

Skids, Skinners and the Shattuck Branch

Contributed by Bob Burton

(Originally published in the October 1998 issue of The Semaphore, the newsletter of the Texas Panhandle Railroad Historical Society.)

The relocation of an old town to a new location on a railroad was common in western railroading. Along the Santa Fe line between Shattuck and Spearman, it was almost the rule.

Virtually every siding along the line was named for a figure in Santa Fe history. Among the presidents and directors, such as Magoun, Sherlock, Twichell, Lord, and Burnside, were surveyors Follett and Booker, and other lesser lights. The first station out of Shattuck was named for A. E. Touzalin, the Santa Fe's first super land salesman. The end of the line was named for the Santa Fe's current land commissioner, Thomas Spearman, who was building the towns along the line. Rather, the Spearman Land Company was surveying and platting the locations. For the most part pre-built towns, complete with buildings and population, were moving onto the sites.

Ivanhoe had been founded in Oklahoma in 1892 and had prospered until the water supply failed. An adequate supply was found three miles to the southwest, so in 1909 the frame structures were placed on skids, mules and steam tractors started tugging, and shortly the entire town had moved. But in 1917, the railroad bisected the survey stakes of Follett, just six miles away in Texas. Mr. Spearman offered free lots to the citizens of Ivanhoe, who were not at a loss as to what to do. The skids were reapplied as was the horsepower, and the town moved again, this time to a new state and new name. Legend claims that the doctor's office remained open and that a patient was examined as the building slid along.

In 1909, the founders of LaKemp, Oklahoma, had thought they knew where the Santa Fe's line from Shattuck would go. A decade later, the rails were in the location called Booker, five miles south. The town moved. History records that one of the portable businesses was a hardware store owned by one Sam Batman, though whether he carried exotic gadgets is not recorded.

With the railhead stalled during the World War, a town was established at end of track. Named "Lourwood" for the first child born there, the town did poorly because the railroad was not running. Resumption of construction spurred growth, and the future was assured when the town of Sunset, another Oklahoma expatriate, skidded into town. Lourwood was later renamed for state legislator John Darrouzet.

Wawaka, Texas, moved to Burnside siding and changed the name of the new location to a fragment of the old: Waka.

Hansford, Texas, moved eastward to become part of Spearman, and Ochiltree moved onto the plains as Perryton, where they were joined by folks from Gray, Oklahoma. Unlike many of her sisters, the entire population of Gray did not move to Texas and the town survived.

While all these towns were relocating, archaeologists were excavating an ancient Indian pueblo a few miles southwest of Ochiltree. The place had been abandoned centuries before, but it is doubtful that a railroad had anything to do with the matter.