searcy Baker after the penitentiary superintendent, was established. The camp only operated until January 1905 when the new prison furnace began using coke fuel exclusively, thereby doing away with the need for wood. The Lanham Administration suspended railroad construction and concentrated efforts on running the new furnace without accruing additional expense. By this time Rusk's only connecting railroad, the old K&GSL, had converted from narrow to standard gauge and was part of the well-organized Cotton Belt railroad system. For a time at least, the state seemed satisfied shipping over the Cotton Belt while seeking a buyer for the incomplete State Railroad extension, which sat idle and neglected.

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NEW LIFE AGAIN

The state still held its decaying railroad properties at Rusk when Thomas M. Campbell became governor in January 1907. Like Governor Hogg, Campbell was born in Rusk and shared the dream of linking his hometown with neighboring Palestine by a state-owned railroad. Campbell was a lawyer, but for eight years, from 1889 to 1897, he managed the affairs of the financially troubled I&GN Railroad. Initially appointed master in chancery by Hogg while Hogg was attorney general, Campbell moved to Palestine in 1891 and served as I&GN's receiver and general manager.

One of Campbell's first priorities as governor was securing passage of the Texas State Railroad bill, which became law on April 5, 1907. The unprecedented act expanded the powers of the prison commission to extend the Rusk railroad westward to a connection with the I&GN as well as northward to a connection with the Texas & New Orleans Railroad. The legislation granted eminent domain and permitted the state road to be



John W. Wright (1861-1929) served as chief financial officer of the penitentiary and superintendent of the Texas State Railroad during the road's extension to Palestine between 1907 and 1909. Photo courtesy of David Hughes, Tuscon, Arizona.

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operated as a common carrier of public freight and passengers. The act also provided a $150,000 loan from the state's permanent school fund to fund the expansion.

Governor Campbell placed the responsibility for building the State Railroad extension upon John W. Wright, who was both a railroader and banker. Wright's background for the job seemed perfect. A native of Georgia, a state with a history of government-owned railroads, Wright came to Texas during the 1870s as an employee of the International & Great Northern Railroad and worked several years as a locomotive engineer. In 1892, in Palestine, he married Lucy Royall, daughter of Anderson County banker Nathaniel R. Royall, also a Georgia native. Becoming increasingly involved in banking, Wright left the railroad and led a group of financiers who organized the Citizens National Bank of Tyler in 1899. He moved to Tyler and served as president of the bank. Early in 1907 Governor Campbell appointed Wright to the prison commission and placed him in charge of the State Railroad extension. Wright was made chief financial officer of the penitentiary in September 1907, and he resigned from the commission at that time. As the penitentiary's chief financial officer and the railroad's president and superintendent, Wright oversaw all prison system finances, while closely managing the state railroad extension.

Throughout the railroad's construction Wright lived in Tyler and visited Rusk and the railroad at least two days a week, often more. He ordered all supplies and equipment, personally selected mules, locomotives, rail, and other important items, and managed necessary free labor and engineering crews. He secured rights-of-way and handled all funds to keep the project moving. Supervision of the convict work gangs eventually fell to Captain A. K. Addison, a fifteen-year veteran prison farm guard. Addison supervised railroad construction from December 1907 through August 1909. The Fred A. Jones Company, state contractors, handled the road's engineering supervision.

To reach the I&GN the state at first seemed undecided whether Palestine or Crockett would be the terminal objective. The law allowed for either choice. Wright led the penitentiary board to Palestine to meet with citizens about the matter in August 1907. The manager of the Oriental Hotel gave the state officials a "red carpet" reception, converting the large second floor

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front gallery into a summer roof garden. The *Palestine Daily Herald* reported that the board members had "many personal friends" in Palestine, and "good cigars, soft drinks, and a magnificent breeze" contributed to "a pleasurable evening of social chat and good humor."

The congenial spirit surely ended the following day when the prison board asked the people of Palestine for a $15,000 cash bonus plus right-of-way and depot grounds. Estimating the latter two items at an additional $15,000, the Palestine Board of Trade immediately began a fund drive for $30,000. The *Daily Herald* reported that without the $30,000, the State Railroad would not come to Palestine. Within a short time nearly $20,000 was pledged, but the balance of the requested funds never appeared.

Occasionally the *Herald* ran a daily subscription column, asking and then urging "loyal" citizens to contribute any amount they could, even if it was only a dollar. The paper urged "every wage earner" to give something, admonishing, "The giving will be like casting bread upon the waters; it will come back to you." Citizen groups vigorously canvassed the town, but still the bonus could not be raised. The unpopular campaign waged into 1908. As late as the first week of March, Wright revisited Palestine. He insisted that construction of the railroad, then nearing the Neches River, would halt unless Palestine produced the bonus. Three weeks later, at the end of March, Wright returned to Palestine and announced that the state would withdraw the bonus demand if Palestine and Anderson County would provide the right-of-way and ground for the depot.

The *Palestine Daily Herald* called the bonus withdrawal "a very liberal proposition." Critics cried foul, however, and when the road actually reached Palestine a year later the editor of the *Rusk Press-Journal* charged that Palestine was chosen over Crockett because Governor Campbell's home was "in Palestine and he and his friends own property there, and they do not own property in Crockett." Such criticism was only the beginning of political troubles.

The majority of the rights-of-way through both Cherokee and Anderson counties were fifty to 100 feet wide. The state generally paid between $1 and $100 for these narrow strips of land, but in many deeds reserved the right to go outside the designated boundaries "to borrow or deposit earth and other material" for "cuts, heavy embankments, or clearing timber" to

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"insure the safety of trains." In addition to the cost of the right-of-way itself, the state also paid $2.50 per 1000 board feet for standing timber in the right-of-way. In some cases, the state paid adjoining landowners for drainage damage resulting from the road's construction.

Actual construction work on the railroad was well under way by June 1907. Camp Searcy Baker was reorganized and named Camp Wright in honor of John W. Wright. The area was heavily timbered, so the state constructed a sawmill where convicts began making many thousands of needed crossties and bridge timbers. Since the nine miles of track between the camp and the prison had been neglected for more than two years, first priority was resurfacing it as well as replacing worn ties and rail. Slag from the iron furnace was used as ballast in some places, and old forty-pound iron rail—weighing forty lbs. to the yard—was replaced by fifty, fifty-six, and sixty-pound steel rail, some of it new. Many of the trestles were renewed and some were replaced by fills and large iron culverts made at the prison.

To renew the former road and build the extension, much additional labor was needed. In July the penitentiary commission recalled 300 leased convicts from farms and placed many of them at Camp Wright. State-owned mules were also recalled from the farms and from the Rusk ore beds. In addition, Superintendent Wright traveled to West Texas in September and personally selected seventy-six new mules for the railroad work. From 1907 through 1909, at least 150 mules regularly worked at plowing, scraping, and hauling earth for the grade, which was mostly either a substantial cut or a high fill through and across forbidding, heavily timbered ground described by engineers as "very hilly" or "wet and boggy." The prison used its steam shovel, purchased during Lanham's administration, whenever possible, but most of the work was done by human and animal muscle.

Both the initial State Railroad extension under Governor Hogg in 1893 and the extension in 1907 under Governor Campbell came during depressed economic times. A national panic, in full swing by autumn 1907, threatened the State Railroad project before it fully began. As chief financial agent of the penitentiary, railroad superintendent Wright responded by taking $45,000 in cash from the state treasurer in October and kept it out of the banks, which had already turned down state checks in Hunstville and Rusk. Although the state missed making its payroll by more than three weeks that

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month, Wright used the cash to pay for rail, locomotives, and other items needed to keep the construction project moving.

With labor and material secured, actual construction progressed slowly at best. Supervising many large gangs of convicts at railroad construction work was not an easy task, and at least once Governor Campbell inquired about what he called "confusion on the State Railroad." Campbell visited the work occasionally, bringing pardons and boosting morale; but since many of the convicts were long-term men, prison officials advised him that they "must be handled very carefully or we might have some very severe trouble." Accordingly, convicts were only effectively worked five hours a day because guards kept them close together to avoid escapes. Gangs could not spread out nor advance too far from camp, whereas with free labor graders, track-layers, and surfacers spread out over various portions of the road miles from one another. In contrast, the convict track-layers and surfacers worked right behind the grading crews, advancing slowly and inefficiently. Adding to the cost was the construction of housing for as many as 400 men at a time. In addition to Camp Wright, the state built camps at Mewshaw—four miles from Wright—and at Gill, nine miles from Mewshaw, as work progressed toward Palestine.

By November 1907 the road was improved and extended enough that the state began carrying public freight, although trains essentially operated more as work trains than for the accommodation of the public until the road was completed to Palestine in the fall of 1909. The first public freight handled was lumber produced by private sawmills located along the line, but newspapers reported that shippers were unhappy about paying $20 per car for only twelve miles or less of service.

By early 1908 new construction had nearly reached the Neches River, and the state established the new camp at Mewshaw, named for penitentiary commissioner J. T. Mewshaw of Garland. In addition to moving the camp from Wright to Mewhsaw, the state also moved the state sawmill, rebuilding it as a 50,000-board-feet of lumber per day operation. A three-mile logging spur was constructed into nearby timber and was operated by a small, geared Shay locomotive. The Mewshaw sawmill cut pine, oak, and sweet gum timbers, crossties, and various stock of dimensional lumber for use at all prison properties across the state, including plantations and farms and three

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other state railroads then under construction at the Ramsey, Clemens, and Harlem farms in Brazoria and Fort Bend counties. These railroads, unlike the Rusk-Palestine line, were not public carriers.

In August 1908 the state's Palestine railroad extension crossed the Neches River near the mouth of Stills Creek with an impressive twenty-five-foot-high and 1,200-foot-long trestle. Across the river in Anderson County the route followed the fairly straight east-west running ~~along~~ of Stills Creek for eight miles, or nearly all the way to the present Palestine State Park depot. The lowest points on the entire line, track elevations of 270 feet, remain the Neches River crossing and where the route first encounters Stills Creek halfway between Herring and Jarvis. Here, in a hardwood bottomland forest, is one of the most secluded portions of the road, as well as one of the most picturesque, especially in fall and spring. High fills to keep the track above floodwaters characterize much of the right-of-way and add to an appreciation of the road's historic construction.

While state forces endeavored to build the extension to Palestine, they were powerless to begin the northward extension to Texas & New Orleans (T&NO) Railroad's Beaumont-Dallas line as provided by the State Railroad Act of 1907. Seeking Rusk as well as Palestine traffic, T&NO decided to build the line itself. Between the fall of 1908 and the spring of 1909 T&NO constructed a seven-and-eight-tenths-mile branch line from Gallatin on the Beaumont-Dallas line to a connection with the state's original prison spur at North Rusk, the prison station. T&NO opened its new road to the public on April 25, 1909, running two trains daily in each direction. Trains left Rusk at 11:55 a.m. and 4 p.m.. Trains left Gallatin at 1 p.m. and 5 p.m. Scheduled times were about thirty-five minutes each way. T&NO trains used the state prison spur to reach Rusk, where T&NO built a depot and a locomotive turntable on sidetracks off the state line. T&NO and the state shared a depot agent at the Rusk station and the state was allowed use of the turntable. The little T&NO line had only two stations, Checkup and Stayton. Checkup reportedly received its name from a farmer who asked for a station, arguing the train would only need to "check up a little" to load his crops. Stayton got its name as a derivation of "stayed on," the reply of a trainman when asked how inspection officials fared over the road, which snaked its way around many hills and ridges.

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Meanwhile, state construction to Palestine had proved costlier than anticipated and the project actually ran out of money in 1908. Financial agent Wright shuffled accounts and used at least $100,000 in additional money earned by the Huntsville prison and the farms to keep the project moving. In January 1909 Wright resigned from his state positions, after being acquitted in an anti-nepotism case involving his brother-in-law, who had taken an accounting position at the state sawmill at Mewshaw. Tired of politics, Wright moved from Tyler to Dallas and became a prominent banker and financier there, helping to establish the Dallas branch of the Federal Reserve Bank. Others, namely Colonel J. A. Herring of Madisonville, superintendent of the penitentiary, were left to finish construction of the Texas State Railroad.

Financial relief did not come until May 1909, when the legislature authorized an additional $50,000 loan from the permanent school fund to complete the road. An earlier House version of the bill would have authorized additional monies and granted the penitentiary commission powers to extend the road beyond Palestine in any direction up to 100 miles. Some congressmen desired to extend the state road to Waco and Dallas as well as to the state farms along the Brazos River, connecting with Huntsville on the way. The final Senate version struck out all provisions for future extensions and even required that the state try to sell the road once construction to Palestine was completed. In the words of one Campbell official, conservative senators guarded against "building up a nucleus for state ownership of railroads." Governor Campbell strongly opposed the idea of selling the road but reluctantly signed the Senate bill under intense pressure. The penitentiary system was already "greatly handicapped," his advisors told him, since the railroad had dipped into the earnings of the farms and the Huntsville prison, and without the immediate appropriation of $50,000 the penitentiary would be "greatly embarrassed for lack of funds."

While the governor and legislators debated funding for the road's completion, convict forces had moved camp in December 1908 to about eight miles outside Palestine near Crystal Lake. The state named the new camp Gill, for judge and penitentiary commission chairman W. H. Gill of Palestine. It was Gill who eventually secured the final right-of-way into Palestine in July 1909, after scrapping several earlier "permanent" locating

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surveys. Although challenges to the final right-of-way continued for months, the state proceeded to build its depot with free labor on a site bounded by Reagan, Cooper, Dorrance, and Van Fleet streets, as originally intended, with the approaching state tracks crossing those of the I&GN at grade instead of passing over or under them, as once planned. In the end, the value of lands donated to the State Railroad by the Palestine Board of Trade was $17,175.62, according to the Interstate Commerce Commission's findings in 1917.

When state tracks reached Palestine late in July 1909 the state hosted a barbecue dinner at Crystal Lake for more than 100 convicts who had worked on the road before returning them to the prison. Officials from Palestine as well as Austin attended the dinner. The *Palestine Daily Herald* reported that the convicts "expressed regret" at having to return to the walls, and "paid Captain Addison a high tribute" for his management during their railroad work. In following days, Addison selected an additional force of convicts for track surfacing work and installation of switches within Palestine's city limits, which continued until the end of August. When finished, the State Railroad was just over thirty-two-and-one-half miles in length, including the original prison spur between Rusk and North Rusk.

No one ever knew the true cost of building the road. Incomplete accounts were kept in both Rusk and Huntsville, and their conflicting numbers frustrated senate oversight committees for years. The best estimates prepared during the 1910s were each in excess of $527,000, which included approximately $102,000 as the original cost of the nine miles of road between the prison and Camp Searcy Baker (later renamed Camp Wright, then Maydelle), which were constructed between 1893 and 1904.

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STATE RAILROAD OPERATIONS 1909-1921

State operation of public trains into Palestine began during the last week of August 1909. One mixed train, carrying both freight and passengers, ran daily in each direction. It left Rusk in the morning, arrived at Palestine a little after noon, and returned to Rusk late in the afternoon. Probably the first all-passenger train between Rusk and Palestine ran as a Labor Day Special on September 6. The train carried the Rusk band and others and arrived in time for them to participate in a parade at 10:30 a.m. and then enjoy a barbecue dinner and a ninety-minute speech by Governor Campbell. The return trip to Rusk, scheduled for 9 p.m., was held until midnight so



A convict work train clears ditches on the Texas State Railroad in about 1913. Photo from the Grady Singletary Collection, courtesy of The History Center, Diboll.

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passengers could enjoy the a dance that night. Fortunately the state locomotive had been fitted with a new, regulation electric headlight three days earlier.

Just three weeks later, on September 27, 1909, the state sawmill at Mewshaw burned, destroying everything except the boilers. State officials inspected the mill on the following day and judged the operation "a total loss." More than one-and-one-quarter-million feet of lumber had burned, as well as three boxcars, two of which were owned by other railroads. Estimating the loss at $37,000, prison officials decided against rebuilding the mill, since the state's seven million feet of standing timber in the area was "badly scattered" and would not justify renewal of operations. Prisoners at the mill were transferred to the Rusk prison, the logging teams were sent to the Harlem state farm, and the state logging locomotive, a small geared Shay, possibly thirty-five-ton Engine No. 3, was sold. Now, a long siding that serves as the meeting point of the eastbound and westbound trains marks Mewshaw and gives passengers in passing trains a chance to greet and photograph one another.

Throughout its history, the Texas State Railroad carried little iron, its intended primary commodity. Due to continuing financial losses, Governor Campbell shut down the state's iron works in Rusk in 1910, despite having spent an additional $100,000 in improvements two years earlier. The blast furnace, located outside prison walls, ran little thereafter. The state sold it in 1919, but reacquired it in 1929 by default and razed it in 1931. The prison itself closed in 1917 and reopened in 1919 as the Rusk State Hospital.

In the absence of iron, lumber provided the State Railroad its greatest traffic both in tonnage and revenue throughout the years of state operation between 1909 and 1921. Originally the line passed through heavy growths of pine, oak, hickory, sweet gum, and elm, which the state cut at its Wright and Mewshaw prison sawmills. What little timber remained after 1909 was taken to the Rusk prison and used by the state's prison box factory. By 1917, when the prison closed permanently, timber along the line consisted only of small willows, myrtle brush, and scattered pine and oak saplings. Yet several private sawmills operated on adjacent lands, and the state often provided mill owners with necessary connections and spurs if the mill owners supplied the ties and did the necessary grading. Some sawmills on the line,

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including the Dean & Wright and Wherry Lumber Company mills near Palestine, were even logged by the Texas State Railroad.

Throughout the state's operation of the railroad, its inconsistent performance became a matter of public record through published legislative investigations and reports. J.E. Stubblefield, manager of the road from 1912 to 1915, also served as the line's conductor, who at times described the road's operations as "crippled." Much of the time twenty-five percent of the track had a slow order of only nine miles per hour to protect life and property. The rest of the line operated at twelve miles per hour, with trestle speeds limited to between four and six miles per hour.

The road was built shoddily and required constant maintenance. All crossties were untreated and many were made from pine procured from timber on the right-of-way. The track was mostly unballasted and often slumped in wet and marshy ground after rains. In such conditions, untreated pine ties lasted only two to four years at best. Even the preferred and more expensive white oak ties lasted only four to six years in swampy applications when untreated. As early as 1910, only a year after the road's completion into Palestine, track crews replaced more than 20,000 rotted ties, or twenty percent of the entire line. Thousands more were replaced in 1911 and 1912, and by 1913 the road's general manager estimated that still another 50,000 ties, comprising half the entire line, needed replacing by the following year.

Faulty or broken equipment, including locomotives and rolling stock, made the road unreliable. From the beginning shippers had little confidence in the line's service. Although the Texas State owned dozens of freight cars, many of them built at the Rusk prison, none were accepted for interchange with other railroads until 1916, when ten new cars were acquired. Having to rent freight cars from other roads cost the Texas State about $3,000 annually. Passenger cars were no better, although they did not have to interchange with other roads. Managers described them as "rotten, absolutely worthless and dangerous to operate." Governors were advised, "We are taking a great risk everyday."

Also described as "dangerous to operate" in addition to "unreliable and inefficient" were the road's two coal-burning locomotives, Engines 5 and 6. The engines operated so infrequently that the state often leased locomotives from the I&GN at Palestine, which were usually oil burners

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TEXAS STATE RAILROAD
Time Table No. 9

EASTBOUND 2 Mixed Daily	Distance from Rusk		STATIONS — July 1915		Station Number	WESTBOUND 1 Mixed Daily
a. m.			Leave — Arrive			p. m.
8 30	32.6	D	PALESTINE (32.6)	D	33	4 15
.....	31.4		I. & G. N. CROSSING (1.2)		31	.....
f	30.8		WHERRY (.6)		30	f .....
f 8 50	26.3		DEANWRIGHT (4.5)		26	f 3 42
f 8 55	24.0		CRYSTAL LAKE (2.3)		24	f 3 37
s 9 10	19.4		JARVIS (4.6)		20	s 3 25
f 9 17	17.7		HERRING (1.7)		18	f 3 19
s 9 35	14.7	D	MEWSHAW (3.0)	D	15	s 3 05
f	14.1		WOODALL (.6)		14	f .....
f 9 47	12.0		JAVA (2.1)		12	f 2 50
s 9 54	10.2	D	MAYDELLE (1.8)	D	10	s 2 42
f 10 11	5.7		BEANS CREEK (4.5)		5	f 2 25
f	3.1		STATE CROSSING (2.6)		3	f .....
s	1.0	D	NORTH RUSK (2.1)	D	1	s .....
10 45		D	RUSK (1.0)	D	0	2 00
a. m.			Arrive — Leave			p. m.
2						1

"D"—Day Telephone Office.
"f"—Flag Stop.
Track connections with St. L. & S. W. of Texas at State Crossing and Rusk.
Track connections with T. & N. O. R. R. at Rusk.
Track connectons with I. & G. N. Ry. at I. & G. N. Crossing.
Track scales at Palestine and North Rusk.
Water tanks at Palestine, Crystal Lake and North Rusk.
East bound trains are superior to west bound trains of the same class.
Trains will not exceed speed of four miles per hour over Bridge No. 5 (Tales Creek) and Bridge No. 7 (Neches River.)
Express—Wells Fargo & Company.
Grade Crossings:
St. L. & S. W. Ry. of Texas, M. P. 2.1.
I. & G. N. Ry., M. P. 30.4.

A Texas State Railroad public timetable, July 1915. Author's collection.

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requiring the added cost of hiring I&GN firemen, since state firemen were unqualified to operate them.

In a letter to Governor Colquitt on July 4, 1913, State Railroad manager J.E. Stubblefied described typical early operations. Customers were "clamoring" for car movements and deliveries, while loaded freight cars holding tomatoes, logs, and gravel were stranded on the line because the state was without a working locomotive. While moving cars of iced tomatoes two days earlier, "Engine 6 was knocking and pounding herself to pieces, but the tomatoes had to move." The next day, the left side main pin on the "lame" locomotive "broke and blew out the cylinder head," leaving another car of tomatoes, "which was getting low on ice," stranded at Maydelle. Stubblefield tried to borrow a locomotive from I&GN, but none was available. Then, on the morning of July 4 he succeeded "in getting the T&NO at Rusk to take an empty iced refrigerator car to Maydelle" to rescue the tomatoes. Meanwhile, the cars of logs and gravel on sidings remained stranded until a loaner engine could be provided by I&GN.

Whether running state or I&GN engines, State Railroad train crews logged long hours, but not necessarily because of business demand. During one week in January 1913, no trains ran on three scheduled days due to mechanical failures and exhausted crewmen, who, during the other four days of the week, worked an average of twenty hours per day! When service was provided that week, it moved at an average speed of less than three miles per hour, because of continuing mechanical failures.

Motive power problems were greatly reduced after September 1915 when, under the administration of Governor James E. Ferguson, the Texas State Railroad acquired the only new locomotive purchased during the line's operation as a common carrier. Numbered 7, the Baldwin 2-6-0 Mogul type locomotive weighed sixty-four tons and was ideally suited for the Texas State's light rails and mud track. Texas sold the locomotive to the Blytheville, Leachville & Arkansas Southern railroad in 1921 at the end of state operations of the State Railroad. The engine later served the Cotton Belt and the Arkansas Railway, before being retired in 1957 and scrapped early in the 1960s.

Free labor composed all Texas State Railroad train crews after 1907. The Texas State Railroad Law of that year prohibited convicts from operating

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any train for public conveyance. Convict labor built the line, but prisoners were not generally used in regular maintenance of the roadbed after 1909, except for large seasonal ditching, filling, and track-raising work. Between 1910 and 1920, the Texas State regularly employed between thirty-six and seventy free persons monthly, paying wages comparable to those of private railroad companies operating over similar distances of track. The superintendent, who often doubled as train conductor, earned between $150 and $200 per month. When the railroad employed a regular conductor, he made $100 to $120 per month. The auditor earned between $100 and $125 a month, the Palestine agent $80 to $100 monthly, and the Maydelle agent only $45 a month. The state shared the T&NO agent at Rusk, but did not pay his salary. Clerks earned between $25 and $45 monthly, a locomotive night watchman made $50 per month, and car repairers were paid $1.35 per day.

Locomotive engineers earned between $110 and $150 monthly. Tyler native Joe Ramsour (1861-1935) served as a state locomotive engineer from at least 1894, when the state began standard-gauge operations, through at least 1913. Locomotive firemen earned between $75 and $90 a month, and brakemen made $65 to $80 a month. The roadmaster, bridge foreman, and section foremen made $100, $90, and $50 per month, respectively. Bridge men made between $2.00 per day as laborers and $2.75 per day as carpenters. Track section men earned $1.25 a day.

Two section crews were based at Bean's Creek and Crystal Lake, each responsible for about seventeen miles of track. Texas State officials complained that the sections were "entirely too long as half the time is consumed in going and returning from work." Section and bridge crews often numbered only four to six men each. Section gangs enjoyed use of a motor car, but the bridge gang had to "truck on push cars most of their material." Bridge repair was expensive, as the line's many dozens of bridges were under constant repair or replacement. The Bean's Creek trestle, for example, was completely replaced as early as 1912.

The State Railroad served more than a dozen passenger stations along its thirty-three-mile line during the 1910s. Most of these were merely flag stops. Only the regular stations of Rusk, North Rusk, Maydelle, Mewshaw, and Palestine had day telephone offices. Rusk served as the line's headquarters

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until 1916, when Palestine became the head office. Water tanks for servicing steam locomotives were located at North Rusk, Crystal Lake, and Palestine. Track scales were at North Rusk and Palestine.

Among the stations, Maydelle, named in honor of Governor Campbell's daughter, has the most interesting story. The state was influential in the station becoming a town as well as providing its name. When Camp Wright disbanded in 1908, the state owned more than 500 acres in the area. To enhance the value of the state's holdings, railroad officials planned to establish a town there at about the time that John W. Wright left the railroad in January 1909. Maydelle station opened at the former campsite that summer and quickly became a lumber shipping point for sawmill operators in nearby communities. In October 1909, while Maydelle was still only a station, petitioners from Pine Town, located about two miles southwest, asked the governor for "a switch, siding, or spur" to accommodate passenger as well as freight service directly to their community. The petitioners even proposed renaming Pine Town "Campbell Station." State Railroad officials advised the governor that two stations so close together were "wholly unnecessary." Once Maydelle was established as a town, they explained, Pine Town's merchants and residents would move to Maydelle and "the main reason for wanting a station at Pine Town would be removed, insuring the success of Maydelle." The state could then "safely put in a spur track at Pinetown to accommodate the lumber mills there."

As if according to plan, private interests developed Maydelle as a town the following year, with Maydelle Campbell herself singing at the townsite opening. Pine Town soon faded just as railroad officials predicted. Within a few years Maydelle reached a population of a couple hundred residents and became a busy shipping point for tomatoes as well as lumber. By 1914 it had a bank, two churches, four general stores, a druggist, and a cotton gin. During the 1940s and 1950s, Southern Pine Lumber Company of Diboll maintained a truck shop at Maydelle. In 1972 Maydelle became the first headquarters of the Texas State Railroad State Historical Park, until the Rusk depot, offices, and locomotive shops were completed in 1976. Maydelle is now the only passenger station on the line between Rusk and Palestine.

Between 1910 and 1920 the Texas State Railroad carried between 30,000 and 40,000 tons of freight annually, earning an average of $21,000

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a year in freight revenue. Forest products consistently accounted for more than half of both tonnage and revenue. About twenty percent of the Texas State's total operating revenue was passenger service. The road carried about 9,000 passengers annually, earning about $5,500. Fares averaged three cents per mile over the line, with clergy and children riding at half price. The road's operating expenses, however, far exceeded income. During state operation, the road's average operating ratio was more than one hundred seventy-five percent; in other words, expenses outpaced income by a margin of nearly two to one.

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THE WHITE ELEPHANT RAILROAD 1909-1921

The Texas State Railroad appropriation bill of May 1909 required that the state prison system "endeavor to make a sale" of the Rusk-Palestine line once its construction to Palestine was completed. Governor Campbell basically ignored this provision, and in his farewell address to the legislature in January 1911 he advised against selling the line. Acknowledging the road's poor financial record during construction and early operations, he argued that the line still had no "friendly connections at either end," even though it connected with three other carriers! Even more astonishing, Campbell encouraged the legislature not only to maintain the road but also to extend it, claiming "the best interests of the people" demanded it. He envisioned the Texas State Railroad, he explained, as "a lever in the hands of the State Railroad Commission" to be used in reducing rates and otherwise better regulating the private roads within the state.

Just one week later, Campbell's successor and chief political rival, Governor Oscar B. Colquitt, told the legislature that Texas' experiment with state railroads, including the prison railroads in Brazoria and Fort Bend counties, was conclusive proof that government ownership and operation of them was futile. Attacking the Rusk-Palestine line, he said that the road was not only a failure but its financing by the permanent public school fund was of "doubtful constitutionality." As soon as possible, he urged, the state should "dispose" of the road and repay the borrowed funds.

No one seemed to want the road. Some even charged that nothing about it was sound, except maybe the rails. After being a subject of inquiry during legislative investigations into alleged mismanagement of the prison system in 1909, the Rusk-Palestine line became known as "a white elephant on the hands of the state." It not only was "a burden" but "a Jonah," bringing bad luck. Prison officials explained in 1911 that the road "was non-productive,

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impossible to make productive, and consequently had to be maintained from earnings other than from the railroad itself." It was also unsafe, they claimed, and Texas was "asking people to hazard their lives in patronizing it."

Adding to the controversy was the fact that the Campbell Administration had given up on the Rusk prison and iron industry in 1910. After all, providing the prison iron industry with one or more "friendly" rail connections was the stated reason for building the railroad in the first place. Yet when the Colquitt Administration assumed control of the Rusk prison in January 1911 it confined just sixty-three convicts, most of them "cripples or invalids," according to prison reports.

Throughout his two terms, Governor Colquitt devoted a great deal of his time to State Railroad matters. Trying to make the best of a bad situation, for a while he even worked with his son, Oscar Jr., a civil engineer with an iron developing company, to provide business and turn the road around. But despite his best efforts the railroad continued to slip into what the senate later called "a deplorable condition both financially and physically." By an emergency act in 1913, the legislature placed the railroad under the governor's direct control and appropriated $60,000 from the state's general fund to make necessary improvements because of concern for public safety.

A legislative investigating committee that year determined that at least another $250,000 would be required to rehabilitate the line completely, but concluded such an expense could never be recovered, even under the most optimistic revenue projections. It was hoped the line could be rehabilitated just enough so the state might at least be able to lease the road. But politics change quickly, and in the summer of 1915, with Governor James E. Ferguson in office, the state appropriated $100,000 for improvements to the road, including the purchase of a new locomotive. Provisions also allowed for a possible extension to Dallas. At least one large landowner along the Trinity River offered to donate a right-of-way, and Dallas extension talk filled newspapers again as it had six years earlier. Representative John R. Moore of Palestine reportedly proposed that the state issue up to $1,000,000 in bonds for building the extension to Dallas and place the management of the State Railroad directly on the Texas Railroad Commission.

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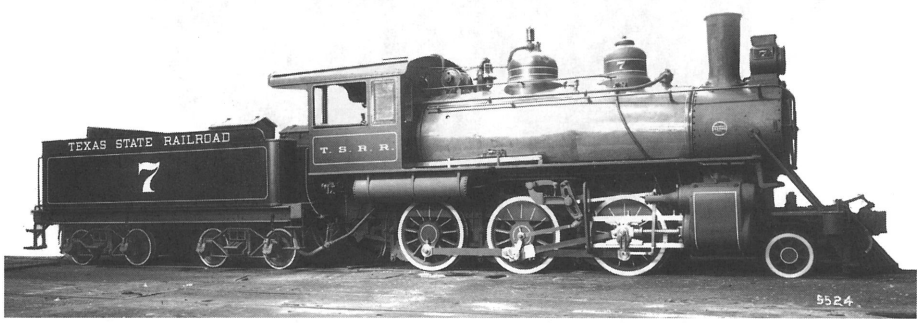


State Senator I. D. Fairchild of Lufkin rescued the State Railroad from years of mounting financial ruin by sponsoring legislation in 1921 that created a professional Board of Managers to govern the Rusk-Palestine line. The act led to more than 50 years of successfully leasing the State Railroad to private companies. Today, the State Railroad travels through three of five units of the I.D. Fairchild State Forest, created in 1925. Image courtesy of the Texas State Preservation Board, Austin.

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The extension debate continued until 1917, when under the administration of Governor William P. Hobby, the state returned to a policy of trying to lease the existing road, although many senators urged "junking" it once and for all. Longtime Texas Railroad Commissioner Allison Mayfield seemed to agree, stating the line was more than $300,000 in debt, and in his opinion, "the best thing to do would be to tear up the road and junk the equipment." Yet the majority in the legislature remained unwilling to write off the "expensive experiment" at such a heavy loss, and in 1919 appropriated another $30,000 to keep the "white elephant" on its feet for another year.

Early in 1921, with operating funds again depleted, Senator I. D. Fairchild of Lufkin proposed a novel solution. Since history had proven that the state knew little about managing a railroad successfully, why not turn the road over to a committee of "experienced, practical railroad men?" The senate approved the idea and in March named Lieutenant Governor Lynch Davidson chair of a new Board of Managers of the Texas State Railroad. Davidson, himself an "experienced" railroad man, appointed E.C. Durham of the Texas South-Eastern Railroad in Diboll and J.A. Glen of the Santa Fe lines in Beaumont to serve with him. The board was given $25,000



Texas State Railroad Engine 7, a 1915 Baldwin 64-ton 2-6-0 type Mogul, was the Texas State Railroad's only locomotive purchased new during common carrier operations. The state sold the engine in 1921 to the Blytheville, Leachville & Arkansas Southern Railroad. It was retired in the late 1950s and scrapped a few years later. Image courtesy of the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania.

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and the use for one year of fifty "able-bodied convicts" to rehabilitate the road, as well as authority, with the approval of the governor, to lease, sell, or at worst continue to operate the road upon the best basis possible.

With only $25,000—the original version of the bill had provided $150,000—board members never considered continued operations. Instead, they rehabilitated the line at little cost to the state by obtaining new and unused eighty-pound federal government World War I surplus rail for only the cost of transportation and selling the old rail, locomotives, and rolling stock to meet the cost of laying the new rail and making other repairs. The board then leased the rehabilitated line to the Texas & New Orleans Railway for five years, effectively providing T&NO with direct access to Palestine. By the terms of the lease, T&NO would maintain the railroad "in good and safe condition" and pay half of the earned net operating income to the state. T&NO and the board of managers subsequently renewed revised versions of the original lease until 1962, saving the state forty-one years of further losses.

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THE LEASE YEARS 1921-1969

Texas & New Orleans began operating the Texas State Railroad in August 1921. Official freight operations began on November 16, with passenger service delayed until December pending additional crosstie replacements by the board of managers as a condition of the lease. Passenger service began with two mixed trains daily in each direction between Palestine and Rusk, continuing over T&NO rails from North Rusk to a connection at Gallatin with T&NO's Dallas-Beaumont line. The trains averaged between nine and twelve miles per hour, including stops, between Palestine and Gallatin. Overnight Pullman sleeper service between Palestine and Dallas began early in 1922, along with day and night passenger service daily each way. On the night trains, passengers boarded Pullman sleepers at Palestine at 9:30 p.m. and arrived at Dallas the next morning at 8:30 a.m. Returning,



Texas South-Eastern Railroad Engine No. 22 and Caboose No. 4 idle on Texas State Railroad tracks in downtown Palestine in January 1963. TS-E leased the State Railroad from November 1962 through December 1969 and donated Engine 22, a 1956 General Electric 70-ton switcher, to the state tourist road in 1996. Photo by Fred Springer, courtesy of The History Center, Diboll.

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passengers boarded the sleepers at 8 p.m. and arrived back at Palestine at 6:30 a.m..

In 1932 T&NO acquired the Cotton Belt, effectively making the steep-graded and tightly curved Gallatin to North Rusk branch line expendable; T&NO abandoned the branch in 1934. Mixed freight and passenger train service continued until possibly the early 1950s, when the Texas State became a freight-only railroad. T&NO used light 2-6-0 and 4-4-0 steam locomotives over Texas State rails until the middle 1950s when they introduced lightweight diesel-electric switchers.

The original T&NO lease had provided for the state to receive fifty percent of the net earnings. Since there were no reported net earnings to divide between 1926 and 1950, the final ten-year lease required a rent of $12,000 per year plus fifty percent of any annual net income in excess of $24,000. This insured the state at least some income in addition to saving the expense of maintaining the road.

While T&NO leased the Texas State Railroad, Southern Pine Lumber Company of Diboll (SPLCo), the largest landowner along the Neches River, maintained a logging camp at Fastrill, several miles south of the State Railroad. To supply logs to sawmills in Diboll, more than sixty miles away in Angelina County, SPLCo's logging railroad crossed the tracks of the State Railroad late in the 1920s just east of the Neches River. In the early 1930s SPLCo added a spur connecting its mainline to the Texas State so its log trains could use the Texas State trestle to reach timber in Anderson County. Another spur located just west of the river allowed SPLCo trains to exit the state mainline into the surrounding forests. Portions of the long-abandoned logging lines on both sides of the river remain visible.

A few people born before 1930 may remember the logging operations. One who does so is L. D. Farrow of Nederland, who was born at Fastrill in 1922. Farrow remembers helping his father, J. T. "Big Boy" Farrow, log train engineer on SPLCo's Engine 11, study for a test that he had to pass before being allowed to operate trains over the State Railroad. Using a booklet of signs and signals, young Farrow motioned the calls, which his father had to recognize instantly.

When the Fastrill camp disbanded early in the 1940s, SPLCo ceased train operations over state rails but by the late 1940s it maintained a truck

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shop at Maydelle to service log trucks in the area. Rail sidings at Herring, Mewshaw, Java, and Maydelle on the Texas State became busy loading sites for logs bound for Diboll on T&NO trains operating over the Texas State to Rusk, then over the former Cotton Belt to Lufkin. Texas South-Eastern Railroad (TS-E) and SPLCo engines then coupled on to the cars and pulled the logs to Diboll over TS-E rails. During 1954 SPLCo stored as many as 5,000 logs monthly near Texas State tracks. Herring was by far the largest loading and storage area. About eighty percent of the logs were pine and twenty percent hardwoods.

The last T&NO lease of the State Railroad expired in 1962. Then, with an historical relationship to the Texas State Railroad going back at least to the early 1920s, Texas South-Eastern Railroad of Diboll leased the State Railroad and operated it from November 1962 through December 1969 as its Northern Division. The lease agreement was for TS-E to maintain the road in "good and safe condition," according to the same standard it maintained its Diboll-Lufkin division, and to pay the state $6,000 per year plus five percent of any net operating income. TS-E out of Rusk, operated a round trip daily from Rusk to Palestine, Monday through Friday, using TS-E Engine 22, a General Electric seventy-ton diesel-electric switcher built in 1956, and wooden caboose No. 4. Willard Conner served as section foreman with a regular track-and-bridge crew of six men, and A. D. Evans was depot agent at Palestine. Odaire Womack worked as an engineer; Fate Patrick and later Carrol Dover served as conductors.

TS-E's directors, who also directed Temple Industries and Southern Pine Lumber Company of Diboll, hoped that new federal economic stimulus programs might renew development of the Cherokee County iron industry, bringing heavy traffic and profitable revenue. This never happened. TS-E's net operating loss for the seven years was more than $65,000. Operating revenues ranged from $20,000 to $79,000 per year, but expenses usually exceeded income; slight profits were made in 1966 and 1967.

TS-E hauled between 300 and 1,400 cars annually over the Texas State. The principal customer by far, representing about fifty-five percent of the cars handled yearly, was the Vernon Calhoun meat packing plant located east of Palestine and west of Palestine State Park depot. Temple Industries usually was second, at about fifteen percent of total cars. Bridge traffic, or

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freight handled between Palestine and Rusk but not originating or terminating on the line, accounted for a large percentage of 1967's business when 43,000 tons of gravel in 616 cars was moved for a Texas Highway Department road project based in Lufkin.

Engineer Odaire Womack piloted TS-E's first run on the Texas State on November 1, 1962, and the last one on December 31, 1969. The last run consisted only of switching one car at Rusk and switching and transferring cars at Vercal and Palestine stations and the Missouri Pacific transfer tracks in Palestine. For fifty-eight miles of the sixty-six-mile round trip, only the engine comprised the train. Wayne Sellers, publisher of the *Palestine Herald-Press* and later a member of the Texas State Railroad board of managers, rode in the cab that day and noted that Womack blew No. 22's air horn loud and long through Maydelle on the return trip to Rusk. "That's the last time they'll hear a TS-E whistle here," Womack said. Ironically, twenty-seven years later TS-E donated Engine 22 to the Texas State Railroad, where it is used around the rail yard at Rusk and in occasional maintenance of way work.

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The Texas State Railroad's first full time crew under Parks Department operation poses in 1976 with Engine 200 at Rusk. From left: General Superintendent Ed McLaughlin, Operations and Maintenance Superintendent Blair Lavell, Fireman Roger Graham, and Engineer Dennis Spendlove. Photo by Bruce Blalock, courtesy of Joe Dale Morris, Austin.

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TOURIST RAILROAD AND STATE PARK 1970-2004

Plans to convert the Texas State Railroad into a tourist attraction began in March 1969, only days after Texas South-Eastern Railroad officials notified the State Railroad board of managers that they would not renew their lease at the end of the year. Tourism in East Texas was just beginning to develop in 1969, and Rusk's civic leaders were on board with their own ideas. Rusk Chamber of Commerce leaders Leon Edwards and Paul Cox, with J.B. Langhorne of Houston, organized the Cherokee and Southwestern Tourist Railroad. Area newspapers reported that Langhorne, a Timpson native, retired postal employee, and avid railroad enthusiast, earlier had tried unsuccessfully to establish tourist railroads at Cripple Creek, Colorado, and at Moscow, Texas.

Plans for the Cherokee and Southwestern included providing steam tourist-train service over eighteen miles of track between Rusk and Herring, the former log loading station located west of the Neches River. Designs also involved developing Herring into an elaborate Western theme town with a café, snack bar, curio shop, picnic area, and a large transportation museum. By the end of 1969 the State Railroad's board of managers agreed to lease the eighteen miles between Rusk and Herring to the tourist railroad and to lease just under four miles at the other end of the line to the Missouri Pacific railroad for freight service to the Vernon Calhoun packing plant. By early 1970 Langhorne and the Rusk Chamber had obtained a steam locomotive, four former Frisco passenger coaches, and a former Southern Railway Post Office baggage car. Temple Industries of Diboll leased the four Frisco coaches, which TS-E Railroad had used in popular Diboll Day passenger excursions between Diboll and Lufkin during the late 1960s.

The Cherokee Southwestern Tourist Railroad was dedicated, along with a Southland Paper Mills nature trail, on April 10, 1970. With print, radio,

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and television news media in attendance, the Rusk High School band played as hundreds of people gathered at the west end of Rusk's Fourth Street for festivities and the inaugural run of the "Cherokee Chief." Instead of a train ride, however, the people got only lemonade. The "Chief" broke down earlier that morning and never left the staging area. "The Cherokee and Southwestern Tourist Railroad was an embarrassment to all," editor Marie Whitehead of the *Rusk Cherokeean* later recalled. "The train tooted and that was about it." The under-financed and ill-equipped venture was a total failure by late summer and ended before really beginning, a heartbreak as well as an embarrassment for the people of Rusk.

Yet public interest in returning steam to the historic Texas State Railroad was significant. The dedication ceremonies included many dignitaries, including State Senator Charles Wilson of Lufkin, State Representatives Rayford Price of Palestine and Fred Head of Athens, as well as the Texas State Railroad board of managers, the Texas Tourist Council, and various chambers of commerce and state historical organizations. Senator Charles Wilson was among the principal speakers at the train's dedication. Despite the train's disappointing mechanical failure, he applauded Rusk's community spirit and pride and urged area leaders as well as every citizen to "keep moving."

Rusk and the Cherokee district did just that, and in less than a year an incredible turn of events changed everything. In January 1971, while the State Railroad's future remained as uncertain as ever, Governor Preston Smith appointed Wells banker Jack R. Stone to the Texas Parks & Wildlife Commission. This single act became seminal in the establishment of the Texas State Railroad State Historical Park.

One fateful evening that same month, while Stone awaited senate approval of his appointment, he and Rusk's mayor, Emmett H. Whitehead, traveled to a party in Senator Wilson's honor at Temple Industries' northern Newton County forest resort known as Scrapping Valley. During the drive, the two discussed Stone's pending appointment to the parks board and their mutual dream of the Texas State Railroad becoming a true recreational and tourist facility. The recent failure of the shoestring-budgeted Cherokee and Southwestern Tourist Railroad was still fresh in their memories. They knew that millions of dollars would be required for a tourist railroad

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to be launched successfully. Stone's appointment to the Parks & Wildlife Commission was confirmed by the senate just days after the party, and already a plan was at work.

With Stone on the Parks & Wildlife board things began to move. Feasibility studies to refurbish the railroad were conducted late in 1971. Then in February 1972, Governor Smith appointed Stone chairman of the Parks & Wildlife's Board of Commissioners. This was followed only a few weeks later by the legislature transferring the Texas State Railroad to the Parks & Wildlife Department, and then in August appropriating $3 million to refurbish approximately twenty-six miles of the thirty-three-mile line between Rusk and Palestine as a steam tourist railroad park. Senator Wilson sponsored all supporting and enabling legislation in the senate, while Representative Rayford Price led the way in the house.

To make the railroad park successful, Parks & Wildlife asked the cities of Rusk and Palestine to provide additional recreational facilities in support of train operations. With a long history as a state-supported town, Rusk took the early lead in developing and supporting the project. Through complex land swaps, donations, and purchases among city and state departments as well as private individuals and companies, the land needed for a new Rusk terminal and train turnaround was secured quickly. Rusk leaders formed a city parks board to develop a 110-acre campground and park at their end of the line and received federal matching funds from the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. In addition to a jumpstart in organization, Rusk also had the advantage of not having any major highway grade crossings with which to contend in locating its terminal and turnaround as Palestine did. Rusk also took the lead in securing the railroad's offices and maintenance complex, assuring the State Park's headquarters for Rusk.

By summer 1972 a few Palestine civic leaders came on board as well, encouraged by Rusk's early lead in selecting and acquiring land and hiring a park architect. Palestine newspaper publisher Wayne Sellers, who was also a new member of the State Railroad board of managers, reportedly said upon seeing Rusk's initial master plan in August, "This could be one of the greatest tourist attractions in the United States." It was this kind of infectious enthusiasm by Rusk's and Palestine's leaders that convinced Austin officials

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to fund the railroad project fully later that month.

With funding secured, the first priority of the Parks & Wildlife Department was the railroad itself. Although much political work had been done in Austin, no maintenance of the railroad right-of-way had been performed since TS-E Railroad last operated the line in 1969. In cooperation with the Texas Department of Corrections (TDC), Parks & Wildlife used prison labor to rehabilitate the neglected, decaying roadbed, which had disappeared in places under a heavy growth of weeds, vines, brush, and saplings. Late in October 1972 inmates from the Ellis and Eastham units of TDC arrived at Maydelle and began clearing what they described as "a real jungle." Commuting daily at first, the inmates cleared an area along the railroad for a 200' x 600' fenced compound. They constructed housing for themselves as well as other buildings to store equipment and to serve as a parks field office. Early in 1973 they began clearing brush along the twenty-five miles of park railroad right-of-way and placing barbed-wire boundary fencing along both sides of the tracks. In places they removed barbed wire fencing that stretched across the tracks, placed there by private landowners who believed the State Railroad had been abandoned. The inmates also carried saws to cut saplings of several inches diameter that had grown up in the tracks.

The inmates spent four nights a week at the Maydelle compound, returning each Friday afternoon to their regular prison units for the weekend. They returned to Maydelle again each Monday morning and were back at work on the railroad before lunchtime. Tuesdays through Thursdays their work day began with breakfast at 7 a.m., loading tools and necessary supplies at 7:30 a.m., and traveling by train to their work site by 8 a.m.. At noon, the work train returned the inmates to Maydelle for a hot lunch. By 1:30 p.m., the inmates were back on the work train returning to their job sites. Work continued to about 5:30 p.m., when the work train returned the inmates once again to Maydelle for hot suppers, hot showers, color televisions, and clean bunks. It was a far cry from the experiences of the 1907-1909 prisoners, who were comparatively poorly clothed and housed and who bathed outdoors two to three per tub in unheated water, even in winter.

Supervising the inmates' work was retired Missouri Pacific track and

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bridge crew foremen working for Track Work Inc. of Ennis, Texas. Under their direction, inmates replaced more than 50,000 rotted crossties and rebuilt twenty-eight timber pile trestles. Since the road had received fairly light traffic, only a few pieces of the World War I era, eighty-pound rail were replaced. In recent years, however, several sections of track, particularly areas prone to washouts, have been relayed with newer 112- and 133-pound rail. The railroad was initially restored as a mud track, meaning there was no real ballast material other than dirt. During the late 1970s, however, a rock-ballasting program was implemented, which over the course of several years ballasted the entire line, making it more durable and safer.

An average of about fifty inmates at a time worked on the project. About half of these were assigned to track work. Nine to eighteen, depending on the job, were assigned to bridge repair. The others were trustees who performed housekeeping, cooking, and mess hall duties at the Maydelle compound. When needed, some of the track and bridge crews performed restoration work on passenger coaches and steam locomotives.

Track and bridge crews utilized mostly hand tools. They used two pneumatic jackhammers for driving spikes and impact wrenches for bridge and trestle bolts. In addition, bridge crews used a Burrow crane and a flat car, as well as long aluminum ladders, chain saws, and various ropes. Transporting the crews daily between Maydelle and the work sites was former Temple Industries and Southern Pine Lumber Company's forty-five-ton General Electric diesel-electric locomotive Engine No. 1, acquired in late 1972. Well into the project, Parks & Wildlife began purchasing labor-saving track maintenance equipment for regular Texas State Railroad crews to utilize once the rebuilding was complete and inmate crews left the property.

Much of the success for the Texas State Railroad State Historical Park's development is due to Ed McLaughlin, who served as the park's first superintendent of operations from January 1974 to March 1980. A native of Fort Worth, McLaughlin began consulting on a volunteer basis for the Texas State Railroad in February 1973, while he developed and managed the new Wasatch Mountain Railroad at Heber City, Utah, an historic steam tourist line now known as the Heber Valley Railroad. McLaughlin had served as a design principal in the project, which began with abandoned track of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad through Utah's Wasatch

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Mountain State Park. Texas Parks & Wildlife officials visited McLaughlin and his Wasatch railroad operations in August 1973, and offered him the Texas State Railroad's superintendent job in November. McLaughlin loved the mountains but missed his native state. He accepted the offer, seeing the fledgling Texas State Railroad project as a challenge tailored for him.

McLaughlin's physical presence at the Texas State Railroad began the first week of January 1974. In August 1973 he had been given the state park's master plan, which he later described as "model train around the Christmas tree thinking." Designs called for Maydelle to be the base of operations, "with little more than station platforms, a very small ticket booth, and toilets to be built at the Rusk and Palestine terminals." McLaughlin knew that historical and tourist railroads had always been market-driven enterprises, and the public's first and last impressions with the Texas State Railroad would be the Rusk and Palestine depots. They had to be "upgraded considerably" if the project was to be a success. Parks & Wildlife quietly listened and agreed, but made it clear to McLaughlin that his priority was to have an operating steam train ready by the summer of 1976 to celebrate the nation's bicentennial and the State Park's dedication.

Throughout 1974 McLaughlin justified new capital budgets to modify the master plan, oversaw track and bridge rehabilitation, and acquired and began restoring steam locomotives and historic rolling stock. Working long hours, he became a regular at the TDC supper table eating with the inmates in the compound mess hall at Maydelle. A year before McLaughlin began as superintendent, Parks & Wildlife had obtained two inoperable steam locomotives—one located by U.S. Congressman Wright Patman from Army surplus and the other donated by Temple Industries of Diboll. Congressman Patman's U.S. Army, seventy-four-ton, 2-8-0 type engine No. 611 "was a real basket case, missing many critical parts," McLaughlin later recalled, and no effort was made to restore it to operating condition.

The Temple engine, Southern Pine Lumber Company Engine No. 28, had last served logging operations in Pineland, Texas. It was built in 1917 by Baldwin for the U.S. Army and intended for World War I operations in Europe. Known as a General Pershing class 2-8-0 type, the eighty-three-ton engine remained in the United States, primarily serving Fort Polk in Louisiana. The Tremont & Gulf Railway acquired it in the 1940s and sold

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it to Temple in 1955. It was retired early in the 1960s, and donated to the Texas State Railroad in November 1972. Needing a new boiler and other major repair, it was not moved from Pineland to the Texas State Railroad until February 1976 and was not restored to regular state park service until spring 1996. Since then it has operated regularly out of the Rusk depot. During the 2003 season it was the only operating steam locomotive on the line, since all others were being rebuilt.

Given the poor condition of the locomotives on hand late in 1973, McLaughlin knew he would have to find other steam power to run a train by the Bicentennial deadline. Remarkably, from May through July 1974, McLaughlin obtained three locomotives that became Texas State road numbers 200, 201, and 400. Engine 200, a Cooke seventy-one-ton 4-6-0, formerly Southern Pacific No. 2248, built in 1896, was purchased from a collector in California. During the 1950s it operated as Southern Pacific's exhibition locomotive at county and state fairs and during the last runs of retiring engineers. Retired in 1960, the engine had been maintained well and required little restoration work, which was done "in the dirt" at the crude Maydelle yard. McLaughlin made Engine 200 the State Park's first working steam locomotive, and it was the only working steam engine during the entire 1976 and 1977 seasons.

Engine 201, a Cooke seventy-nine-ton 4-6-0, formerly Texas & Pacific Engine No. 316, built in 1901, was donated to the Texas State Railroad by the City of Abilene, Texas, where the locomotive had been displayed in a park since the early 1950s. Engine 400, a Baldwin ninety-one-ton 2-8-2, built in 1917, was originally Engine 30 of Louisiana's Tremont & Gulf Railway. It was sold in 1954 to the Magma Arizona Railroad in Arizona, where McLaughlin acquired it for the Texas State Railroad. The locomotive had appeared in the MGM epic film "How the West Was Won" (1962). Near the end of the movie it is the fictitious Verde & Rio Grande Railroad Engine 7 that crashes through a timber roadblock. Hahn & Clay Boiler & Machine Works of Houston completed the restoration of engines 201 and 400 in 1978.

In late 1979 McLaughlin acquired from the Fort Concho Museum in San Angelo what became State Railroad Engine 500. The Baldwin 138-ton 4-6-2 Pacific type, built in 1911, which was originally Santa Fe Railway's

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Engine 1316, was in excellent condition and had seen very little service since Santa Fe overhauled it prior to donating it to the museum in 1954. The high-drivered 500 was easily restored by Texas State Railroad maintenance supervisor Blair Lavell and his crew at the Rusk shops and placed in service on the state park line in 1981.

Half of the passenger cars in service are former Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific commuter coaches built in 1923 by Standard Steel Car Company. They are numbered 40-46. Four of them were acquired in 1984 just in time for peak passenger operations. Other cars are coaches and observation cars formerly owned by the Santa Fe, Pennsylvania, International & Great Northern, and Erie Lackawana railroads. Knowing the steam trains would be heavily photographed, McLaughlin gave much thought to paint color. In the end he decided on yellow with a red stripe so the cars would photograph well against the dark greens and shadows of the East Texas forest. During the early 1980s, crimson red replaced yellow as the official primary color. Train sizes were generally limited to four or five cars during the 1970s, but beginning in the 1980s reached seven or more if needed when pulled by the more powerful engines 300, 400, and 500.

Early in 1972, long before locomotives or inmates arrived at Maydelle, the city of Rusk hired Austin architect Stewart B. Lambert to design the Rusk City Park. The city of Palestine later hired Theodore S. Maffitt Jr. of Palestine to design its park. After designing the Rusk park, Lambert was hired by the state to design both the Rusk and Palestine Victorian-style depots. Designed to be support facilities for the Texas State Railroad State Historical Park, both city parks were transferred to the state in 1982. Rusk offered its park to the state in the summer of 1979, after disillusionment regarding financial profitability of managing such a facility. The initial Rusk City Park budget was $100,000, but costs ran to more than $400,000 before completion. The state's restoration of the State Railroad to tourist service also went over budget, with the original $3 million estimate running to more than $5 million before completion. Portions of the planned sixty-acre Palestine City Park were never completed, and today Rusk remains the most visited end of the line among train riders as well as recreational campers.

By the spring of 1976 preparations for the State Railroad's inaugural run and the dedication of the Rusk City Park were at full steam. The big

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day was scheduled for June 25, and McLaughlin painted Engine 200 a bright Bicentennial red, white, and blue. Students from Rusk High School's Trades Class completed construction of the park registration building. Parks & Wildlife stocked fifteen-acre Cherokee Lake with 1,600 channel catfish, and the Rusk Chamber of Commerce began advertising in *Southern Living* magazine and other similar publications. A special train for members of the press ran on Wednesday, June 23, and some 125 representatives from newspapers and television stations from across Texas were on board for the first passenger train over the line since the 1950s.

The biggest day, however, was two days later on Friday. On the morning of June 25, Governor Dolph Briscoe and First Lady Janey Briscoe flew by plane to Palestine, then by helicopter to the Rusk City Park, where a crowd of more than 1,000 people awaited the day's activities. State representative and former Mayor Emmett H. Whitehead served as master of ceremonies, which officially began at noon near the park's group camping shelter, since the depot and parking lot remained under construction. Among the many individuals and groups Whitehead recognized for diligent and tireless work were Mary Buchanan and Gene Kelley, managers of the Rusk City Park project, and Roy Conner, director of the Rusk Chamber of Commerce. Parks & Wildlife Commissioner Jack Stone and Texas Speaker of the House Bill Clayton also made remarks. Governor Briscoe then provided the keynote address, followed by Janey Briscoe's christening of Engine 200 by breaking a bottle of champagne on the engine's front coupler.

Following the locomotive's christening, the "Governor's Special" officially opened the railroad to the public. Joining the governor and first lady on the train for lunch were officials of the Parks & Wildlife Department and other dignitaries who departed for Palestine at about 1:00 p.m.. A drawing was held for a second run for approximately 300 passengers, which completed the day's events late that evening. The day was a tremendous success, and not even a rabid skunk could spoil it. According to the *Rusk Cherokeean*, "a berserk skunk strangely ran in circles" at the edge of the crowd during the noon ceremony, and before it could run for the speaker's platform, "Highway Patrolman Jimmy Rinehart stopped it with several rounds from a shotgun and a .357 magnum pistol."

Throughout the rest of 1976, the new Texas State Railroad ran only

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eight more excursions. Following a Sunday, July Fourth Special, State Railroad staff spent the remaining summer days moving operations from Maydelle to the newly completed Rusk locomotive shop and office. The remainder of the season consisted of runs on September 25, October 1-3, 9 & 16, and November 13, 1976. All runs originated and terminated at the Rusk city park's group camping shelter, since the Rusk depot remained unfinished until the following season. The runs were three-hour round trips between Rusk and Palestine. They departed from Rusk at 11:00 a.m.. In Palestine the trains simply turned around on a wye, since the Palestine depot also remained under construction. The trains carried a full-capacity of 300 passengers each.

The Rusk depot was completed in February 1977 and was dedicated in April by driving a gold spike in the tracks in front of the native ore rock structure. During the 1977 season the train ran on weekends only from



Newly restored State Railroad Engine 400 greets photographers in 1978 with engineer W. J. Morrison at the throttle. Image courtesy of The History Center, Diboll.

Jonathan K. Gerland, STEAM IN THE PINES: A HISTORY OF THE TEXAS STATE RAILROAD (Nacogdoches: East Texas Historical Association, 2004)

May through early October for a total of forty-seven trips, carrying 15,141 passengers, a full-capacity average of 322 passengers per train. At times the railroad was forced to turn away as many as 100 people per run, since there were not enough seats. All trains but possibly the last one of the season operated out of Rusk, awaiting the Palestine depot's completion early in October.

In 1978 trains began making two runs daily, both operating out of Rusk. After receiving restored Engine 400 in late spring, the railroad added more restored passenger cars and occasionally originated trains in Palestine as well. Also, now with a second operating steam locomotive, simultaneous runs were sometimes offered, with the Rusk and Palestine trains passing one another on a siding at Mewshaw. The railroad operated excursions from March to October, carrying 35,799 passengers and earning $156,294 in revenue.

In 1979 the railroad carried 47,479 passengers, earning $200,528 in ticket sales. Eighty-five percent of all passengers still began their ride at Rusk. Railroad staff had grown to include twenty full-time and forty-seven part-time employees, seventy percent of whom resided in Cherokee County, with an annual payroll of $300,000. The total annual railroad budget was just under $400,000.

Late in 1979 train crews experienced considerable swaying of the Neches River trestle. To make the summer dedication deadline in 1976, bridge repairers had not driven new bridge pilings during the road's rehabilitation. Fearing a catastrophe, Superintendent McLaughlin immediately closed the Neches River trestle to passenger traffic. A new concrete bridge replaced the trestle the following season, and four other trestles were similarly replaced in 1981. Further trestle replacement took place between 1991 and 1996, until eventually all trestles on the line were rebuilt as concrete bridges.

With the Neches River trestle out of service late in 1979, Superintendent McLaughlin realized the railroad needed an option for shorter excursions at each end of the line. He remembered the location of an abandoned turntable in the Frisco rail yards in Paris and managed its donation and transfer to Maydelle. A track wye was installed at Jarvis, about seven miles east of the Palestine depot, and with the turntable installed at Maydelle, trains from either end could operate short, approximately seven-mile excursions independently of each other and have their locomotives always at the head

Jonathan K. Gerland, STEAM IN THE PINES: A HISTORY OF THE TEXAS STATE RAILROAD (Nacogdoches: East Texas Historical Association, 2004)



Governor Bill Clements waves from the cab of Engine 200 to kick off the 1979 season. Image courtesy of Joe Dale Morris, Austin.

of the trains. These shorter runs have since become a popular offering, especially in accommodating various special events and in weekday rides for school groups.

Although the railroad continued to operate while trestle repair continued, ticket sales during 1980 and 1981 clearly showed the impact of not operating over the entire line. Only 30,803 passengers rode in 1980, a decrease of 16,676 riders from the previous year. In 1981, 40,871 passengers constituted a good improvement over 1980, but still 6,608 fewer than 1979, the year the Neches trestle closed.

With bridge repair completed, the park's peak years of operation began in 1982, which also included state ownership and operation of the former city parks at the Rusk and Palestine terminals. Between 1982 and 1990 the railroad carried an average of more than 65,000 passengers a year. The three highest years of passenger totals were 1984 with 75,078; 1985 with 71,796;

Jonathan K. Gerland, STEAM IN THE PINES: A HISTORY OF THE TEXAS STATE RAILROAD (Nacogdoches: East Texas Historical Association, 2004)

and 1986 with 70,930. Crews at the time said that if the railroad had had more coaches available, numbers would easily have surpassed 80,000. Revenue from ticket sales for 1986 alone was $506,130.

Competing with new tourist steam railroad attractions at Fort Worth and Austin during the 1990s, the Texas State Railroad began experiencing a serious decrease in riders in 1993. Only 39,674 people rode the trains that year, down significantly from the more than 70,000 riders just a few years earlier. Although Fort Worth's "Tarantula Train" and Austin's "Hill Country Flyer" have each experienced periods of steam service interruption due to mechanical failure in recent years, the Texas State Railroad is no longer the only steam railroad in the state. The State Railroad's annual average ridership from 1993 through 2003 was 39,166.

Ed McLaughlin, who left the State Railroad in 1980 to develop other tourist and freight railroads, helped develop Fort Worth's Tarantula Train, which is pulled by former Texas State Railroad Engine 200, restored to its original Southern Pacific number 2248. McLaughlin arranged a swap with the state whereby Fort Worth received Engine 200, which the state was no longer using in regular service, and the state received a new, all-welded boiler from the Dixon Boiler Works in California for the then un-restored state Engine 300.

Over the past twenty-eight years, the Texas State Railroad, with its several locomotives and various passenger and freight cars, has appeared in more than two-dozen movies as well as many shorter films. It should be no wonder, considering that railroads were among the earliest subjects filmed by the pioneer motion picture industries in both America and Europe. As early as August 1972, at an initial Texas State Railroad State Historical Park organizational meeting in Austin, the newly formed Governor's Commission on the Film Industry pledged wholeheartedly its support for the park, reporting that during 1971 alone film companies on location spent an estimated $12 million in Texas. Texas' many and diverse state parks, including the State Railroad, have become increasingly attractive to film production companies, and by 2001 movie companies were spending nearly $200 million annually in the state, not including commercial, documentary, or music video film work, all of which have occurred at the State Railroad.

One of the earliest movie projects to film the Texas State Railroad was MGM's "The Long Riders" (1979), a sympathetic portrayal of Jesse James

Jonathan K. Gerland, STEAM IN THE PINES: A HISTORY OF THE TEXAS STATE RAILROAD (Nacogdoches: East Texas Historical Association, 2004)

and his gang, which starred brothers David, Keith, and Robert Carradine, James and Stacy Keach, Dennis and Randy Quaid, and Christopher and Nicholas Guest. In "The Long Summer of George Adams" (1982), starring James Garner and Joan Hackett, the State Railroad acquired the present Maydelle depot. The structure began as an existing house, which was modified and used as a movie prop in the film. In 2000 the story of Jesse James was retold at the Texas State Railroad, this time starring Colin Farrell, Ali Larter, and Scott Caan in "American Outlaws." Sort of a comedic film, it contains a scene in which Engine 201 is literally blown up through the magic of Hollywood.

Two of most popular movies were made for television. Both Larry McMurtry's "The Streets of Laredo" (1995) and Turner Home Video's "The Rough Riders" (1996) feature multiple scenes of state locomotives and rolling stock in action. Starring James Garner, Sissy Spacek, Sam Shepard, Ned Beatty, and Randy Quaid, "The Streets of Laredo" was actually filmed in West, not East, Texas. In perhaps the most unusual accommodation the state has ever made for a film, Engine 201 and several freight and passenger cars were towed by rail behind modern diesel-electric locomotives from Palestine via Fort Worth and San Angelo to the Big Bend Ranch State Park area located northeast of Presidio. Filming occurred for two weeks on a Santa Fe rail line known as the "Orient Railway," South of Marfa, between Alpine and Presidio. The following year, movie production returned to the Texas State Railroad's home tracks to shoot "The Rough Riders," starring Tom Berenger, Sam Elliott, Gary Busey, and Brian Keith. Unlike "The Streets of Laredo," which featured only one locomotive, Rough Riders used several of the State Railroad's engines as well as a host of rolling stock and trackside scenery and props.

Generating the most publicity by far was Fox Television's live filming of Robbie Knieval's motorcycle jump over a Texas State Railroad train in February 2000. Filmed at the State Railroad's Palestine Park before a live, prime-time television audience and an estimated 20,000 on-lookers, Knieval successfully cleared an approaching Engine 400 pulling five cars just before the train crashed through the launching ramp. Fireworks ignited into the night sky as he cleared the train and landed safely 200 feet away. Automobiles filled the Palestine Park parking lot and lined both sides of the park entrance road and U.S. Highway 84 for miles.

Jonathan K. Gerland, STEAM IN THE PINES: A HISTORY OF THE TEXAS STATE RAILROAD (Nacogdoches: East Texas Historical Association, 2004)

Originally built by convict labor and primarily a hauler of slow-moving, relatively low-value and unexciting forest products, the Texas State Railroad had come a long way indeed.

The restored scenic railroad remains today one of the most popular and unique tourist train operations in the country. It maintains and operates four steam as well as four antique diesel-electric locomotives. It is perhaps the only railroad in the nation that runs two steam trains simultaneously each day of operation, with trains from each end of the twenty-five-mile line meeting twice daily midway through their runs.

A century ago railroads in general contributed significantly to the growth and development of Texas and the rest of the nation. They not only connected and revitalized already established communities, but they created a host of new ones almost everywhere their tracks stretched. They brought a revolutionary exchange of goods and services, ideas and cultures, and shaped the state's cultural as well as geographical landscape.

The Texas State Railroad State Historical Park continues to connect people of all ages to their history, as well as to the railroad's lingering presence in American life, in a unique, fun, and exciting way.



Engine 300 takes a spin on the Maydelle turntable on October 31, 2002, during an excursion for area elementary schools. Photo by the author.

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State Representative Emmett H. Whitehead (from left), Parks & Wildlife Commissioner Jack Stone, and U.S. Congressman Charles Wilson visit construction work at the Texas State Railroad State Historical Park in early 1976. The three men were among the most important influences in establishing the park. Image courtesy of Joe Dale Morris, Austin.

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A NOTE ON THE SOURCES

Primary sources comprise the basis of this history. Most useful were the various published as well as unpublished reports and records of the Texas State Railroad and the Texas prison system between 1878 and 1922 housed at the Texas State Archives in Austin. In addition, the findings of two legislative investigating committees provided much detail into the railroad's construction and early operations. These were published as *Report of the Penitentiary Investigating Committee Including All Exhibits and Testimony* (August 1910) and *A Record of Evidence and Statements before the Penitentiary Investigating Committee Appointed by the Thirty-Third Legislature* (1913). The author used copies of these two compilations at the State Legislative Library in Austin and the Special Collections Library at Sam Houston State University. Also helpful were the various volumes of Texas' general laws and the journals of proceedings of the Senate and House, as well as the papers of governors Hogg, Campbell, and Colquitt, housed at the Texas State Archives and the University of Texas at Austin's Center for American History.

Other productive records included reports of the Texas State Railroad contained in the Interstate Commerce Commission records at National Archives II in College Park, Maryland. The records of the Texas South-Eastern Railroad are housed at The History Center in Diboll, which also houses related records of Temple Industries. The History Center further provided valuable maps, photographs, and other related materials. Nineteenth and twentieth-century newspapers published in Rusk, Palestine, Dallas, Houston, and Galveston were indispensable. These resources were used primarily in microfilm format at the Rusk and Palestine public libraries, the East Texas Research Center of Stephen F. Austin State University, The History Center in Diboll, The Center for American History in Austin, and the Texas State Archives, as well as obtained through interlibrary loan services of the Houston Public Library System.

Many secondary sources assisted research efforts tremendously. Most

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helpful were Donald R. Walker's *Penology for Profit: A History of the Texas Prison System, 1867-1912* (1988); Ralph W. Steen's *Twentieth Century Texas: An Economic and Social History* (1942); and Joe Dale Morris' *The Texas State Railroad: The Scenic Realm of the Iron Horse* (1979). Also useful were unpublished theses and dissertations, including Herman Lee Crow's "A Political History of the Texas Penal System, 1829-1951" (University of Texas, 1964); James Robertson Nowlin's "A Political History of the Texas Prison System, 1849-1957" (Trinity University, 1962); and Sandra Fuller Allen's "The Iron Men: An Historical Review of the East Texas Penitentiary" (Stephen F. Austin State University, 1982).

And of course S.G. Reed's *A History of Texas Railroads* (1941) provided a handy desk reference. The author used a copy that once belonged to E.C. Durham, an original member of the Texas State Railroad Board of Managers.

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