

Calvert, Waco & Brazos Valley Railroad Depot

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Context

Platted on land granted to the Houston & Texas Central Railroad by William Joel Bryan in 1859,¹ the City of Bryan has been influenced by the fate of the railroads ever since. The H & TC Railroad was the first to come through Bryan, shortly after the close of the Civil War in 1868.² Through the railroad, Bryan became a center of local commerce. Cotton and other agricultural products were brought by buggy and wagon from miles away to the H & TC's depot in downtown Bryan (just east of where the Carnegie Library still stands) for shipping to larger markets for sale.³ Bryan's Main Street rapidly grew, as did the city's general population.

Overview

In 1900, a second railroad was built through Bryan to the west of the original H&TC tracks. Chartered in July, 1899⁴ by George Gould, son of the "robber baron" Jay Gould, the Calvert, Waco & Brazos Valley Railroad had its starting point in the town of Spring, just north of Houston.⁵ Knowing that the vibrancy of Bryan depended on the new railroad access, several local businessmen entered into a contract with the CW & BV to provide land right-of-way for the railroad tracks and a second depot.⁶ Other property owners protested, especially after it became known that the railroad inadvertently had been given "carte blanche" to decide its route through the city, to the dismay of all Bryan residents concerned.^{7,8} The railroad company chose to lay its tracks going directly west out of downtown Bryan,

¹ Brazos County, Texas Deed Records. Volume F, page 169. 9 Apr 1860.

² S. G. Reed, A History of the Texas Railroads (New York : Arno Press, 1981) 207-208.

³ Shirlireed Walker, "Community Histories," Brazos County History : Rich Past, Bright Future, ed. Glenna Fourman Brundidge (Bryan, Tex. : Family History Foundation, 1986) 29.

⁴ "New Railroad: Calvert, Waco and Brazos Valley," Bryan Eagle 6 July 1899: 6.

⁵ Reed 321-322.

⁶ "Calvert, Waco & Brazos Valley Railroad Assured," Bryan Morning Eagle 3 Mar 1900: 1.

⁷ "City Council," Bryan Eagle 29 Mar 1900: 1.

⁸ Bryan City Council, Minutes from Called Meeting. 27 Mar 1900. Accessed 30 Sept 2008.
< <http://www.bryantx.gov/weblink7/Browse.aspx> >.

forever changing what once was one of the most elite neighborhoods in the city with the additional noise, vibrations, and high incidence of accidents common along any railroad. Eventually, in May of 1900, by vote of 3 to 1, the Bryan City Council approved an ordinance that allowed the railroad to operate within the city limits of Bryan.^{9, 10} After levying a fine on each businessman who signed the original contract with the railroad in order to pay for the obligated right-of-way, the city invited all of Brazos County to a picnic celebration inaugurating the new railroad later that summer.^{11, 12, 13} The Dallas Morning News stated that eight to ten thousand people were expected to attend the celebration.¹⁴

Significance

The CW & BV built its depot at the spot now known as 28th Street and Main Street in June 1900 after \$4,500 was spent to acquire the two blocks of land.^{15,16} The depot housed a passenger depot at the north end and a freight depot at the south end, with an office in the middle.¹⁷ The June 28, 1900 *Bryan Eagle* described the depot as “very elaborate” in detailing, with two large waiting rooms and two large lobbies. The building was 176 feet long, had a wood building on top of a 4-foot high solid brick foundation, and cost approximately \$10,000 to build. A warehouse with a second freight platform stood on the next block south.¹⁸

By special act of the Texas Legislature, the CW & BV Railroad was merged with the International & Great Northern Railroad, also owned by George Gould, on February 12, 1901.¹⁹ The tracks were

⁹ Bryan City Council, Minutes from Adjourned Meeting. 16 May 1900. Accessed 30 Sept 2008. < <http://www.bryantx.gov/weblink7/Browse.aspx> >.

¹⁰ “Railroad Meeting,” *Bryan Eagle* 24 May 1900: 2.

¹¹ Lois Alyne Wilcox, “Early History of Bryan, Texas,” MA Thesis. (University of Texas, 1952) 60-61.

¹² “County Celebration – will take place in Bryan upon the advent of the new railroad,” *Bryan Morning Eagle* 21 July 1900: 2.

¹³ “An Invitation,” *Bryan Eagle* 17 Aug 1900: 6.

¹⁴ “Bryan, Tex.” *Dallas Morning News* 26 Aug 1900: 3.

¹⁵ “The C.W. & B.V. Depot,” *Bryan Eagle* 28 June 1900: 3.

¹⁶ “Bryan, Tex.” *Dallas Morning News* 24 Mar 1900: 2.

¹⁷ *Bryan, Texas*, Map 2, Nov 1901. ProQuest Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970. Accessed 6 Oct 2008. < <http://sanborn.umi.com/tx/8447/dateid-000004.htm?CCSI=1783n> >.

¹⁸ *Bryan, Texas*, Map 2, Nov 1901.

¹⁹ Reed 321-322.

extended to Waco the following year and to Fort Worth the year after that, becoming known as the Fort Worth Branch of the I & GN. The citizens of Bryan were in continual discussions with the I & GN Railroad over the next decade regarding the railroad's operational needs. More than once, the I & GN chose to move its freight operations and personnel out of and back into Bryan, causing large fluctuations in the amount of commerce the city was able to attract from surrounding farms.²⁰ Even with the railroad tracks already laid in the city, negotiations were needed to maintain Bryan's importance in the freight transportation system. Some of these concerns were alleviated when the railroad chose to construct a 21-acre reservoir, holding 50 million gallons of water, along the railroad tracks south of downtown Bryan.²¹ Used by the Fin-feather Club for fishing their own stocked fish, the reservoir is still known as Finfeather Lake today.²² Unfortunately, groundwater contamination starting in the 1930s by a neighboring factory that used arsenic has made the lake unusable by humans and unsafe for wildlife.

Many items that were bought or sold in larger cities were shipped along the rail. Cotton and coal formed the largest shipments, but cattle, corn, wheat, eggs, and even bees were shipped on railroads in the Brazos Valley.^{23,24,25,26,27} The carload of bees later terrorized the workers at the I & GN depot in College Station for an entire night after being shaken up by the train ride. In 1908, the I&GN began offering a special train for cotton shipments. Between August 15th (the date of the first special train) and September 10th of that year, 5758 bales of cotton were shipped, double the amount of the year before.²⁸

Passenger service along the I&GN track was limited by today's standards. In 1903, a north-bound train would arrive in Bryan at 11:50am on its way from Houston to Fort Worth. A south-bound train between these two points would arrive at Bryan at 4:15pm.²⁹ By 1923, a second passenger service was added

²⁰ "Bryan a Freight Terminal: I. & G.N. Division Headquarters Reestablished Here," Bryan Morning Eagle 7 Aug 1903: 2.

²¹ Bryan Morning Eagle 24 Jan 1902: 3.

²² "Fish Tank and Pleasure Resort," Bryan Morning Eagle 6 Aug 1902: 3.

²³ "Bryan, Tex." Dallas Morning News 3 Oct 1906: 3.

²⁴ Bryan Eagle 15 Nov 1900.

²⁵ "Bryan, Tex." Dallas Morning News 15 Dec 1902: 5.

²⁶ "Allen Smith Ships a Carload of Eggs," Bryan Weekly Eagle 23 Feb 1922: 3.

²⁷ "Car Load of Bees Hold I. & G.N. Crew All Night," Fort Worth Star-Telegram 1 Aug 1909: 21.

²⁸ "Heavy Cotton Shipments," Bryan Weekly Eagle 10 Sept 1908: 3.

²⁹ Bryan Eagle 30 Apr 1903.

between Bryan and Valley Junction to the northwest, allowing residents near Valley Junction and Hearne to travel into Bryan for the day to shop.³⁰

The railroad depot was the scene of many social occasions, from the arrival of local or national dignitaries, to celebrations of every type, to the sad farewells of wartime.³¹ Businessmen's groups from larger cities such as Houston and Dallas were known to come through sometimes on "excursions."^{32, 33} Football pep rallies were held at the depot when Bryan High School's football team left for the state championship game in 1921.³⁴ Large Juneteenth celebrations were held in the African-American community that drew people from miles around.³⁵ During World War I and presumably World War II, many soldiers left for service from this depot, some of whom did not return alive.³⁶ Like the railways of today – regular railroads, commuter rail, and subways – the people riding or working on the rails unfortunately witnessed many accidents and some suicides.^{37,38,39}

The railroad was also an important part of everyday life in the Hispanic and African-American communities of the Brazos Valley. Not only was the train used for daily travel, but goods were shipped and many men from these communities worked for the railroad company.^{40,41,42} As was the case in other public places at the time, African-Americans were required to use separate waiting rooms and separate travel cars on the railroad.⁴³

³⁰ "Bryan, Tex." Dallas Morning News 30 July 1923: 4.

³¹ "Entire Legislature at A.&M. College," Bryan Weekly Eagle 16 Feb 1911: 3.

³² "Bryan, Tex." Dallas Morning News 11 May 1904: 3.

³³ "Brazos River Navigation," Galveston Daily News 28 Apr 1906: 9.

³⁴ "Bryan Rotary Club Will Boost Bryan High Team," Bryan Weekly Eagle 8 Dec 1921: 1.

³⁵ Brazos Pilot 20 June 1907: 1.

³⁶ "Twenty Two Bound for Camp Travis and the Great War," Bryan Daily Eagle 26 Apr 1918: 4.

³⁷ "Bryan, Tex." Dallas Morning News 14 Nov 1905: 10.

³⁸ "Automobile is Caught on Rail of I.-G.N. Tracks and Is Struck by a Northbound Passenger," Bryan Weekly Eagle 28 Jan 1926: 2.

³⁹ "Bryan, Tex." Dallas Morning News 25 Oct 1900: 5.

⁴⁰ Bryan Weekly Eagle 26 Aug 1926: 3.

⁴¹ "Bryan, Tex." Galveston Daily News 10 Dec 1903: 7.

⁴² Baker v. Loftin et al., Court of Civil Appeals of Texas - San Antonio. 198 S.W. 159. 1917.

⁴³ "I. & G. N. Wreck," Bryan Weekly Eagle 1 Dec 1901.

Some changes were made to the depot over time. In 1912, toilets were added for each set of waiting rooms.⁴⁴ Aerial photographs and Sanborn maps show that in the 1940s, the front part of the building, where the waiting rooms were located, was removed, making the building completely rectangular.^{45,46,47,48} Passenger and freight traffic along railroads increased dramatically during World War II, but the increase for passenger traffic was temporary.⁴⁹ The heavy use of the automobile after World War II diminished the demand for passenger rail service, while total freight traffic decreased until 1960.⁵⁰ Though a resurgence in railroad freight traffic occurred in the 1970s and again the 1990s, the consolidation of railroad companies resulted in the obsolescence of many railroad buildings.^{51, 52} The I & GN Railroad was merged with the Missouri-Pacific Railroad in 1956, which in turn was acquired by Union Pacific Railroad in 1982.⁵³ After attempting for several years to have any taker come and move the depot for use someplace else, Union Pacific demolished it in December of 1990.^{54,55,56,57}

⁴⁴ "Improvements at I.& G.N. Station," Bryan Weekly Eagle 29 Feb 1912: 5.

⁴⁵ Brazos County Aerial Photos from 1940, Aerial photograph of downtown section. Texas A&M University Libraries. Accessed 5 Dec 2008. < http://lib-sanfront.tamu.edu/VCM/Library/Files/Collections/Maps-GIS/Brazos%20Co%20Aerials/40_clb6_38b.jpg >

⁴⁶ Bryan, Texas, Map 4, July 1938. ProQuest Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970. Accessed 6 Oct 2008. < <http://sanborn.umi.com/tx/8447/dateid-000008.htm?CCSI=1783n> >.

⁴⁷ Bryan, Texas, Map 4, July 1938 through March 1950. ProQuest Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970. Accessed 6 Oct 2008. < <http://sanborn.umi.com/tx/8447/dateid-000009.htm?CCSI=1783n> >.

⁴⁸ Hardy, Heck, & Moore, Inc., Historic Resources of Bryan, Texas : A Comprehensive Survey and National Register of Historic Nomination for the City of Bryan (Austin, Tex. : Hardy, Heck, & Moore, Inc., c1986) Photos of Survey Site #1526 in Digital Scans of Original Color Slides.

⁴⁹ Dallas Morning News. Texas Almanac: 1956-7. (Dallas, Tex. : Belo Corp., 1956) 343.

⁵⁰ "Railroads' Role, 1950-2000." America on the Move. 2008. National Museum of American History. 26 Nov. 2008 < http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthemove/themes/story_42_6.html >.

⁵¹ "Overview of U.S. Freight Railroads." National Atlas of the United States. 2008. United States Department of the Interior. 26 Nov. 2008 < http://www.nationalatlas.gov/articles/transportation/a_freightrr.html >.

⁵² Bryan City Council, Minutes from Meeting. 26 May 1987: 2. Accessed 1 Dec 2008. < <http://www.bryantx.gov/weblink7/Browse.aspx> >

⁵³ George Werner. "International – Great Northern Railroad." Handbook of Texas Online. 2008. Texas State Historical Association. 26 Nov. 2008 < <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/II/eqj4.html> >.

⁵⁴ Bryan City Council, Minutes from Meeting. 26 May 1987: 2.

⁵⁵ City of Bryan, 1988, Aerial photograph, Bryan, Texas: City of Bryan. Department of Planning & Development.

⁵⁶ City of Bryan, 1995, Aerial photograph, Bryan, Texas: City of Bryan. Department of Planning & Development.

⁵⁷ Mark Thomas. "Re: Bryan, TX depot." 18 Nov 2008. E-mail to Michelle Audenaert. [Please see Appendix 1.]

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Appendix 1: Refers to Mark Thomas' website: <http://www.duke.edu/~markt/gone.htm>

From: Mark A. Thomas

To: Audenaert, Michelle

Subject: Re: Bryan, TX depot

Sent: Tue 11/18/2008 10:31 AM

Michelle,

You're correct that those web pages haven't been updated in a very long time, but both of the emails you used are still working.

Regarding the date that Union Pacific demolished the Bryan depot in 1990, I actually witnessed it, with bulldozers and all. I had happened to eat breakfast at Los Norteños that day (is it still there?). To get an official cite, you might check the Eagle on about Dec. 21. If that doesn't work, there must be some sort of demolition permit filed with the County or City, so you might ask at the courthouse or city hall. Finally, at the time the Railroad Commission of Texas still had to approve every time a railroad razed a station, so there might be records somewhere. The RR functions of the Railroad Commission have been transferred to the TX Dept. of Transportation. I don't know if archival records would have been tossed, transferred to the State Archives, or transferred to TXDOT, so that would be a little bit of research.

Regarding the fact that the earlier station burned around the 1940's, I don't know where I got that. Perhaps from a history of Brazos County. It must be in a newspaper. Maybe someone at the public library knowledgeable in local history or Bill Page could help you find a reference to this in old copies of the Eagle.

If you don't have luck in the next couple of days, please get back to me. I can post your request to an email list run by a bunch of us train station geeks and someone might know of a published source for the date that the first station burned.

--Mark