

# **CATTLE, SOD AND EMPIRE**

**Contributed by Bob Burton**

The Santa Fe System grew from an east-west line across Kansas into a giant network by absorbing smaller railroads. Most often, the smaller companies had been created by the Santa Fe, which guided the company's development until the principal railroad took direct control. Also very often, the Santa Fe took over completely independent companies. On occasion, Santa Fe personnel formed a new railroad that was free of Santa Fe influence and control at first, but later joined the fold. The Santa Fe's very first branch fell into this third category. It was a major step in the growth of a major railroad.

Early plans of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Rail Road called for the main line to pass through Wichita, Kansas. Surveys made in 1870 included two lines westward from that place. One followed the Arkansas River and the other lead southwestward to the Cimarron River.

Sedgwick County, wherein Wichita was located, wooed the Santa Fe and three other railroads by promising \$200,000 worth of county bonds to the first comer.

There was a problem, however. Wichita lay within land ceded by the Osage Nation in 1865. One provision of the treaty, which was still being debated in Congress, was that none of this land could be granted to railroads.

The Santa Fe desired its promised land grant, which consisted of the odd-numbered sections for ten sections width on each side of the track. Part of this grant would have been lost by passing through the Osage Trust Lands. After lobbying efforts failed, the rails were laid far north of Wichita amidst obtainable land.

The railroad would not lose any business by taking the northern route. It did not matter at that time if the rails intersected the Chisholm Trail at the new town of Newton or at Wichita as long as the trail was cut south of Abilene. The Chisholm Trail had been bringing considerable business to the Kansas Pacific Railroad, but the Santa Fe intended to take the business for itself.

Smoke from the final battle of the Civil War had scarcely cleared from the Texas brush country before booted men began clearing horned beasts from the thickets and driving them north by the thousands. For several years the cattle trade flourished at Abilene, a previously unknown siding on the Kansas Pacific Railroad. But Abilene's heyday was threatened by the advancing line of settlement and by the advancing line of the Santa Fe, which would intersect the cattle trail at a point closer to Texas

But even before service began to Newton July 17, 1871, leading citizens of Wichita were dickering with Santa Fe officials. General Manager T. J. Peter could foresee the day

when farmers would settle around Newton and prevent Texas cattle from reaching the shipping yards there. He presented the matter to his superiors, but to no avail. Only that irrepressible dreamer, Cyrus K. Holliday, sided with him.

Peter, Holliday, and several Wichita businessmen obtained a charter on June 22 for the Wichita and South Western Rail Road, an independent company. Wichita called for a new \$200,000 bond election, since the new company was not eligible for the earlier offer.

The W&SW's route projected southwestward from Newton to the Little Arkansas River at Sedgwick, thence down the valley to the confluence with the main Arkansas at Wichita. The route was to miss Park City, Wichita's arch rival. Citizens of that city became alarmed and proposed to grant a larger bond issue if they got the railroad. The Wichita-controlled W&SW declined the offer.

Park City began stumping for the defeat of the bonds, but was unable to parry a decisive Wichita thrust. Wichita proposed that if the bonds passed, the city would not object if the northern half of the county split away to form a new county. The bonds passed August 11, and on the ninth of the next month Peter assumed control of the construction project.

He did not hold control for long, for the Santa Fe directors had seen the light. To preserve the cattle trade, the railroad had to reach southward. Longhorn cattle, while themselves immune, carried splenic fever. As long as the cattle stayed in the thickets of south Texas, all was well. But economics dictated that longhorns had to be driven northward, where the disease ravaged less hardy livestock. The state legislature had established a quarantine line, effective 1872, beyond which no Texas cattle could pass. The herds were cut off from Newton, but Wichita lay right on the line.

Santa Fe forces completed the W&SW May 13, 1872, in time for the cattle shipping season. By then, ownership and an operating lease had placed the line under Santa Fe aegis. This was not only the Santa Fe's first branch, but also the first separate railroad to come under the Santa Fe banner.

Northern Sedgwick County split away, becoming Harvey County. Then the citizens of the new county refused to pay for the bonds they had approved while citizens of the old county. The case eventually appeared before the state supreme court. In 1877 that body ruled on a technicality that Harvey County was not responsible for Sedgwick County bonds.

For several years, Wichita was the principal shipping point of the Chisholm Trail. However, farmers advanced to the quarantine line and pressed beyond it. Wichita leased a right of way through the new farmland, but trail driving became more difficult each year. In early 1877, the railroad decided to cease loading cattle at Wichita and concentrate on Dodge City. Wichita settled down as the terminus of an agricultural branch. However, events were already in motion to change that.

To the east, the Santa Fe wished to penetrate the farm belt along the Walnut River. For this purpose, the company organized the Florence, El Dorado and Walnut Valley Railroad, which connected its first two namesakes in 1877. Rails had scarcely reached El Dorado when citizens of that place secured an injunction against further construction. For several years, El Dorado was able to enjoy the benefits of being a terminal town. Meanwhile, the Walnut River was in danger of being claimed by other railroads.

Also, a couple of years' experience in trailing cattle to Dodge City confirmed that land to the west was too dry to provide adequate pasturage for the entire cattle trade. An alternate shipping point was desirable.

Southwest of Wichita lay Wellington and Caldwell. The latter place was well known to cattlemen. It had been the first place on the cattle trail north of Texas where supplies and alcohol could be obtained. Now the town slumbered beside the silent Chisholm Trail. However, its location on the state line meant that Texas cattle could be shipped from there. All that was needed was a railroad--and rumors were rife.

In 1878, the Saint Louis and San Francisco Railroad, commonly called the "Frisco" and long stymied in its attempts to enter Indian Territory, switched its efforts to crossing Kansas. The new Frisco line stretched westward to the south of the Santa Fe and entered Wichita in 1880.

Also in 1878, another company tired of beating its head against Indian Territory turned its bruised face westward. This was the Kansas City, Lawrence and Southern Railroad, which formed its Southern Kansas and Western Railroad subsidiary and built south of the Frisco into Wellington by 1880.

Again in 1878, officers of the Kansas City, Burlington and Southwestern Railway asked Wellington for subsidies for a proposed line. Hard on their heels came Santa Fe men. The bond election, set for the final day of the year, was to determine which company would get the support.

Electioneering was fierce, but the Santa Fe swept the field by promising to serve Caldwell as well as Wellington.

On October 28, 1878, the Santa Fe formed the Cowley, Sumner and Fort Smith Railroad. Construction began in May. The line stretched to the southeast and divided at Mulvane on the Sumner County line. One branch crossed the Arkansas River and entered Wellington on September 15. The other fork entered Cowley County and penetrated the coveted Walnut Valley, arriving Winfield September 29 and Arkansas City on the closing day of the year.

Construction hesitated at Wellington, but not for long. The KCL&S won aid from Sumner County in 1879 and laid rails into Wellington April 1, 1880. Caldwell expressed

interest in bringing the line to town, and the Santa Fe quickly built southward. Santa Fe service there began on June 13.

On April 5 the KCL&S formed a new subsidiary. This Sumner County Railroad was projected to the state line. The development of a rival shipping point so close to Caldwell was a worrisome thing, so Caldwell tried to lure the KCL&S to town. Townships to the east had more money to spend, however, and service began to the new town of Hunnewell on June 16.

The neglected Chisholm trail became lively that summer, as did the competition between cities and railroads. The tariff for a carload of cattle to Kansas City dropped from \$40 to \$10. Adding parallel construction to the fight, the Santa Fe-controlled Wellington and Western railroad began laying track westward alongside the KCL&S.

The ruinous rate war caused competing railroad officials to put heads together. H. H. Hunnewell, president of the KCL&S, wished to put his energies to other projects and sold his company to the Santa Fe December 15, 1880.

The takeover returned rates to normal and ended a bad case of the doldrums at Dodge City, where rates had remained high. The 13.7 miles that had been completed by the Wellington and Western were quickly abandoned.

Caldwell and Hunnewell poured cash into the Santa Fe's till, but neither city enjoyed booms quite like other cattle towns had experienced. The competition was much too close.

By 1885, the danger of infection to domestic stock had resulted in a quarantine of the entire state. The longhorns could still ride trains, but the railroad decided not to carry them anymore. That was the end of the fabulous Kansas cattle towns.

The Santa Fe took an important step on November 14, 1879, by allying itself with the Frisco. This was done principally to obtain access to the Pacific Ocean via a Frisco subsidiary, but it had ramifications elsewhere. Notably, the Frisco halted its Kansas construction at Wichita and used Santa Fe rails to reach central New Mexico.

The Santa Fe took a step towards shortening the route west from Wichita by chartering the Harvey County Railroad, December 6, 1880. This company was to build the third side of the Sedgwick-Newton-Halstead triangle. The project was leisurely conducted and the track did not open until December 31, 1881.

On October 6, 1882, the organization of Santa Fe subsidiaries south of Newton was simplified. The Wichita and South Western Rail Road; the Cowley, Sumner and Fort Smith Railroad; and the Harvey County Railroad were consolidated as one company. The new Wichita and Southwestern Railway centered at Wichita. One line led south to Mulvane and forked to Caldwell and Arkansas City. Northward, the line was a miniature

and upside-down replica of the southern part, the line dividing at Sedgwick and extending to Newton and Halstead.

In 1884, a Missouri Pacific affiliate entered Wichita, thus bringing the railroad war that had been raging in the east to the W&SW. A joint Santa Fe/Frisco line, the Wichita and Western Railroad, began building towards Dodge City, a goal never attained. Due to the joint nature of this company, it was operated by its own organization.

Then, the Frisco fell under the control of the lords of the Missouri Pacific and of the Southern Pacific. These were enemies of the Santa Fe. Soon, the Frisco began constructing lines that competed with the Santa Fe.

In 1885, a Frisco subsidiary dropped southward to the state line, paralleling the W&SW between Winfield and Arkansas City. During the next year, this company extended west, invading Santa Fe terminals at Hunnewell and Caldwell.

Another Frisco line came in 1888. This line northwestward from Wichita not only rendered the former Harvey County Railroad redundant, but it also drew traffic from other Santa Fe lines to the west.

The Missouri Pacific extended two lines west from Wichita during 1886-7. Another line passed through Winfield in 1887, headed northwest. Apparently, this last line caused the W&SW to begin construction out of Wellington in 1887, probably on the old Wellington and Western roadbed.. Only 2-1/2 miles were completed before the project was abandoned and the track lifted.

The Santa Fe managed some more successful construction. On November 1, 1886, the long-delayed Florence, El Dorado and Walnut Valley connected with the W&SW at Winfield. Exactly eleven months later, the Chicago, Kansas and Western Railroad connected El Dorado with Mulvane This Santa Fe company continued constructing westward with New Mexico as its never-attained goal.

Santa Fe-owned Southern Kansas Railway, successor to the Kansas City, Lawrence and Southern, built southwards from Arkansas City towards the Gulf Coast and also southwestward from Wellington to the Texas Panhandle.

Economic reverses caused the railroad war to wind down during 1888, but it left a much different Wichita and Southwestern Railway. The company had faded to an agricultural line after losing the cattle trade, but under later circumstances it had become the crossroads of empire. It was part of two lines to Texas, and California-Saint Louis traffic was still exchanged with the Frisco at Wichita.

On November 30, 1889, the little railroad's books closed as it vanished into the Santa Fe. Official merger would not take place until April 10, 1901, but it was already a valued part of the Santa Fe system, which it remains after a century.

## MODELING NOTES

Rail facilities at most cattle towns shared some common characteristics.

First, the loading pens were a short remove from town. The principal reason for this is fragrantly obvious, but a different reason applied at the state line shipping points. By then the quarantine laws were strictly enforced; no Texas cattle could set hoof in Kansas. But the railroad was barred by the Federal government from laying rails in Indian Territory. The loophole was that loading pens could be constructed south of the border, from which long chutes could feed into trains in Kansas without breaking any laws.

Second, most cattle towns possessed some sort of engine terminal, even if the barest minimum. This was due not only to the large business handled, but also due to most cattle towns having been currently or previously end of track.

Third, these locations saw heavy merchandise traffic, ranging from fancy boots to lumber. Frontier merchants geared up for the shipping season the same way their modern counterparts prepare for Christmas--and with the same ballyhoo. These towns also became distribution centers for ranches and farms, some of them hundreds of miles distant. These established transportation and mercantile centers also attracted farmers, who clustered about the town and eventually cut off the cattle trade. It was common for the yards to be stuffed with cars for eastern connections. Possibly, switch engines were assigned for the heavy summer traffic.

The depot at Wichita was in the east part of town. South of this was a small roundhouse, and further beyond were the stock yards. The original stockyard consisted of 15 pens in a 300 x 350 foot space with seven gates and four chutes. Additional facilities included a driving wing and a twelve acre holding pen. Another comparable stockyard was added nearby, and later more holding pens were built on the west side of the Arkansas River.

A photo of the depot area is a mine of information. The station building had an attic room with a large window. A change in the roofline hints that the building was extended to--estimating by counting boxcars in a string--about 200 feet.

Four tracks are to the front of the depot, with a house track and team track on the other side. A street cuts across all tracks.

On the team track is Charles Marsh's false-fronted coal retail business. A three story coal tower looms behind the office. The photographer appears to be standing atop a similar structure, possibly a grain elevator.

Boxcars, some labeled "CB&Q," fill the yard. Only one visible car could carry cattle. It is a convertible box/stock car adjacent to Mr. Marsh's office. The car may have carried coal.

A contemporary engraving of the Wichita stockyard shows five chutes. Also that the pens were built of heavy wooden slabs of wood placed on end instead of the familiar horizontal railing. Cattle could be driven from several pens into a central enclosure which drained into a lane running parallel to the track. Five antechambers the size and shape of stock cars opened off this lane, and a chute lead from each. Cowpokes balanced precariously on planks used long poles to "poke" cattle up the chutes.

A photo of Elgin reveals a locomotive on a gallows-type, hand-turned turntable, a mineral brown depot, a water tank, and a structure that could be either a grain elevator or a coal tower. Closeby is a structure that closely resembles the depot and probably is company housing.

Caldwell remains about the same size today that it was during the cattle boom. Some of the original buildings still stand. Using vintage photos, the cattletown has been reproduced in miniature at the Border Queen Museum in Caldwell. Photos of the model appeared in the September/October 1980 *True West*.

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