Southwestern Spoke

By Bob Burton

Lubbock, Texas is not the only place to call itself the "Hub City," but it has a better claim than some. Railroad lines radiate outwards from Lubbock County towards the eight principal points of the compass, resembling the spokes of a wheel.

The Santa Fe's line southwestward from Lubbock to Seagraves is one of the more interesting spokes. In earlier times, this branch enjoyed heavy livestock traffic. Though the years, cotton and grain have been mainstays. The line serves an oil field as well, and in recent years has carried a variety of chemical compounds in specialized cars. A fleet of unique cars assigned to this branch added a distinctive flavor to West Texas railroading.

Track

Lubbock officially became a railroad town on January 9, 1910, when the Santa Fe's Operating Department took control of the line recently constructed into town from the north. Construction continued in a southeast direction towards a connection with the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway. This connection was opened late in 1911. Meanwhile, a branch was run southwards, opening between Slaton and Lamesa in the Fall of 1910. The last line constructed by the Santa Fe-affiliated Pecos and Northern Texas Railway opened in 1914 between Lubbock and Texico.

Lubbock County by 1914 possessed Santa Fe lines radiating in four directions and the city itself was boasting of being the "Hub City." The following year an independent eastward line entered the Santa Fe family.

In 1910, Crosby County had envied Lubbock's good fortune. Despite vigorous efforts, Crosby County had failed to attract a railroad line of its own. Now, with a railroad just a county away, the citizens resolved to construct a line themselves. On April 6, 1910, they obtained a charter for the Crosbyton-Southplains Railroad. The little railroad, with Santa Fe encouragement, constructed a line between Crosbyton and Lubbock. Regular service began June 13, 1911.

The line did well, but on August 1, 1915, the owners sold the line to the Santa Fe. Shortly, Santa Fe surveyors began working from Crosbyton to Seymour, the terminus of the Gulf, Texas and Western Railway, which the ATSF attempted to purchase. Obtaining this line and the Weatherford, Mineral Wells and Northwestern Railway and closing the gap between Crosbyton and Seymour would have given the Santa Fe a direct connection between Lubbock and Fort Worth. However, the owner of the GT&W held out for too much money and the Santa Fe abandoned the project.

Santa Fe attention now turned towards the area southwest of Lubbock. This developing section was using Tahoka on the Lamesa branch as a shipping point. The business grew to the extent that the depot was enlarged. Other railroads were also interested. The Pecos Valley Southern had its heart set on connecting Lubbock with the Rio Grande, but it only constructed a few miles south of Pecos. The Midland and Northwestern laid wobbly rails as far as Seminole.

The Santa Fe, however, had greater plans than merely building a railroad. It planned to settle the place. A few years earlier, a Santa Fe-affiliated land company had purchased a large body of land in southwestern Kansas. Having learned from experience, the railroad sold land to actual settlers at reasonable rates. Speculators were not welcome. The Santa Fe had built a branch to serve the new settlers, and things had gone well.

The Santa Fe now desired to repeat this success in Texas. For weeks rumors told of a mysterious buyer purchasing huge tracts of undeveloped land in the upper Panhandle and also southwest of Lubbock. The buyer's representative was Harry McGee, a former surveyor and track builder for the Santa Fe, who had more recently worked for real estate companies associated with the Santa Fe. The land was conveyed to Thomas Spearman, of the Spearman Land Company, a Santa Fe company later renamed the Willard Land company. In Gaines, Terry, and Yoakum counties near Lubbock, 267 sections were purchased, the heart of it being 200,000 acres purchased from S. J. Blythe.

The Blythe land was the destination of Santa Fe surveys, which were the work of J. W. Stewart, assisted by J. C. Bye. The first ran westward from Lamesa. Then a line was run northeastward to near the center of Terry County. From there, lines radiated out to Tahoka, Slaton, and Lubbock. Final surveys were complete on August 18, 1916. On the day before, the charter of the Crosbyton-Southplains had been amended to include a line from Lubbock to Gaines

County. Also, the company's name became the South Plains and Santa Fe Railway.

Rancher M. V. Brownfield met with Santa Fe officials with a promise of free right of way and station grounds through Terry County, and residents of Lubbock County made a similar pledge.

As the year passed, a variety of Santa Fe officials, mostly from the Engineering Department, visited the area. Construction Engineer S. E. Ross, praised the chosen route. "There is not a draw, swag, or lake between Lubbock and Primrose <Ropes>, and <this> is the luckiest survey the Santa Fe has ever made. All we have to do is scrape it out."

Grading began on new Year's Day of 1917 and took almost ten months to complete. Laying of #85 rails began March 1 and the last rail was spiked on November 30. After depots, fences, surfacing and other necessary tasks were completed, the Operating Department accepted the line on July 1, 1918. Previously, the Construction Department had provided haphazard revenue service.

The tracklaying machine, flying an American flag from its top girder, had been lavishly welcomed at all points along the line. Also the first passenger train. Brownfield for instance, hosted a grand barbecue at which some 900 autos and uncounted rigs appeared. There was dancing and roping and orating for the entertainment of all, and plenty of food, even for the 4,000 who attended.

One of the featured speakers was Professor J. D. Sanderfer, President of Simmons College at Abilene. A decade earlier, Abilene, Texas, had blown an assured Santa Fe main line by encouraging the Colorado & Southern to extend a branch to that town. The C&S had proceeded to build upon the Santa Fe survey, and the big company decided it had better things to do than to build a railroad that was already built. Perhaps Sanderfer's words carried a certain sadness. "You people are not only to be congratulated on getting a railroad," he said, "but you are more to be congratulated on getting the Santa Fe, for it is able to do things and do them right."

The line ran southwestward from Lubbock in a long tangent passing through the little town of Wolfforth, named for George C. Wolffarth and recorded for all time misspelled.

Primrose siding in the corner of Hockley County became a cattle shipping point before any facilities were constructed. Cow hands made holding pens from lariats and this gave the place the new name Ropes. Texas already had a town with a similar name, so the Post Office insisted on Ropesville. This is how it appears on highway maps, but the natives and the railroad call it by its true name.

The tangent would have passed through Gomez, the oldest community in Terry County, but the line diverted slightly to pass through Brownfield instead.

The town of Meadow moved from its 1904 location to be on the railroad.

End of track was originally called Blythe, but there was another such place so it was renamed for colonization agent C. L. Spearman.

Spearman and Brownfield became trading centers for a large area to the west, extending into New Mexico.

In 1925, the SP&SF constructed from Doud, near Lubbock, westward to the state line at Bledsoe. Some thought was given to extending this line to Roswell, but it never occurred. A Burlington line opened to Lubbock in 1928. Now, with lines radiating in all directions, Lubbock could now truly call itself the Hub City.

Oil was discovered in Lea County, NM, in 1927. The Santa Fe quickly petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission for permission to extend the SP&SF into Hobbs, NM, and thence southward. Second thoughts caused the withdrawal of the proposal because it would develop only the oil field. A new plan was then submitted which would not only tap the oil field, but would also preserve the cattle trade and encourage agriculture. This involved a 46 mile line to Lovington with a 43.5 mile branch leading southward through Lea County.

At the same time, a subsidiary of the Texas & Pacific Railroad, the Texas-New Mexico Railway, applied for permission to enter Lea County from the south. The oil companies had long patronized the T&P, which owned an oil company, and they supported the T-NM. The cattlemen supported the Santa Fe. The Santa Fe offered direct service to Kansas City but not to Fort Worth. The T&P offered the reverse. The T-NM promised to develop a potash deposit while the SP&SF would encourage agriculture. The I.C.C. felt that both proposals possessed virtually equal merit and in December of 1929 granted both lines permission to enter Lovington. The Santa Fe, however, would have to drop

plans for its southward branch. The Great Depression having begun, the SP&SF did not construct its new line, even though the T-NM was completed.

In 1937, oil was discovered near Seagraves, easing the hard times.

Service

Today, ordinary people have little contact with railroads. They know it only as a dirty, noisy eyesore--an inconvenience at grade crossings. It used to be otherwise. The railroad's relationship with the wayside population was more than passenger service or a wave from the train. It was family.

The railroad's primary contact with the general public was the local station force. The chief salesman and public relations man was the agent. A good agent knew everybody and made friends easily. He could charm the rattles off a snake. He learned the business of all current and potential customers. Agents were members of virtually every civic organization and often held public office. It was quipped at Slaton that the city would be better off renting out city hall and conducting city business at the depot since the city officers were already there. The same could be said of any number of towns.

A good agent was a valuable commodity. If the railroad wished to transfer an established agent, it had to counter the objections of local citizens. It also had to give him a raise, and a truly desirable man would receive other compensations as well.

The agent and his staff were not above bending the rules. The mixed train carried milk to the dairy in Lubbock in five and ten gallon cans. Although the personnel and equipment were the same, the milk traffic was handled by two competitors: the railroad and the express company. Station personnel knew who signed their paychecks. The railroad's milk cans sat in the shade of the depot with the lids iced. REA cans sat in the sun with no ice. Nature having taken its course in the metal cans, milk shipped via REA arrived in an undesirable condition. Sometimes something more spectacular occurred. A can might be sitting quietly in the Texas sun when suddenly the lid would shoot skyward, propelled by a geyser of foaming white. Frequently, the vibration from an arriving train set off a milk bomb. Train crews hoped that if a can was going to blow, that it would do so before it entered the shaky environs of the baggage compartment. As it was, combines acquired a distinctive odor.

Train service consisted of mixed trains supplemented by specials as needed. Branch line mixed trains usually were scheduled on an in and out basis for the convenience of passengers. An early morning departure from the end of the line and an evening return allowed people along the line to spend a day in Lubbock and to be home that night. The train stayed overnight at Seagraves, where the railroad furnished an engine house, fuel and water facilities, and other necessities, including personnel.

The South Plains and Santa Fe had a peculiar twist to this plan. The mixed operated between Crosbyton and Seagraves, with a long layover at Lubbock enroute. Two trains were involved, departing opposite terminals in the morning, remaining away from home overnight, and returning to the home terminal the next evening. This gave branch crews a daily run of 102.5 miles, about the same as main line crews. After the Bledsoe line opened, the Crosbyton train operated to Bledsoe and the Seagraves line had its own operation.

This operating method lasted only a few years. Bus competition arose, offering several schedules daily. By the Thirties, the Seagraves mixed was operating out and in from Lubbock. The end-of-branch engine terminals were abandoned.

Crews on branch trains, and locals on the main, tended to be senior men. The heavy enroute switching needed experienced men, but that is not why these men bid for these jobs. The work was harder, but it was nice to be in one's own home every night. Let the young, inexperienced men ride the through trains and not see home for days at a time!

The mixed trains handled freight, passengers, express, and mail and a good many things unheard of in the company headquarters. On the SP&SF line to Crosbyton, coal was "accidentally" dropped on the ground as the train rattled past snow-bound cabins. The conductor would hold the train if requested or if he saw the dust of a buggy hurrying down the road to town. All business stopped when fires swept the grasslands. The locomotive screamed the alarm and firefighters climbed aboard for a rushed ride to the flames.

Stories abound of railroaders delivering newspapers, medicine, and other things to trackside houses. Often regular train crews knew and were known by trackside observers almost as family. Out on the lines west of Lubbock, conductor John Burton's train was often flagged between stations so housewives could pass pies or cakes to the crew. Sometimes, whole chickens

were given to each crewman to take home to their families. And sometimes, the trackside people gave something more.

One day Burton's train stopped with the combine next to a pair of youngsters who had faithfully waved as the train passed each day. Noting the open mouths and wide eyes as the train stopped, Burton, on a humorous impulse, leaned out and asked, "Are you coming home with me?" The pair hoped and raced home. To the conductor's surprise, they quickly reappeared with their mother hurriedly stuffing clothes in a bag. They were the first of many South Plains children to be entrusted to him in those more innocent times. Often the trip to his home was a child's first real journey, certainly the first made alone. For a couple of days they played with Burton children, examined souvenirs from coast to coast rail voyages, and leafed through books thick with photos of distant places. The effects of this introduction to the world can only be imagined.

Passing by the same houses every day, the crew not only recognized the people, but also their routines. If something did not seem right, like no one stirring about the place for a day or two, the train stopped and the crew investigated. Usually, there was no problem, but now and then they found someone sick or injured who had no help on the lonely plains except for watchful--nosey if you insist--railroaders.

Blizzards were another cause for railroaders to check on people. Sometimes special trains were dispatched for the purpose. The crews were volunteers, as were the doctors, lawmen, and others who rode along to help the serious cases. As late as the Sixties, even trains on the transcontinental main line had standing orders to rescue motorists stranded by blizzards.

Informal operation occasionally resulted in embarrassing moments. The lady who owned a little store in Meadow was noted for her excellent fried pies. You just didn't go through Meadow without getting some pies. One day, the train crew was in a hurry and conductor Burton trekked to the store while the crew switched. True to the time and place, the purchase was accompanied by coffee and chat. Suddenly, the train whistled and departed. The lady exclaimed, "Your train is leaving!" Unruffled, Burton sipped his coffee and replied, "Don't worry. They'll come back." Within minutes, the train was backing into town. Not only had the crew missed their conductor, they had missed their bag of pies.

Mixed trains had to run more or less on schedule, so when cattle had to be loaded usually a special train took the task. Usually, these operated out of Slaton, running on the main line to Lubbock before turning onto the branch.

On one occasion, conductor Phil Nickel's crew took engine and caboose to Amarillo to pick up empty stock cars. They carried 120 of them to Brownfield, where they tied up for the night. When they came on duty the next day, cattle covered the countryside. Railroaders and cowhands sweated for hours at the loading chutes. Another crew rolled in from Slaton, sandwiched 60 loaded cars between engine and caboose, and puffed off for Amarillo. Most of the day had passed before Nickel's crew was able to take the remaining cars northward. When they reached Lubbock, the Hog Law was threatening, so another crew continued to Amarillo.

Another time, a crew was called to go to Brownfield for thirty cars. The fireman had enjoyed Slaton's night life a little too much and failed to appear. Rather than call another fireman, the engine watchman, who had just spent the night tending engines on the ready track, was recruited for the trip. Some while later, the train reached Brownfield and loading commenced. Engineer B. H. Botlinger watched the boiler while his makeshift fireman got some sleep. Eventually, Botlinger had to leave the cab. He shook the fireman and cautioned him to watch the pressure. Within minutes, however, the eyes were closed and the rising needle on the pressure gauge went unheeded. When the safety valve popped with a shriek, the cattle still unloaded made toothpicks of the pen and hightailed it for the horizon, pursued by swearing men on horseback. It took three days to round them up, but Botlinger had taken his train out as quickly and quietly as possible and was not seen in not seen in Brownfield for awhile.

Stock loading continued for many years. One of the cowhands at Ropes was Max Evans, who later drew from his experiences for his book: The Rounders.

During the oil boom, special trains ran regularly to handle nothing but oil patch business. They ran out from Lubbock with supplies for the field and returned with empties, transacting no other business enroute.

In season, small towns were mightily proud of the sports teams fielded by the local schools. They still are. Chartered buses now serve the need, but in earlier days special trains carried teams and fans to neighboring communities for games. Teenagers and sports fans have changed little through the years, so the cars on these specials were not the finest equipment on the railroad. In fact, they were the oldest cars that could still run in regular passenger service.

Generally, they were all-wood or wood-bodied, steel-underframed cars. Bulls patrolled the trains, along with any local or state officer willing to come along. The cars were inspected for damage before and after each trip, and the bull made a written report afterwards. As a rule, this included the score of the game.

Sports pride was also displayed after the foundation of Texas Technological College at Lubbock. The football stadium is close to the Seagraves District tracks. The railroad put in a cinder platform where special cars and trains unloaded. When Lubbock obtained a pro baseball team, the Hubbers, that stadium was located near the platform, but not so close. The cindered area is still used when Tech plays, but special trains stopped using it long ago. The area is fenced and fans can rent parking space on the right of way. The railroad takes pains to run trains several hours before or after game time so no one is injured or cars damaged.

The railroad also brought entertainment to West Texas. The Santa Fe hired entertainers to tour for employees, but usually the public was welcome. At other times, traveling entertainers exchanged performances for free transportation.

South Plains residents had to travel to Lubbock, Slaton, or Plainview to see big name stars, but lesser lights, paying their own passage, made the rounds of the branches. These small troupes often carried tents, seats, lights, and other paraphernalia from town to town. Usually plays were presented, but there was at least one shoestring operation that consisted of one man carrying tent, seats, movie projector, and one film from town to town. Harley Sadler ran West Texas' most popular troupe. Art Names used Meadow as his base. These small troupes soon abandoned the railroad for the less-expensive Model T.

Circuses also came by rail. The big shows, like Barnum and Bailey, seldom ventured out on the branches. However, a dying breed, the one ring show with maybe a dozen performers, visited the small towns.

For years, the Santa Fe sent agricultural experts on lecture tours, and on several occasions entire trains carried displays from place to place. The arrival of a display train was a major event. A crowd was on hand, school bands played, barbecues were held, sometimes beauty contests, and other events greeted the trains. After a tour, the railroad usually saw increased orders for fertilizer and seed, and increased crops.

This being the Santa Fe, branch line maintenance was excellent and continued into the Seventies. A major tie-replacement program was pursued in 1966. Outfit trains, weed controllers, and Jordan spreaders made occasional visits. The spreaders spent much time clearing sand from the roadway south of Brownfield. Train crews occasionally found sand dunes blocking the tracks, whereupon in later years a brakeman would hitch-hike to town and arrange for a bulldozer to clear the way. In places, sand has been repeatedly shoved aside until, mixed with tumbleweeds and other vegetation, permanent dunes flank the rails. In places these dunes extend for miles and give the impression that the railroad is in a long cut, although the roadbed is actually above the level of the surrounding plain.

In the Fifties, the Santa Fe announced plans to discontinue passenger service between Lubbock and Amarillo. A storm of protesting letters came from residents of the South Plains. Impressed, the railroad decided not only to keep the train, but also to improve it. The resulting streamlined consist included a Pullman that ran through between Lubbock and Chicago. During the week prior to revenue operation, the new train toured the lines radiating from Lubbock.

The special visited the Seagraves branch February 15, 1955. It was an event. While the train paused at Wolfforth, population 200, over 700 people tramped down its aisles, the first of the day's total of 5,562. Actually, the train made two stops in Wolfforth: At the depot and at the school.

Schools let out all along the line, and schools at off-line towns bused their students to see the streamliner. The high school band played at Brownfield, but Seagraves mustered not only the local band, but also the band from Seminole. Sheriff's Posses, mounted parade units, appeared in full regalia. At the lunch stop in Brownfield, Santa Fe officials detrained to find a horse-drawn chuck wagon rolling up to them.

One lucky little girl at Brownfield was having a birthday. She and several friends had a party aboard the train as it rolled southwards. For the trip around the wye at Seagraves, the train bulged with humanity.

Agents dressed in full uniform. Flags waved and autos honked. Sprinkled through the throngs were people who had been present when the first train had arrived decades before.

The visit of the Lubbock Streamliner is still remembered. At least one model railroader in the Lubbock area obtained his love of railroading that day.

In the early Seventies, the Seagraves line could boast of a 40 MPH speed limit, and track anchors were being installed. Daily trains in season were sometimes fifty cars long. Shippers along the line were being supplied with ATSF cars specially modified for the service, and railroaders scrambled when a customer had a problem.

But the railroad and the public drifted apart. Station forces were reduced and eventually eliminated. Outsiders who had occasional contact with railroaders often considered them, as a group, to be surly and grouchy. Even the insiders, the customers, were alienated. One of the encroaching problems was crew attitude. If upon reaching Brownfield it was discovered that the Lubbock switcher had improperly placed a Brownfield car in the train, the crew was not obligated to switch that car out. It would be hauled to Seagraves and maybe left there in the block of Seagraves cars. Or it would be taken back to Lubbock, through Brownfield, where, hopefully, it would not be "out of block" the next day. In other times, the crew would have switched out the car because it was the right thing to do.

Certainly, part of the problem is the general decay of society, but other matters contribute. One rank-and-file railroader expressed his opinion thusly: "When the management was filled with real estate people, bankers, financiers, etc. and railroad people <were> removed from management, all that was past. The only thing that mattered was profit, and railroads were profited' out of business. They were dependent on good will and friendship as well as good service for their business, and when service was curtailed the people went to whomever would handle their needs."

Specials and passenger service disappeared. Train length decreased. In the Eighties came the distressing sight of five car trains creeping down the Seagraves district at a speed equal to the car count, and not a track gang in sight. Such an operation was a loser, and the railroad that still called itself "Santa Fe" resolved to rid itself of this line.

SWGR

Late in the Eighties, a group of Santa Fe employees approached the railroad with an offer to buy the branches west of Lubbock. One of them privately expressed a desire to do "some real railroading." The railroad declined, but

placed the lines to Seagraves and Whiteface (The track between Whiteface and Bledsoe had been abandoned in 1984.) up for sale. Also for sale were the Lubbock-Crosbyton line, the Slaton-Lamesa branch, and the Plainview-Floydada connection.

The South Plains Association of Governments proposed to purchase and operate the orphaned Santa Fe lines and also the Burlington Northern line northeast of Lubbock. When it came to raising the money however, several member county governments balked. A purchaser had to be found elsewhere.

On March 30, 1990, Amerail, a new subsidiary of freight car lessor Tempco, purchased the lines to Seagraves, Whiteface, and Floydada. The three lines were organized into two companies: The Floydada and Plainview Railroad and the Seagraves, Whiteface and Lubbock Railroad.

Amerail purchased four former MKT GP7s, and immediately began having trouble with them. MKT had boosted the horsepower, but not the tractive effort. The engines were bad about spinning wheels. They had also been poorly maintained and Amerail had neither facilities nor personnel to correct problems. The diesels had a nasty habit of setting the right of way on fire--frequently. After a spectacular fire near Wolfforth that burned 1,200 acres and occupied the fire departments of five towns, legal action was threatened if the problem was not corrected. Eventually, a half dozen or so GP9s that had worked previously for C&NW and SP and a man who could tinker with them relieved the problem.

The Seagraves, Whiteface, and Lubbock runs into Santa Fe's Upper Yard to pick up a string of cars and takes it to Doud to make up its trains. Unfortunately, Doud is a poor location for switching of this kind. The tracks are too short and too few in number. The lack of space means that often cars are switched thirty or more cars from the engine. Aggravating the problem, busy grade crossings are at both ends of the siding. With long strings of cars being switched, these crossings frequently are blocked for long periods.

Amerail inherited a physical plant cursed by deferred maintenance, which used to be anathema on the Santa Fe. Ties are failing and the gravel ballast that had been applied in the Sixties has been driven into the mud. Weeds hide the rails, ties sink as trains pass, and crossing signals malfunction.

Despite problems, traffic levels rose. The trains composed of a mere handful of cars like in the last days of Santa Fe operation are rarely seen today. Fifty cars

is more normal, and once an 85 car string of grain hoppers was run. Three diesel units on one train is not uncommon. Pleased, Amerail attempted to buy other Santa Fe lines running out of Hutchinson, Kansas.

The SWGR (Seagraves, Whiteface and Lubbock) has plans for a TOFC facility west of Lubbock and Tempco plans to put in a car shop. However, these plans and others are on hold until the darkest shadow over the company is removed.

During the Sixties, an east-west freeway through Lubbock was proposed. It was to run on the right of way of US Highways 62/82, but the project was laid aside because it would have required removal of the adjacent railroad. The project was revived and approved two decades later, when the railroad was declining. It was thought possible to relocate the Seagraves line to a junction with the main line northwest of Lubbock.

However, the area west of Lubbock has undergone rapid development almost to the county line. The residents strenuously object to the construction of a railroad in this area.

The objectors have a variety of motives, from people concerned about property values to a group that routinely opposes every move made by Lubbock's City Council. Their arguments are equally varied. The most frequently appearing topic concerns child safety. Grade crossings are dangerous to school buses and to driving teenagers. Much was made of a recent incident where unsupervised children tried to hop a moving train, and one was killed. A railroad, it is claimed, has no business being close to children.

In the face of many objections vigorously expressed, the Highway Department drew up plans to run the tracks over, under, or down the median of the freeway. None of these plans worked well, so the railroad must be relocated before construction of the freeway can begin. Dozens of routes have been proposed, and none has been acceptable.

Objectors to the relocation attempted to halt the freeway project. Failing in that, they are trying to have the entire railroad abandoned. Safety regulations, tax and land records, financial statements, and other public documents have been examined in attempts to legally cripple the SWGR and declare it insolvent. It is claimed that the railroad is hauling around empty cars to make itself appear profitable. Volunteers are examining tracks and recording what they consider to be safety violations.

Meanwhile, citizens of Brownfield, Seagraves, Levelland, and other area towns are trying to keep the railroad running. And the TOFC facility, car shop, switching yard, and track improvements are on hold until the railroad is certain that the investment will not be wasted. Nothing will be done until the matter is settled.

Cars

The first major commodity shipped on the Seagraves District was cattle. For a time, Seagraves was the largest shipping point of cattle in the world. In 1919, Gaines County shipped 31,485 head and Terry County, 25,563. The bovines came not only from the immediate area, but also from New Mexico. Many of the ranches in New Mexico were actually closer to the Texas and Pacific Railroad. However, a belt of sand stretched north of the T&P tracks, making the driving of cattle difficult. It was easier to trail to the closest Santa Fe rails. This traffic continued for decades, but faded as fences and farms cut the range and as trucks and highways grew to a size to handle the need.

Not just cattle, but hogs and chickens where shipped. Reportedly, herds of wild antelope were rounded up and loaded aboard the Santa Fe cars in the early days.

The Santa Fe set about populating its land holdings with farmers. Cotton was the first major crop and remains so today. Indian corn was popular, and the favorite grain was kafir. Kafir was used to feed livestock.

Little wheat was grown in early years--little enough that a decade after the railroad line had opened no elevators had been erected at Seagraves and Brownfield. There were several cotton gins, though.

Eventually, elevators appeared. They were small wooden structures, often veneered with metal to reduce the fire hazard. One still stood near the Brownwood depot in the early Eighties, though by then unused. Walther's offers a line of elevators. Model Railroading of July/August 1984 tells how to scratchbuild a wooden elevator. The next issue takes this elevator through the decades, showing how it changes and grows into a facility that can be used today.

When the line to Bledsoe opened in 1925, the Santa Fe-affiliated Terminal Building Corporation of Texas built round, steel elevators along this line. Most of them are still in service.

The wooden elevators along the Seagraves line were supplanted by the huge concrete structures that serve today. The operators are Goodpasture Grain and Milling, and Anderson Grain. The Anderson elevators are of a fairly ordinary appearance, but those of Goodpasture are more distinctive. They are more angular, somewhat art deco. Also, the grain driers are capped by oversized metal hoods.

The Goodpasture facility at Brownfield is immense. The large elevator is surrounded by warehouses, silos, tanks, and various buildings. Company colors are white and aqua. (An amazing number of businesses, private homes, and even the Boy Scout building in Brownfield wear these same colors.) The company has a tiny switch engine in Brownfield, and the Lubbock elevator--not on the Seagraves line--uses a former Santa Fe switcher, 2352, still in full Santa Fe paint.

In 1937, oil was discovered on both lines west of Lubbock. Although the boom was not as large and messy as other booms, it still brought a good bit of business to the tracks. Many oil companies operated near Seagraves. Among the more familiar names are Magnolia (Mobil), Shell, Mid-Continent, Sun, Humble, Atlantic, Standard, and Texas and Pacific Oil, an affiliate of the railroad of the same name. These were accompanied by a variety of oil field service companies, such as Halliburton.

Halliburton uses concrete to seal the sides of wells. The cement is shipped in covered hoppers. MDC offered a model of these cars, but the colors should be grey and red instead of white and red. Also, the prototype more closely resembled the car formerly offered by E & B Valley Railway. Halliburton also used acid to break up limestone. the acid came in tank cars. Modeling of a Halliburton facility, including trucks and hopper cars was covered in *Railroad Model Craftsman*, December 1983 and January 1984.

After World War Two, pipelines were built in the area. The sections of pipe arrived aboard Milwaukee gondolas. These were various classes of 40 and 50 foot drop bottom composite cars, sample numbers being 361766, 80669, 85305, and 82501.

The mid to late Forties was also marked by massive highway paving projects on the plains. Periodic tank cars of asphalt were accompanied by many gondolas of sand and gravel. These were Burlington cars, mostly of class GS-5. They were loaded near Quitaque, on the Burlington line northeast of Lubbock. Models of CB&Q GS-5 gondolas are available from Sunshine Models.

Goodpasture Grain and Milling sold anhydrous ammonia under the trade name "Sol-U-Phos," at a facility on the south edge of Brownfield. For shipping the fertilizer, tank cars GGMX 201-205 were acquired. They were painted and lettered in Goodpasture's white and aqua colors at the Roscoe, Snyder and Pacific Railway's shops. Athearn's chemical tank car will model the cars, but the unusual lettering (typical of an RS&P design) will be difficult to duplicate.

Columbian Carbon's plant at Seagraves shipped packaged, palletized carbon black aboard assigned ATSF cars 62076-62090 and 62136-62143. These were fifty-foot, double-door box cars drawn from several classes, but most were FE-25s. This class had some unusual features, and modeling them was described in the Santa Fe Modeler of November/ December 1984.

Smaller shipments went by SFTT, but bulk shipments rolled in Columbian Carbon's own fleet of covered hoppers. CCX used several types of covered hopper, but no model duplicates any of them. However, one popular design can be approximated by fitting the body of Walther's 50 foot Air-Slide hopper over the underframe and hopper bottoms of Walther's PS-2 CD covered hopper. The prototype's hopper bottoms are more rounded, so the bottoms of Walther's Pressure Differential covered hopper can be cut and fit to the Air-Slide body for a better match, but leave off that over-thought plumbing! The PD bottoms can also be applied to a Center Flow hopper for a different type of carbon black car. The January 1997 Model Railroad Craftsman contained drawings of another common type of car.

In the mid-Sixties, Ozark Mahoning began shipping salt cake from both Brownfield and Seagraves. The Santa Fe assigned 70-ton PS-2 covered hoppers similar to Concor's model to this service, then almost immediately assigned cylindrical covered hoppers of the GA-131 class.

GA-131s were unlike anything else on the railroad. They were an early, more rounded version of ACF's Center Flow design. Few cars were built to the early design, and most of them were fifty-footers. Almost none measured 43 feet. The GA-131 class did.

Ozark Mahoning might ship 100 cars in a month; not in long cuts, but in individual consignments, a car or two to a customer at a time. They traveled nation-wide, but were stenciled for return to Brownfield and Seagraves.

In West Texas, they seemed to be everywhere. Their round sides and grey color made them standouts. Every train and yard seemed to have one. Lubbock was full of them. Brownfield and Seagraves seemed to be growing the things. I used to think the class contained thousands of cars. It contained only two hundred, and only 145 were assigned to this service.

GA-131s hauled salt cake for three decades. In the mid Eighties, their salt-corroded sides began sending them to scrap. The last one I saw in revenue service was in 1995. That summer, the few survivors waited at Brownfield for a call to duty that may never come.

Several cylindrical hopper models are available, but they are all fifty foot cars. Further, the only one with the correct early-ACF tank ends is Model Power's. The Model Power car can be shortened, but the best model of a GA-131 would be made by saving the shortened tank and underframe, throwing the rest away, and applying better trucks, ladders, platforms, walkways, and hatches. If you cannibalized a PD hopper for a carbon black car, you have many of the needed parts at hand.

<Late Report: Atlas is releasing a 50-foot version of the ACF car. I have not examined one, but this may be a better starting point for modeling a GA-131.>

Today, Ozark Mahoning ships primarily in short, two-bay Center Flow cars marked ACFX. ATSF GA-136s are also in this service. They are PS-2 CDs with a different roof arrangement. Instead of trough hatches, these cars have ten round hatches ranged along both sides of a central walkway, like older covered hoppers. Brand new PD hoppers, lettered GPFX and exactly like the Walther's model, have recently come to serve Ozark Mahoning.

Trains presently operating carry various types of modern tanks and hoppers with a healthy selection of boxes.

Many shippers and the cars they used have escaped mention here, but the ones mentioned give this branch a distinctive appearance.

Steam locomotives known to have operated on this branch at one time or another include 1012, 1077, 1096, 1815, 1822, 2519, and 2548. RSD-5 diesels

worked the Lubbock branches in the Fifties, and PA 56 hauled freight to Seagraves in 1960. The late Sixties and early Seventies found GP7s, CF7s, and occasionally Fs. By then, two units operated in multiple on the Bledsoe line. Tonnage did not require two units, but since the train was no longer going to line's end, there was no way to turn the power.

By the late Seventies, single units of the 3600 and 6300 classes were assigned. Locomotives on the Bledsoe line returned to Lubbock long hood forward. Just before the line was sold, GP-30s were used.

SWGR uses a variety of GP-7s and GP-9s formerly owned by MKT, C&NW, and SP, in various states of repair. Paint is mismatched and sometimes three units are assigned to one train.

Layout

If anywhere resembling the prototype, a model of branch line operation is, by nature, a switching layout. Regular trains have work to do at virtually every location. Sometimes, a siding must be switched twice a day as cars are emptied or filled. Main line locals are much the same, except they rarely are mixed trains and they have through traffic to dodge. Most locals also resemble branch lines by operating out and back from terminals as "turns."

The Seagraves branch does not need to be modeled exactly to prototype. It could be a turn on a main line, operating as far west as Seagraves on a route to Roswell or El Paso. The Santa Fe did consider extending the SP&SF westward to Roswell and east from Crosbyton to Fort Worth or Ardmore, Oklahoma.

Nor do the track or structures need to duplicate the actual locations. Since this is a switching layout, there is little need to model wide open spaces--however nice--between stations. The next town can begin where the last one ends. One modeler in Lubbock has modeled the South Plains & Santa Fe Railway in this manner. For Upper Yard, he copied a plan from a magazine and freelanced the rest. It is U-shaped and fits easily into his garage.

The SP&SF could even be a switching job within a single city, shuffling stock cars, carbon black hoppers, and GA-131s around various industrial areas. The industries on David Barrow's "Lubbock" in Model Railroad Planning 1996 can be renamed for the Seagraves branch.

However, following the prototype and modeling a recognizable location can be rewarding.

Upper Yard is an interesting prototype. The through trains and most of the industrial switchers are handled in Lower Yard. Smaller, older Upper Yard is where the branch trains were made up. Passenger trains switched here, too. A rip track was near the steel tanks that marked the locomotive servicing track. Adjacent were the small boiler house and the boxcars used for offices and bunkhouses.

Upper Yard was surrounded by a variety of industries served by rail. Among these at different times were Swift and Armour meat retailers, produce warehouses, ice plant, power plant, cotton gins, oil company warehouses, cotton compress plant, large wooden grain elevator, livestock dealer, circus-type TOFC ramp, Post Office, and many others. Also nearby was the South Plains Fair grounds, but it can hide behind the power plant with only the sign visible. Next to the depot was a street underpass.

Northwest (compass direction) of Upper Yard is Lubbock Junction (now renamed "Canyon Junction"). Lines radiate in five directions from here and it would be a monster to model. However, by moving the big concrete Burris Grain elevator a short distance, the junction need not be modeled at all. The main line--double-tracked, high-ballasted, clean right of way, cantilever signal-bridged. junction- signed--would disappear behind one end of the elevator. What would emerge from the other side would be the shabby branch line. However, something genuine could happen behind that elevator.

The main line could vanish behind or below the Seagraves District into a staging or a fiddle yard. Not only would this be a place for main line trains to go, it also provides a destination for the other branch line mixed trains. Possibly the hidden track could turn back, passing under Upper Yard, then turn back again to become visible at the other end of the yard. Such an arrangement would allow a certain amount of through traffic and connections for the branch trains.

Virtually all of the Seagraves line's spurs within Lubbock have been abandoned and disconnected. However, the passenger platform at Texas Tech remains, and there is an interesting campus road underpass.

On the Tech campus next to the tracks is the Ranching Heritage Center. For the last couple of decades, this museum has been building a collection of genuine

ranch buildings ranging from dugouts to a multi-story mansion. The Ropes depot is here, alongside a loading pen and a short train of Santa Fe and Burlington equipment.

I suggest modeling three stations beyond Lubbock: Ropes, Brownfield, and Seagraves. Each is a different size and offers a different flavor. I would choose trackside structures with care, to avoid duplication.

Ropes has a small concrete elevator and stock pen. The early rope pen was replaced with a wooden pen. Terra Chemicals has a modern fertilizer facility here, served with Terra's tank cars. This is also a good place for a section gang headquarters. A company house survives here and has recently been converted into a restaurant.

Brownfield is the largest town and the only county seat besides Lubbock. Goodpasture's giant elevator dominates the town. Across the street is a contrasting tiny wooden elevator. Cars stored all over town await delivery to the small but traffic-generating Ozark Mahoning facility at the north edge of town. Also located here is Halliburton, a scrap yard, and the SOL-U-PHOS fertilizer facility.

Immediately south of the Goodpasture elevator is a large trestle over Lost Draw. Here I would model the SP&SF's crossing of Blackwater Draw, on the Crosbyton branch in Lubbock. It looks much the same except for the inclusion of a unique old highway underpass. It is too good to leave out.

For miles south of Brownfield, the track is flanked by high, permanent sand dunes.

Seagraves is more of an oil town. Various oil company docks are served. An oil-loading rack would be proper here, and although I do not know of one at this location, I wouldn't squawk if you put in a refinery. The Columbian Carbon plant's plume of smoke soots up the entire town. The stock pens are fairly large. Cotton warehouses line the yard. A grounded bunk car converted from an old box car decays near the concrete elevator.

The southwestern spoke of the Lubbock railroad hub offers the modeler a mix of loads and unusual cars that identify this as a specific location, and the stations and other facilities are pure Santa Fe standard. It is an excellent prototype, with one glaring exception: The land resembles a pancake. So much the better for farmers and loaded grain hoppers!