

HISTORY & FOLKLORE

The Dayton Railroads

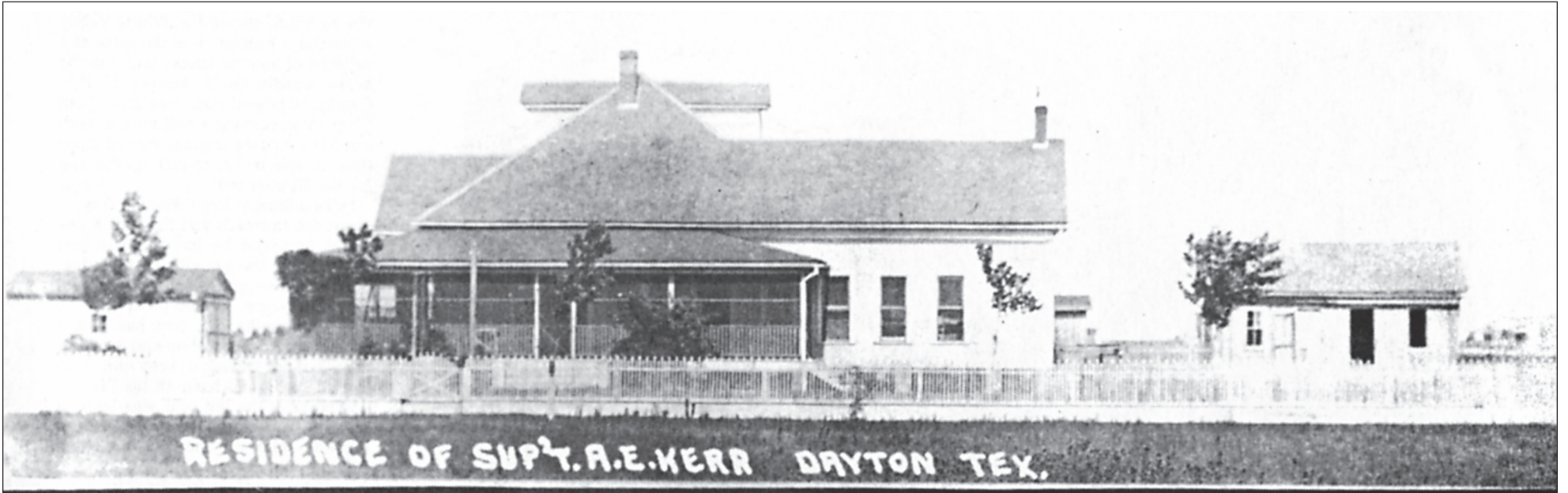
by Wiley Smith (1988)



MILL STORE AND HOTEL

The great sawmill served by the locomotives of the TV&N was once said to have 1,500 employees, no doubt including those who worked in the woods along the many spurs and tram roads. The pictures of the commissary and hotel, which served the complex, furnished by Mr. Joe Robert Krenick Jr. of Baytown were of poor quality. A board walk stretched all the way from downtown Dayton to this area of Ladd, almost a mile away. The mud that featured the landscape of that day after prolonged rains was oceanic.

The big mill ran out of suitable softwood timber by 1923, at which time it switched to hardwood. They brought in R.V. Cy Young to boss the job, but it all came to an end when the Great Depression arrived in the early 1930s.



Dayton has been a railroad center since the nineteenth century, but this activity reached its height in the period between 1904 and 1930.

The huge pine lumber mill built at Ladd, Texas, a defunct town, which lay on the west edge of present Dayton, was served by a 20-mile railroad, which ran north to Lum and Macedonia on the southern edge of Tarkington Prairie. The railroad, named Trinity Valley & Northern Railway, was the spine of a network of logging tracks laid into the heavy woodlands of western Liberty County. A lateral spur was laid about every mile, running a half-mile to each side. The logging engines moved down these simple tracks to pick up the logs for the Dayton mill.

I was talking to Fred White in Dayton about the railroads and the mill a few weeks ago, and he had many a fine story about the activity of that day. Fred is in his eighties, and drove a taxi for many years. He had polio when he was six months old, and has had a problem with his get-up-and-go since then. But not enough to keep him from working long and hard all his life.

Fred says the big mill was built in 1904 and the Trinity Valley & Northern Railway with it. The North Dayton Oilfield came in about this time, and Ross Sterling founded Dayton State Bank in 1907, so things began to pop in the local economy of the day, about the same time the Batson oil boom shook the Gulf Coast. In fact, Ross Sterling, later governor of Texas and founder of Humble Oil & Refining Company, founded the R.S.

Sterling Bank in Batson in 1904.

The Dayton & Goose Creek Railway was built by Sterling about 1918 and it was used in conjunction with the Trinity Valley & Northern, connecting Goose Creek and the Missouri Pacific Railroad, which still runs just north of Dayton into Houston. In fact, there was quite a hassle between the Missouri Pacific and the Southern Pacific in those days as to who would get this or that piece of the pie.

The Missouri Pacific did favors for the Dayton entrepreneurs in return for access to Goose Creek. For the uninitiated, Goose Creek is the original name of Baytown, which also includes old Baytown and Pelly. The Houston Chamber of Commerce was infuriated by the MP entre into the back door of the Houston ship channel area, and was happy when the Great Depression and the depletion of timber in the Dayton area led to the decline of Dayton business. The Southern Pacific folk won the day when they leased the Dayton & Goose Creek Railway for 99 years. Of course this sealed the doom of the Trinity Valley & Northern, since SP wanted a connection to Missouri Pacific like they wanted a hole in the head.

Fred White says that the board of directors of the Dayton & Goose Creek had offices in the Dayton Mercantile Building, a Sterling enterprise, and later moved into the Southern Pacific Depot. Among the directors were Ray Ford and T.S. Shaw, a onetime city councilman of West Liberty (early Dayton).

In those days, bad weather made travel next to impossible. The roads were so bad after prolonged rain that horses could walk only with great difficulty down them. A ride on rails was the only reliable way of getting about the country. The TV&N had a Model T Ford truck with rail-type wheels on it that was used for car-

rying mail and passengers. It was operated by J.S. Sid Flowers for years after he had been severely injured as a conductor on a train. He was standing on a step between the engine and carrier of an incoming train when the boiler exploded, injuring him so badly that he was near death for quite a while. He lived into his eighties, serving as a police officer for the City of Dayton until the 1950s.

The network of rails were such that the engines shown in these pictures could go pretty close to just about anywhere in this area. The TV&N engine pictured is at Camp Luce, located near Huffman. It moved up tram lines to the Missouri Pacific, east along that major line to Fullerton, near Kenefick, where it turned onto the TV&N to move either to Macedonia or to Dayton or Goose Creek. There was a gate at Fullerton, which was not really a town, which was opened when trains wanted to move onto the TV&N and alternated when MP trains wanted through.

One of the best-remembered engineers on the TV&N was Lon Perkins, now deceased. He was a brother to Jay Perkins and probably some distant kin of mine. Lon was married to one of the Alexander girls, a sister of Press and his well-known brothers. After she died he was married to Winnie O'Neil, the daughter of a Dayton blacksmith.

Andy Bevil, in his nineties – or so he says – and looking more like 70 or less, is a retired engineer of Missouri Pacific. He ran these tracks in those days and I can hardly wait to hear some of his stories. He is married to the former Dora Varnado and retired in Dayton. She is the sister of Ide Jackson Sanders, wife of Hans Sanders.

(Continued next page)

5 QUESTIONS

Are you or a loved one in need of rehabilitation or medical/clinical assistance?

Do you have a loved one who is a senior and has Medicare, but don't know what their benefits will help with?

Do you have a loved one who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's or dementia?

Do you know the full benefits a skilled nursing facility has to offer? Or have you ever wondered?

If you've answered these questions with **YES** or are interested in more information, give us a call. We'll be glad to assist or answer any questions you may have. Whether it's about Medicare/Medicaid benefits, skilled nursing care or long term care that you or a loved one may be in need of we are here to help.

LIBERTY
HEALTH CARE CENTER
1206 N. Travis St., Liberty • 936-336-7247

Milam Tire & Auto
COMPLETE AUTO CARE . . . more than just tires!

Need to customize your ride?
We stock Mud Tires!

VISIT US IN STORE OR ONLINE!

1020 US Hwy. 90 • Liberty, TX 77575
Phone (936) 334-9500 • www.milamtireandauto.com

BERKELEY EYE CENTER
—Preserving your gift of sight—

Berkeley Eye Center is pleased to announce **Manzil Quadir, O.D.** has joined David B. Beeler, O.D. in our Dayton office. Quadir is a Certified Therapeutic Optometrist and Optometric Glaucoma Specialist. She will be accepting patients Monday & Tuesday.

936-258-0020
306 N. Main, Ste. A • Dayton • berkeleyeye.com
MOST INSURANCE ACCEPTED