

# El Paso & Southwestern Flyer

JULY 2014

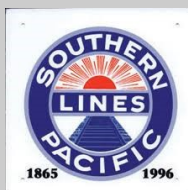
There will be no meeting in July. The August annual 3420 Birthday Party will be held at Patricia Kiddney's home, date and time TBA.

## Special points of interest:

- Sunset Route
- Chapter News
- Streetcar News

## Mexico News

A new theater car is nearing completion for KCSM at the car shop of Pete Messina in Metairie, Louisiana. (For any who don't know, a theater car is a business car with a large window on the rear end, with rearward-facing tiered seating so that a railroad can be viewed from comfort at the end of a train.) It is expected to be moved on July 15 to KCS's car shops in Shreveport, Louisiana, to be painted in the KCS/KCSM passenger car livery. Afterward, it will go to Mexico. The car is rebuilt from an ex-Pennsylvania coach that was most recently numbered Amtrak 7607. It will be named "Queretaro."



## Along the Sunset Route

### Part 1

**SANDERSON AND BAXTER'S CURVE** by Bill Hawn, Terrell County Historical Commission

(edited for length)

In an earlier era, the land that is now Terrell County was often a haven for outlaws running from the law. With its sparse population, rough terrain, and easy access to Mexico it was an ideal place to hide. The coming of the railroad through this rugged land opened up new opportunities. It provided jobs for honest men and a chance at a quick strike for the outlaw. Sanderson, the county seat of Terrell County owes its founding to the coming of the railroad and the people and money that it attracted.

In late 1860 C. P. Huntington, a railroad magnate, decided to link his west coast tracks to his east coast tracks. To accomplish this he intended to lay new tracks through Texas and Louisiana. He created a new company called the Southern Pacific Railroad and received Presidential permission to build as far as El Paso. He was then able to go across Texas by entering into a "community of interest agreement" with Thomas Pierce, owner of the G.H.&S.A. Rail Road. Pierce, using some of Huntington's money, would build new track from San Antonio to Del Rio and then westward toward El Paso. The two track laying crews would meet somewhere in the middle of the harsh land and join their tracks.

Charley Wilson was a military man assigned out of Fort Concho in San Angelo to guard a crew of surveyors laying out the path of the new tracks. Early on, he surmised that the area around the then non-existent town of Sanderson would be the path of choice for the railroad. He bought the land, had it plotted, and waited for the tracks to come to him. When the tracks got to Charley's land the railroad people weren't happy to find he had already bought the land they needed to erect a depot and turn around station. There were a few angry confrontations but eventually they came to an accommodation.

Charley slowly sold off his land holdings and became a rich man in the process. He set up an ornate saloon which served the finest whiskies and champagnes and had many gaming tables. Sanderson came into existence in 1882 with the arrival of the railroad. It began to flourish as the round house was built and ranchers began to move into the area. Train robbers also became active with the most spectacular robbery occurring on May 14, 1897 at Lozier Canyon. \$42,000 was taken by members of the Tom "Black Jack" Ketchum gang. The method of executing the robbery involved stopping the train at an iron bridge and decoupling the passenger cars before taking the rest of the train over the bridge. There were rumors that one of the Baxter's Curve robbers (Kilpatrick) may have been involved in the Lozier Canyon robbery, since the same technique was used in the Baxter's Curve robbery.

### Baxter's Curve and the Train Robbers

Baxter's Curve is located almost midway between Sanderson and Dryden, just east of Sanderson Canyon. It was a sharp bend in the railway's rail bed named for an engineer who died there when his train derailed. The writer has walked to the curve from U.S. Highway 90 (approximately ½ mi.) and can attest to the roughness of the area and the deepness of the canyons which the iron bridges spanned. Concrete supports for the bridges still survive. The current rail bed runs north of the curve, removing it as a hazard.

The Baxter's Curve train robbery in March, 1912 has been reputed to be the last "big" train robbery in Texas, but a later train robbery occurred near Uvalde in 1914 netting over \$4,000. If not the last train robbery in Texas, it was the last in Terrell County and probably in West Texas, and is of interest because of the notoriety of one of the robbers involved. Ben Kilpatrick was known as "The Tall Texan."

The other robber at Baxter's Curve was identified as Ole Hobek. He went by many different names including Ole Hobek, Ed Welch, Ed Walsh, and Ed Beck. It is believed that Ben and Ole met for the first time in the Federal Penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia where they were both serving time for robbery. It is unknown when Ole was released but Ben was released in 1911 after serving ten years. He had been sentenced to 15 years for participating in the "Wild Bunch" robbery of the Great Northern train outside of Wagner, Montana in July of 1901.

While there are conflicting accounts as to which robber was killed by a rifle shot and which was dispatched with an ice mallet the basic facts concerning the robbery are clear. On March 12, 1912 at 8:02 p.m. GH&SA RR (Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio Rail Road) Train No. 9, engine No. 709 left Del Rio, Texas with engineer D. E. Grosh at the throttle. It was making a scheduled passenger, baggage, and mail run to its final destination of El Paso. Shortly before midnight, it stopped in Dryden, Texas to take on water for steam generation. As the train was preparing to pull out, the two robbers (Ben Kilpatrick and Ole Hobek) climbed aboard the engine and ordered Grosh to proceed to the first iron bridge east of Baxter's Curve. The official time of the robbery is listed at 12:05 a.m. on March 13, 1912 by the railroad.

The events that followed after the train stopped at the iron bridge are best related by using the official statement taken from David A. Trousdale on March 15, 1912 at the Wells Fargo and Company's office in San Antonio, Texas. Mr. Trousdale was the express manager Wells Fargo assigned to Train No. 9 and as such was responsible for overseeing the mail, baggage, and any gold or other valuables that the combination mail and baggage cars were carrying. Here is his statement:

"The first I knew of being held up was when the train came to a stop at Baxter's Curve. I did not go to the door, and did not know there was any trouble until the train porter, or the engineer called me and asked me to come to the door. I opened the door, and when I looked out, there was a man with a mask on, standing there pointing a rifle at me. The train porter told me that I was wanted out there; that there were robbers and I had better come out. I stood there for a few seconds and the robber told me to 'fall out' with my hands up. When I got out of the car, he walked up to me and searched me for arms; and then made me stand back with the train crew. He made the conductor and the train porter uncouple the baggage cars from the coaches and move away about 10 to 12 feet....He searched the helper, and gave the conductor and porter instructions to go back and stay with the coaches; the mail clerk, the helper, and I to go on the engine. One of the robbers rode on one side of the engine in the gang way and one on the other side. They carried us something like a mile from the place they held us up.

"The robber going by the name of 'Partner' stayed with the engineer and fireman; and the other one going by the name of 'Frank' had the mail clerk, the helper, and myself line up by the side of the engine tank and marched us back to the baggage car and made us get up into the car, holding our hands up. He then carried us over to the safe and had me open it. I only had sever money waybills in the safe, and out of the seven, I told hem that there were only two of any value to him. I got him to take two packages one valued at \$2.00 and the other \$37.00. After he had looked over the car, he said he would go through and see what Uncle Sam had and he carried the three of us back to the mail car. He cut one mail pouch open and put all of the loose registers in it; and threw it out with four others, filled with registers; and told me that he would take me across the river (meaning the Rio Grande) with him.

"I thought if there was any chance for me to get the advantage on him, it would be by taking him back through my car where I could find some means of turning the table on him. We passed through the combination car and I opened two or three packages of express; and he took his knife and cut one telescope grip open. He took out a Mexican hat and said there was nothing in the baggage that he wanted. The robber, helper Reagan, and I went on into the through car. I told him that I was not getting fighting wages and did not care how much he took out. In this way I gained his confidence and he quit treating me as roughly as he had been. Before this, he would jab me with his rifle and command me around in a boisterous manner. When we

passed by a stack of oysters, I had an empty packer standing in about the center of the car, and the robber and I had to pass between the oysters and the packer, and this crowded me close to the oysters; and as we passed, I picked up the ice-maul which was lying on them. I placed it behind my overcoat so that he could not see it and got him away from the door and showed him a package which was going to Sanderson, and told him that the package was worth more than all he had gotten, I thought. He rested his rifle against his leg and started to pick up the package in his right hand. While he was in this position, I saw my chance, and so the first blow I struck him was at the base of the skull, adjoining his head from his neck. Then I struck him two more blows in the top of the head after he had fallen, and knocked his brains out the third blow.

"I took two .45 caliber Colt revolvers and a 401 Model Winchester off this man. I gave the mail clerk and the helper each a revolver and I kept the rifle. I sent the mail clerk and helper to the rear end of the car. I turned the lights out and then joined them and the only way we could see was from the lights in the combination car. I waited something like two hours for the second man to come back. He did not show up for sometime, and I fired a shot through the top of the car, and in a few minutes, he came to the door and called the name 'Frank' three times; and waited about five minutes, then I saw his head sticking out from behind a trunk forty feet from me. The first time he put his head out I did not get a chance to shoot, but the second time he was looking toward the rear of the car. I fired one shot – the bullet striking him about an inch and a half above the left eye, passing through his head and started going through the end of the car. After waiting about an hour, we pulled the air and the engineer backed the engine and baggage cars back to the coaches. The fireman came back to the coaches and called me. I told him to get the conductor and some of the passengers before I could open the car, that I had killed two men. In a few minutes he came back with the conductor, porter, and fifteen or twenty passengers. When I found that there was no one out there to harm me, I opened the door and admitted the train crew.

"After getting the train coupled up, we moved up to where the US mail had been unloaded and found everything there as it had been unloaded, and I got the two sealed packages that had been taken out of my safe. I transferred all of my money run to Helper Reagan and went as far as Sanderson and unloaded the dead bodies with the six guns taken from them. I then went before the Grand Jury and the coroner's court and was released.

"In conclusion, I will state that while on the way to Sanderson, I removed six sticks of dynamite and a box of dynamite caps and an 'Infernal Machine' from the man called 'Partner'. The man called 'Frank' had a pint of Nitro-Glycerin in his side pocket."

For his actions in stopping the attempted robbery and preventing potential harm to the passengers, Mr. Trousdale was awarded \$51 collected on the spot by the passengers. The Wells Fargo Co. awarded him \$1,000, the Federal government gave him \$1,000 and the Southern Pacific Lines added another \$500. In addition Wells Fargo presented him with a gold watch engraved with: "In recognition of the courage and fidelity displayed in an attempted train robbery near Dryden, Texas, March 13, 1912, Wells Fargo and Co."

To go with the gold watch; the train passengers gave him a gold watch fob inlaid with a diamond inside the star of Texas. The inscription reads: "Presented by passengers, west-bound Sunset Express, for bravery displayed March 13, 1912, near Dryden, Texas."

The robbers, after being posed for a picture at the Sanderson Train Depot, were buried together in the Cedar Grove Cemetery in Sanderson, Texas. Their joint grave has a marker erected by the Terrell County Historical Commission and is still a spot of interest to tourists and also draws those who are students of the Wild West era.

David Trousdale, a true and modest hero, was 32 years old at the time of the robbery. He retired in August of 1945 after 43 years of faithful service with the Railway Express Agency, formerly Wells Fargo and Co. He lived in San Antonio until 1949 and then moved back to his birth state of Tennessee. He died peacefully in 1953.

## SW Chapter News

**MEETING: JUNE 11:** The regular meeting was held at Avila's Mexican Restaurant on N. Mesa. Ric Brightman continued the series on Railroads of the Civil War. The U. S. Military Railroad System used locomotives which were sisters of historic E P & S W Locomotive No. 1, owned by UTEP on exhibit Downtown. The Confederate forces used the same type 4-4-0 engines, but there was very little C S A government coordination with the railroads which made it very difficult for Confederate officers to get the logistical support they needed.

**JULY MEETING:** According to tradition there will be no meeting. However the Board is planning the Annual Birthday Party for historic S P Locomotive No. 3420. More information will be available in the August newsletter.



**Southwest Chapter**  
**Railway & Locomotive Historical Society**

**TO:**

Ron Dawson, Editor

2819 E Eastland  
 Tucson, AZ 85716  
 Email: upper14@aol.com

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#### **EL PASO STREETCAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN:**

The plan approved by the last City Council has been approved by the State Commission for the Texas Dept. of Transportation. The state will contribute \$ 97 million for the project. This is a tribute to those founders and leaders of the Paso del Norte Streetcar Preservation Society.

Justice David Chew and Ron Dawson have worked on the Streetcar preservation project for more than 30 years. The Railroad & Transportation Museum staff has worked on this project for the last 15 years. Ernesto Villanueva Vice President of the Museum Board for Streetcar Operations spoke before City Council and on the History Radio Program. Artist Peter Svarzbein made the return of the streetcars a "quality of life" issue for City Council.

Susie Byrd, Woody Bare and Prince McKenzie are still circulating the petitions of the campaign called "Finish What We Started and Bring the Streetcars Back" to remind the city council that the historic PCC Cars should be used on the project instead of "phony" replicas. Any person who is a registered voter of El Paso County, can sign the petitions. For more information, or to sign a petition, contact Ernesto Villanueva at (915) 329-1030 or the Museum staff at (915) 740-7480. for more information and history about the PCC Cars or El Paso history contact Ron Dawson at upper14@aol.com .

#### **Helpful Links:**

- RR & Transportation Museum of El Paso, <http://elpasorails.org>
- El Paso Streetcars Home Page: <http://trainweb.org/elpasocars> (on this page, sign up for the streetcar newsletter)
- SW Chapter, R&LHS: <http://trainweb.org/ep-sw/index1.htm>
- Harvey Girls of El Paso: <http://harveygirlsel Paso.weebly.com>