

Echoes of the Past

THE MISSOURI, OKLAHOMA and GULF RAILROAD

ALL ABOARD

All aboard at Copeland Switch for a mythical 1950 train ride on a long forgotten railroad, the Missouri, Oklahoma and Gulf Railroad (the MO & G) that ran the length of the Grand River Valley from 1912 to the mid – 1960's. Although the line began at Baxter Springs and wound its way through Fairland, we choose to board at Copeland Switch, across from today's Tom Cat Corner at the junction of highways 59 and 85A,. But now during the summer of 1950, we leave Copeland and travel southwest across the fields north of Echo Bay and beyond Littlefield's Corner then turn north and follow the new grade (now 85A) which was created because of the creation of Grand Lake then across the railroad bridge at Horse Creek to the station at New Bernice. Someone mentions that the original town of Bernice established in 1913 was now under water and the town and railroad track originally had been relocated 2 ½ miles east before being inundated by the lake in 1940,

Continuing on through Bernice we travel about five miles to the town of Cleora. The original community was nearer the river but was moved to take advantage of rail transportation. Today, the town now includes a two story hotel, a post office, and a Dr's office. We reflect on the fact that if we were to pass through Cleora 50 years later, the train would have run right through Kahoot's Convenience Store as it made its way southeast across the upper end of Duck Creek to Ketchum.

Folks at Ketchum had also anticipated the coming of the MO&G several years before by moving some of their buildings from what then was known as Ketchum Crossing founded in 1898 by Reverend James Ketchum, a wealthy Delaware Indian. It would have happened later anyway because now Ketchum Crossing was covered by 80 feet of water under Ketchum Cove.

Leaving Ketchum we continue to Pensacola another creation of the railroad. In 1910 a speculator from Kentucky, James Wilson, began buying Indian allotments and platting a town, however he had a problem. He needed a post office but one already existed called Pensacola and it was located just 1 ½ miles north. It would be very difficult to persuade the government that another post office was needed nearby. Wilson knew that Isaac Garber owned the store housing the post office and after considerable overtures to Garber and the surrounding neighborhood, convinced them that it would be to their economic advantage to move to the new site and they agreed. The name "Pensacola" first the home of "Greenbrier Joe" Martin, then the name of a post office three miles south of his ranch buildings had moved another 1 ½ miles south and was finally a town located on the MO&G.

Years before when the railroad was being proposed it's owners determined that they would begin construction southbound from Baxter Springs, Kansas and northbound from Muskogee. And consequently our next stop Strang, also a result of the railroad, became the site for the two sections to meet. On Valentines Day, February 14, 1913 a "Golden Spike" ceremony occurred that drew thousands of spectators. Most had never seen a steam engine or train and were in such awe that they scattered in terror when the engineer, a practical joker, pulled the whistle and yelled that he "was going to turn the train around."

From Strang our train turns south across the Grand River on a bridge whose abutments are still visible and follows the east bank of the Grand River to Salina. All of this section of the road would be flooded by Lake Hudson in 1965, but now in 1950 it is a peaceful scenic ride. Back in 1912 some businessmen had decided to create "New Salina" about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile south of the present town and constructed some buildings, but the new location soon faltered because the post office had remained in Salina and folks wanted to shop there.

Following the river bend and steaming on past the future site of Kerr Dam just east of Markham's Ferry Crossing the train turns sharply to the left and enters Locust Grove, still another railroad town platted in 1912. Then traveling southwest we cross the river again at Rocky Point northeast of Wagner and leaving the Grand River Valley continue through Okay and then merge with the Katy Railroad at Muskogee. Arriving at the station the conductor shouts "end of the line." Improvement of trunk roads and highways for trucking plus creation of the Grand and Hudson lakes prove the conductor to be prophetic. Fifteen years after our mythical ride in 1950, the Missouri, Oklahoma and Gulf came to the "end of its line."