Summary Information

Title: Texas State Railroad Board of Managers Audit Papers
Collection Number: 2004:014o
Creator: Clyde Thompson as compiler
Collection Dates: 1921-1952, bulk 1943-1950
Extent: .25 cubic feet (1 box)
Language: English

Collection Abstract:

The Texas State Railroad was ordered by the state of Texas in 1882, and was used by the East Texas Penitentiary in Rusk, Texas to provide fuel to the prison's charcoal-fired iron smelting furnace and also provide an outlet for heavy iron products manufactured at the prison. By 1909, the railroad provided passenger services between Rusk and Palestine. This small collection of papers documents the railroad's construction and operation up to 1950, additions and retirements to track facilities, and the Southern Pine Lumber Company's interest in purchasing the railroad.

Repository:

The History Center
102 N. Temple
Diboll, TX, 75941
936-829-3543
http://www.thehistorycenteronline.com/

Author/Processing Information: Processed by Jonathan Gerland in April 2009.
Revision History: Finding guide updated to current format by Matt Gorzalski on February 10, 2011.

Biographical/Historical Note:

The Texas State Railroad, a tourist railroad since the middle 1970s, has an intriguing history dating back to at least 1882, when Governor Oran M. Roberts decided to construct 1.3 miles of railroad between the state's new East Texas Penitentiary at Rusk and the nearby tracks of the Kansas & Gulf Shortline (K&GSL) railroad. The spur was necessary to provide fuel to the prison's charcoal-fired iron smelting furnace and also provide an outlet for heavy iron products manufactured at the prison. Although built by the state, the spur was operated by K&GSL until 1886, when the state, under Governor John Ireland's direction, purchased a used locomotive and rail cars and began independent train operations over the short spur.

In 1893 Governor James Hogg initiated the state's construction of another line of railroad originating at the prison heading westward toward Palestine, in Anderson County, completing nine miles by 1896, but stopping short of the Neches River. The state abandoned six miles of this extension in 1903 and began construction of a new, more northerly route, reaching the present site of Maydelle in 1904. Between 1907 and 1909, under push from Governor Thomas M. Campbell, the state exercised power of eminent domain and finally completed the Palestine objective initiated 16 years earlier.

Unlike other state-owned and operated railroads in Brazoria, Fort Bend, and Walker counties, the 33-mile Texas State Railroad between Rusk and Palestine organized under special legislation in 1907 as a common carrier of public freight and passengers. As such, civilians composed all operational train and regular maintenance crews. Between 1910 and 1920 the Rusk-Palestine operation regularly employed between 36 and 70 civilians monthly, paying wages comparable to private railroad companies in Texas operating over similar distances.

Some Texas governors sought to make the state-owned railroad a tool the state Railroad Commission could use to better regulate private carriers. Yet despite the state's best intentions, the Texas State Railroad was a much publicized drain on the state treasury. Because of construction cost overruns and numerous "emergency" operational appropriations to the railroad, legislators labeled the line "a white elephant on the hands of the state" during the 1910s. To mitigate further financial losses, the state leased the line to private railroad companies, including Texas & New Orleans, Texas Southeastern, and Missouri Pacific, between 1921 and the early 1970s, then transferred the railroad to the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department in 1972. The line reopened to the public as a State Historical Park in 1976, providing steam passenger tourist excursions seasonally. In 2007 the state privatized the railroad, transferring authority to a rail operating agency and a private operator.

Collection Scope and Content:

This small collection of papers was assembled early in 1952 when Southern Pine Lumber Company considered purchasing the Texas State Railroad, which was then leased by the Texas & New Orleans Railroad Company (T&NO). At the heart of the collection is a twenty-nine page audit report for the years 1943-1950. The report begins by reviewing an earlier audit of the years 1921 to 1943 and provides a three page narrative history of the railroad's construction and operation to 1950. Interestingly, the audit questions T&NO's reported operational losses during the lease years. Also included in the papers is an itemized list of additions and retirements to track facilities made by T&NO between 1921 and 1951.

Arrangement: The papers are arranged in reverse chronological order within five folders.

Subject Terms:

Topics

- Railroads -- Texas -- Diboll
- Railroads -- Texas, East
- Railroad tracks -- Texas, East

Corporate Names

- Southern Pine Lumber Company
- Texas and New Orleans Railroad Company
- Texas State Railroad
- Texas State Railroad -- History

- United States. Interstate Commerce Commission

Personal Names

- Minton, Robert E., 1878-1968

Genres

- Auditor's reports

Locations

- Texas, East

Access and Use

Access Restrictions: There are no restrictions on this collection.
Acquisition Information: This collection was originally filed within Clyde Thompson's papers, a part of the 2004:014 accession that was transferred from the Southern Pine Lumber Company commissary to The History Center periodically between 1996 and 2004. The accession was divided into separate collections based on creator. These papers were removed from Clyde Thompson's papers and treated as a separate collection.
Citation: Texas State Railroad Board of Managers Audit Papers, 1921-1952, 2004:014o, The History Center, Diboll, TX
Related Materials:

Clyde Thompson Papers, 1934-1978, 2004:014c, The History Center, Diboll, TX contain records of Southern Pine Lumber Company receiving logs from their forestlands in Anderson and Cherokee counties via the Texas State Railroad during the 1950s.

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Bibliography:

- Gerland, Jonathan Kirk. *Steam in the Pines: A History of the Texas State Railroad*. Nacogdoches, TX: East Texas Historical Association, 2004.

Collection Inventory

Box 1

Folder 1 — Letter, R.E. Minton to Alva Sanders, January 10, 1952, regarding Southern Pine Lumber Company's interest to purchase the Texas State Railroad.

Folder 2 — Letter, W.B. Bartel to Alva Sanders, November 29, 1951, regarding the Interstate Commerce Commission's return of the Texas State Railroad to the Texas State Railroad Board of Managers.

Folder 3 — Letter, E.A. Craft to E.M. Decker Jr., November 2, 1951, regarding Texas and New Orleans Railroad Company's providing a map and statement of existing facilities in 1921 and changes made thereafter. The folder also includes, as presumed enclosures, a large, folded and colored track map and a four-page itemized list of additions and retirements as made by the Texas and New Orleans Railroad Company between 1921 and 1951.

Folder 4 Bound report, 29 pages, *Audit Report to the Board of Managers of the Texas State Railroad, September 1st, 1943 to August 31st, 1950.*

Folder 5 Typescript, S. B. No. 498 of the 41st Texas Legislature, Ratifying Contract Leasing the Texas State Railroad, CH. 267, January 22, 1929.