

Today a motorist desiring a shortcut from Gracey over to Ft. Campbell and Clarksville can take state highway 117 across southern Christian County, intersecting with US-41A about three miles north of the Fort and saving him quite a few miles and a little driving time. But unless he happens to notice and recognize a little station building still standing at Newstead, complete with one name board, he will never know that most of the way he was traveling on the former roadbed of the Clarksville and Princeton Branch of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. In the late thirties, a few years after its abandonment, one could have travelled all the way across on the former rail line, but with the construction of Camp Campbell in 1942-43, the highway was rerouted from the John Dixon farm at HJowell over to 41-, as it cut across what became the Campbell Army Airfield.

As I have already, few traces of the former railroad still remain. At Gracey, at the intersection of 117 and US-68, the former roadbed can still be seen entering into the center of town, where it is also visible along with the remains of the concrete station platform. At Howell, one can beside the old store onto a gravel road, part of the original ... and drive a couple of miles on the old roadbed to the boundary of Fort Campbell. And beside the already mentioned station at Newstead, one other still stands at Kennedy, just north of the Tennessee state line where the branch crossed the "Tobacco Road", state highway 115.

Once, though ambitions were high and future prospects bright as the branch line ... part of a grand optimistic scheme to construct a railroad from Evansville, Indiana,, thru the coal and iron regions of Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama to Mobile on the Gulf. On February 21, 1882 this road was incorporated in Alabama as the Indiana, Alabama and Texas Railroad Company. The following June the objectives of the company were included in a letter from a Clarksville, Tennessee, citizen to the Kentucky Railroad Association. This letter noted that "there is a feeling of general rejoicing here this morning upon the arrival of Major E.C. Gordon and his corps of engineers to begin the survey and building of the proposed Indiana, Alabama, & Texas Railroad. He will commence the construction of the line of the ... from this point to Princeton, KY., at once and plans to put 500 men to work inside of a month." Next, the letter stated the objectives of the line as providing "a long-desired direct route ... southern outlet, and a healthy competition with the great Louisville & Nashville road and its connecting lines. It is a gigantic railroad scheme, and the Gordons are just the men to carry it out."

No evidence as to the reason for starting this great undertaking in Clarksville seems to have survived the years, but it would seem to the writer that the city's location on the navigable Cumberland just north of the iron industry around Hematite and not too far from the western Kentucky coal fields would be the most logical explanation. At any rate, construction moved forward rapidly, and the end of the following year, 1883, found some twelve miles of the line north from Clarksville to have been graded, with the line --- working only ten miles from Princeton. However, nothing

[When this manuscript was rediscovered in August 2019, this first page was partly illegible due to some sort of chemical spill, forcing re-typing by the webmaster.]

had been determined toward the route north from that city.

On February 15, 1884, the stockholders of the IA&T ratified a merger of the line's separate corporations in Alabama, Tennessee, and Kentucky into the Indiana, Alabama, & Tennessee Railroad, Consolidated. And at this time the objectives of the company were re-stated as being the construction of a railroad north from Mobile, Alabama, to some point on the Ohio River near the mouth of the Green River in Kentucky, with a branch to a point on the same river opposite Mt. Vernon, Indiana. Evidently this flexibility of terminal objectives at the northern end of the line was to encourage stock subscriptions and land donations by communities interested in having the road pass thru their town.

Hopes of completing the line to Princeton by mid-1884 faded with the funds of the IA&T and December, 1885, found it completed only to Newstead, Kentucky, although grading had been finished on to Princeton. However, this same scarcity of funds also resulted in a very flimsy construction job, consisting of light rails and lightly constructed bridges and culverts. Rock ballast was not used, indeed was never used on the branch: ballast consisted of dirt, shaped high in the middle to provide drainage to the sides.

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An interesting sidelight on the original construction of the IA&T was its track gauge, or width, of 36 inches. This gauge, commonly referred to as "Narrow gauge", was very popular in the 1880's as a much less expensive means of railroad construction, especially in hilly country such as Colorado and the west, where a few lines still survive today. Engines and cars, being of much smaller size, were also less expensive. Of course, there could be no interchange of equipment with connecting lines of the more prevalent wider gauge, and therein lay the chief drawback to this width.

With the seemingly remote possibility of the struggling IA&T's reaching the Ohio River, 1886 brought the construction of a potential connecting line, the Ohio Valley Railroad, south from Henderson toward Princeton. Completed the following year, the Ohio Valley, coupled with the IA&T's lack of capital, sealed the latter's fate. This competitive route from the Ohio south into Tennessee was now taking shape and this development was not lost on the L&N. Suddenly, the big road became interested in the struggling narrow-gauge, and on August 14, 1886, acquired all stock and bonds of the IA&T. On April 9, 1887, the L&N took possession of the line and thereby blunted the southward thrust of the Ohio Valley at Princeton.

Acquisition by the L&N brought immediate completion of the line to Princeton and some rebuilding of the portion already completed to Newstead. Coupled with the re-building was the widening of the track to 4'-9", the gauge then used by the L&N. On December 1, 1887, the track reached Princeton and the line became designated as the C&P Branch.

The most significant part of the re-building was the abandonment of the original six miles of line from Clarksville north to Elliott's Pond (near what became the station of Glen Ellen, Tennessee) and construction of a new route from that point across the West Fork of the Red River to a connection with the Memphis Line of the L&N at a point some two miles north of Clarksville. This became known as Princeton Junction. This re-routing was necessary in order to provide a physical connection between

Attesting to this light construction of the IA&T is the following story, which appeared in the "Hopkinsville Kentuckian" under the title, "A Dangerous Road: A serious Smash-up on the IA&T", being re-printed from the "Clarksville Chronicle" of January 22, 1886:

"An accident occurred on the IA&T Railroad this morning at 11 o'clock, about six miles from the city, at Wilson's Spring, Trestle No. 11. As the passenger train, coming into town, approached the trestle, the tender, which was in front of the engine, was derailed about ten or fifteen feet from the trestle. The wheels of the tender striking the cross-ties of the track, pushed them in front of it, and the engine and tender fell through on the cap of the trestle bench, knocking it out of place and letting the whole down ten or fifteen feet to the ground.

"The passenger coach was saved by the coupling-link being broken, and remained securely on the track behind the wreck.

"Mr. L. Abshire, the engineer, stood nobly to his post, reversing his engine and doing everything possible to prevent a disaster. He went down with the engine but fortunately came off with slight injury. He received a severe blow in the side and his right leg was somewhat scalded.

"Monroe Nelly, colored fireman, jumped from the engine and received a severe cut on the head.

"None of the passengers were hurt but all were badly scared. The passengers express themselves under many obligations to Conductor Charley Maner for his kind treatment of them. He refunded all their fares and hired a conveyance to bring them to town.

"The brakeman on the passenger coach, whose name we failed to learn, stood bravely at his post and promptly adjusted the brakes, which probably prevented the car from being precipitated into the broken trestle. The cab of the engine was badly smashed-up and the running board completely demolished. It is otherwise unhurt. The tender was not damaged to any great extent.

"It will be several days before the wreck is cleared away and the train put to running again."

the two lines in Clarksville. The old IA&T had entered that city along the Cumberland River, roughly paralleling the present Tennessee Central line, but at the level of the river bank. Its depot was thus some sixty feet lower than the L&N's line, which crossed the river on a long, high bridge, and thus a physical connection between the two lines was nearly impossible.

An interesting antedote to the L&N's purchase is the founding of Gracey, Kentucky. As grading for the IA&T reached the vicinity of Belleview, ten miles west of Hopkinsville, the route left that village a mile to the east and located a station at the crossing with the Cadiz Pike on the farm of H. H. Bryant. This was first called Bryant's Station, but with L&N purchase the name was changed to Gracey, in honor of Frank P. Gracey, the road's president. This marked the beginning of the town and the demise of Belleview, long since obliterated and forgotten.

While on the subject of station names, it is interesting to note that Julien was named after President Gracey's son, who was for many years superintendent of the L&N division including the C&P branch. Glen Ellen, in Tennessee, was named after another of President Gracey's children. Kennedy was named for D. N. Kennedy, who served as trustee for the IA&T stockholders after the L&N's purchase of their road. Rich, between Herndon and Newstead, honored C. W. Richardson, the IA&T's chief engineer.

The completed line between Princeton and Princeton Junction measured 52.7 miles and service began with two trains each way, daily except Sunday. The passenger run left Princeton in the morning, returning from Clarksville in the evening. The other, a mixed train, ran opposite, leaving Clarksville in the morning and returning that night. However, the service was short-lived, for once again the shadow of the Ohio Valley fell across the branch.

At a meeting of the Ohio Valley's directors in Henderson on September 19, 1888, there were submitted "letters and telegrams from prominent business men in Hopkinsville indicating that a subscription of \$200,000 in the road's capital stock would be voted for an extension from Princeton on to Hopkinsville, provided the people were assured that the railroad would be built." This proposal was accepted and on November 10, 1888, the proposition, submitted in referendum to the voters of ~~Hopkinsville,~~ was approved by 399 votes. However, before the full bond issue could be floated and the extension begun, the Ohio Valley fell into financial difficulties and defaulted on its interest payments.

To the Ohio Valley's rescue came Collis P. Huntington's Chesapeake, Ohio, & Southwestern, with which it connected at Princeton and formed a valuable feeder line. As a result, steps were promptly taken on the Hopkinsville extension. The L&N was approached for the purchase or lease of the Gracey-Princeton line, but this was quickly rejected. However, when grading began between Hopkinsville and Gracey and surveyors set out to locate a parallel line north of the latter point, the L&N reconsidered. On June 26, 1892, the C&P branch from Gracey to Princeton was leased to the Ohio Valley for 99 years for an annual payment of \$12,039.70 plus maintenance and taxes, and the right to renew the lease in perpetuity. Within a short time, both the CO&SW and the OV were absorbed into the Illinois Central and thus, today, that road operates the only portion of the former C&P still existing.

With the shortening of mileage, it was only a matter of time until a complementary shortening of service occurred. Consequently, the daily except Sunday passenger run was dropped, with the mixed remaining as the only scheduled run. This train took three hours to make the trip, leaving Gracey at 6:30 A.M. and arriving in Clarksville at 9:30. However, the return trip took only two hours, 44 minutes, with departure from Clarksville at 4:10 P.M. and arrival in Gracey at 6:54. A typical consist would include a box car for l.c.l. merchandise, a combination mail-baggage-express car, a partition coach (for white and colored), and a car or two of freight. Mostly, freight consisted of coal and fertilizer inbound, and lumber, poultry, livestock, tobacco, and wheat outbound. During the wheat harvest, it sometimes became necessary to run an extra train or to make a Sunday trip. Day telegraph offices were maintained about this time at Princeton Junction, Herndon, and Gracey.

Economically speaking, the branch line was never much of a success, even before its reduction in length to Gracey. The first full year of L&N operation, 1888, saw total revenues of \$22,828, divided roughly 50-50 between passengers and freight, for a net loss of \$4029. By the following year, revenues had jumped up to \$48,252, reducing the deficit to only \$579. Revenues in 1890 increased to \$51,334 and brought the L&N's first net profit of \$1,881. After the branch was cut back to Gracey, revenues were almost halved, with the see-saw of profits and losses continuing. The net profit for 1893 was \$3,780 on a gross of \$28,375; while 1894 showed a loss of \$515, but on only \$20,928 in revenues.

The C&P branch's destiny, from the beginning, lay in providing mainly local services. And that's why it is gone today. Serving a lightly populated farming area and connecting, first at Princeton, then at Gracey with lines which were competitors of the L&N, it could count on little interchange traffic and was forced to survive on business generated on-line. After construction of the Tennessee Central to an IC connection in Hopkinsville in 1903, such interchange traffic as had been available dried up. In fact, the possibilities of interchange passenger traffic were so dim that the L&N never tried to schedule connections with IC trains at Gracey.

Occasionally, in the early years of operations, excursion trains of six or seven cars were run from Princeton to Clarksville. These added much needed extra revenue but not so another monthly special of those times - the pay train - a very important one in the days of limited banking facilities. However, the most important special ever run over the C&P, indeed South Christian's day in the sun, was on September 2, 1892, when Vice-Presidential candidate Adlai E. Stevenson returned to his home town of Herndon in the course of that year's campaign. Mr. Stevenson was running with former President Grover Cleveland in the latter's successful bid for a second term of office.

The distinguished visitor, accompanied by his brother, William W. Stevenson, rode the special train from Hopkinsville via Gracey and the C&P to Herndon. The following report, entitled "A Great Day: The Herndon Barbecue a Tremendous Affair", is taken from the "Hopkinsville Kentuckian" of Tuesday, September 6, 1892.

"Under the escort of a committee of local Democrats, he left for Herndon, by the O.V. Railroad, at 9:30. Four hundred people were in the crowded coaches and when Herndon was reached at 12:05 there were 600 people in the party. The slow time made - eight miles an hour - is still a mystery to everybody but the railroad people. Arriving at the depot Mr. Stevenson and his escort were taken in carriages to Mr. & Mrs. J. T. Coleman's and given an opportunity to dust up before going to the grounds. The barbecue was over and Col. Joseph E. Washington had entertained the crowd with a speech in the forenoon. A special table had been reserved for the visiting party, but Mr. Stevenson never reached it to eat. He was headed off by relatives who took him to a private picnic spread upon the ground, where he satisfied his hunger between the handshakes of the delighted people.

"Dinner was over by 1:30 and speaking was resumed. It is not possible to estimate the number of people present. They were scattered all over the woods and it was almost impossible to get about for the vehicles. It is known that the 26 coaches carried not less than 2,500 people by rail and it is probable that twice as many came by private conveyances. There must have been 7,500 people on hand, although the date was fixed only ten days before. The seats were crushed down by the surging mass of humanity and those who craned their necks to hear and see occupied 'standing room only'. They crowded upon the stand and shut off every breath of air until the speaker was forced to move to a wagon some distance from the stand, where he towered above the crowd and managed to make himself heard by the acres of humanity on every side. Mr. Stevenson was introduced by Mr. W. R. Howell in a brief speech and after dwelling for a few moments upon the sentimental features of his visit, made an elaborate political address in which he discussed all of the issues of the campaign in a masterly manner. He spoke an hour and a half.

"He was followed by Hon. W. T. Ellis, Hon. J. A. McKenzie, Hon. W. J. Stone and Editor Rufus Rhodes, all of whom made stirring speeches. Mr. Stevenson spent Friday night with his old friends and relatives in the vicinity of Herndon. He was given a reception at the residence of Mr. Thomas L. Moss in the evening and came to this city Saturday morning in time to take the 9:57 train for Illinois.

"There were 115 carcasses barbecued and six of those were left untouched, not being needed. Everybody had enough to eat and the meat was cooked in Capt. Sam White's very best style.

"There was not only plenty to eat but plenty of ice water, plenty of shade, plenty of oratory and plenty of congenial company.

"Seats were the only things scarce and this was due to an accident, by which the plank seats were thrown down.

"There were six coaches from Hopkinsville, six from Clarksville, and eleven from Paducah and Henderson, besides the regular L&N train."

There is little wonder that the guest of honor and the train he was riding was late when one considers the size of the crowd, the short length of trains in those days, and the number of trains traversing the

lightly constructed C&P branch to a station with no turning facilities and only one siding. In addition to the L&N's two regularly scheduled trains that morning the branch handled either three or four specials, each of which would have had to go back to another siding in order to clear the line.

The construction of the Tennessee Central in 1903 provided a brief spurt of business for the branch. Since the roadbed south from Hopkinsville was finished before that north of Clarksville, probably due to the number of trestles on the T.C., several extra trains of steel rails were run across the C&P to Gracey in order to get this material from Clarksville to the construction crews at Hopkinsville. Thus the rails on the T.C. were layed from this city southward.

In early 1903, the mixed run was reversed, with the train leaving Clarksville in the morning and returning in the afternoon. Thus the overnight layover of engine and crew in Gracey was eliminated.

Probably the most noted crewmember on the C&P was the conductor during this period. His name was William V. Buckberry and he was known as "Little Buck". Because of this long service on the line, the mixed train became known as "Buckberry's Train" and going to meet it was commonly referred to as "going to meet Buckberry". Unfortunately, things were not as rosy as they seemed as he was not on speaking terms with his engineer, one John R. Martin, and other members of the crew were forced to act as intermediaries between them during every trip.

Then there is the story of the Howell audit. A young auditor, J. H. Mitchell, having only worked for the L&N a short time, was told to check the agencies at Herndon and Howell. After finishing his work at the former depot, he walked the three miles to Howell, arriving just before sunset. He soon found a tall, elderly man who said he was the agent, and Mitchell then asked to see the cash book.

"No cash book," replied the agent.

"All right" was the reply, "I'll take your expense bills and add them up and see how much is due us."

"No expense bills", said the agent.

"This," replied Mitchell, "is unprecedented. We will not permit an account to be so handled."

"Come with me", replied the agent.

The men walked to the front of the store and down to the roadway. "How far can you see in this direction?", asked the agent, pointing north. Mitchell indicated that he had no idea, and the pointing to the three other cardinal points of the compass brought the same reply.

"Well, it doesn't matter," said the L&N's representative at Howell. "I own as far as you can see in any direction. Any time the L&N doesn't like the way I handle their business they can take their tracks off my land."

"We'll do it your way", quickly replied Mitchell; and after the bills were abstracted and totals balanced, a personal check for the net was tendered by the agent - and accepted! This story is from the "Kentucky Engineer" of August, 1951.

In order to give you a general discription of the line, its stations and structures, let us imagine a typical ride over it on the daily mixed train in the years just after the turn of the century.

Departure time from Clarksville is 9:15 A.M. and the little eight-wheeler pulling our train, among the lightest engines on the L&N, picks up speed up the Memphis Line toward Princeton Junction. Our partitioned coach rides smoothly up the "main line" but this is short-lived as we swing left at the Junction onto the C&P Branch. The lighter rail with its dirt ballast can be quickly felt as we sway along at a diminished rate of speed. This dirt roadbed doesn't lend itself to either speed or a smooth ride and our passing is betrayed by a gentle cloud of dust and coal smoke.

Brakes are applied as we drift slowly down the winding grade toward the bridge across West Fork of Red River. This grade, two miles long, is the steepest on the branch, reaching a maximum of 1.71% and crossing a 401 foot pile trestle just south of the West Fork Bridge. The latter is the line's most elaborate structure, consisting of a 730-foot pile trestle, a 153 foot deck truss bridge, and another 95 foot pile trestle. After easing across, our little engine hits the three miles of tortious grade climbing out of the valley. Its a slow pull, even with our four cars, up this long grade to the box-car station at Glen Ellen. Here, as our panting engine rests from the climb and our crew unloads some merchandise and perhaps a passenger or two, we can see a stock loading pen and a siding, evidence of the large amount of livestock business which the line handles. Next stop and the top of the grade is Kennedy, just across the state line in Kentucky, possessing a depot, stock pen, and siding.

The grade of the line now follows closely the level of the land it crosses, providing a "roller-coaster" affect, as we head toward Oak Grove and a grade crossing with the newly constructed Tennessee Central. Oak Grove also boasts a depot and siding, but there is no connecting track between the two railroads.

Leaving Oak Grove, we begin to notice how straight the track runs, and, except for another river crossing, it will be this way all the way to Gracey. Rocking along between 30 and 35 miles an hour, we approach Douglas, 16.8 miles from Clarksville, and almost halfway to Gracey. Located in what is now Fort Campbell, it also has a depot with the inevitable spur track and stock pen.

Our next stop is Howell, with its depot and siding, then Herndon, with the same plus a stock pen. After getting the "all aboard" at Herndon, we drop downgrade to the second river crossing, over Little River on a 96 foot pile trestle, a 101 foot wood truss trestle, and a 24 foot pile trestle. Here a stop is made to re-fill our engine's tank from the only water tank on the C&P branch. Then our engine strains into the second steepest grade on the road - a one mile grade north from Little River bridge, reaching a maximum of 1.59%.

Soon we are dropping downgrade to the little depot at Rich, with its siding and stock pen, then on to Newstead, with the same. Between Newstead and the siding at Julien, we cross the last bridge-structure on the line - over Sinking Fork. This one includes a 132-foot bent deck

trestle, a 101-foot wooden through truss, and a 148-foot bent deck trestle. Next, we're drifting past the siding and turntable at Clardy, a mile and a half south of Gracey, so located because the L&N couldn't find enough land for the turntable any closer to town at a price the road was willing to pay.

Now we're whistling for Gracey, 32 miles from Princeton Junction, and we drift across the Cadiz Pike to halt beside the depot platform. The 34.2 miles from Clarksville have been covered at a speed of just over 20 miles per hour, including stops, and we're right on schedule - 11:58 A.M. Now our crew must get the mail, baggage, express, and freight unloaded, the engine turned, and the train switched in time for a 1 P.M. departure for Clarksville. This was the C&P 60 years ago.

The lengthening 20th Century, with its improved roads and gasoline-powered vehicles, brought harder times to the C&P branch and many other branches similar to it. The line's freight business, mainly in agricultural products, was readily adapted to truck transportation. And the small lumber business the line once enjoyed from local sawmills had disappeared with the depletion of the forests. Still, the L&N hung on by reducing the daily mixed to a tri-weekly run on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.

But the Great Depression combined with the before mentioned truck competition put an end to the Gracey Branch. Revenues decreased sharply between 1928 and 1932, while losses spiraled upward. In 1928, the line had carried 2,396 passengers and hauled 22,822 tons of freight. 1932 found these figures decreased to 695 passengers and 6,561 tons of freight while mail service had ended that September. This decrease in business was reflected in revenues, which dropped from \$14,998 in 1928 to \$5,443 in 1932. The total deficit for these five years, 1928-1932, amounted to a staggering \$143,468.

However, the immediate cause of the branch's demise lay in its rapidly deteriorating old wooden bridge-trestle structures. Only the lightest engines could be run over them and double-heading was prohibited. The maximum gross weight of any car could not exceed 120,000 pounds, and if it did, that car must be preceded and followed by an empty car. Speed limits over two of the bridges were restricted to five miles per hour and the cost of reconstructing just these two structures, in the worst condition, was estimated at \$119,950. Such an expenditure - and more - was plainly not justified by the rapidly declining business.

Consequently, application was made to the Interstate Commerce Commission on March 3, 1933, for permission to abandon the entire branch. This was speedily approved, on March 27th, and abandonment became a fact on May 13, 1933. Removal of the rails and bridges began that October and continued until February, 1934.

In the meantime, a meeting was held in the Christian County Court House on Saturday, May 27, 1933, by citizens interested in raising money to purchase the abandoned right-of-way for use as a highway. There was reported to be some opposition among adjacent property owners whose deeds stipulated that the right-of-way ownership would revert back to them if the road should ever be abandoned. This meeting also decided to name the proposed highway the "Adlai E. Stevenson Highway" in honor of the former Vice-President and Herndon native.

On June 28, 1933, the Christian County Fiscal Court agreed to take over the abandoned right-of-way as soon as the citizens committee had finished raising the money to purchase it. This committee was reported as making headway in raising the sum, which was reported as \$3,000. County Judge Rives, according to the "New Era" of June 30, said that engineers had placed a value on the right-of-way at many times this nominal sum asked by the L&N.

Thus the Clarksville & Princeton Branch passed onto the pages of L&N and Christian County history and eventually into the records of the Kentucky Department of Highways as number 117. Now, almost 35 years later, the dirt roadbed has been replaced with asphalt, the old wooden bridges with concrete ones, the puffing engines and swaying cars with speeding and drag-racing automobiles, and the occasional trackside wildflowers with littered empty beer cans. But the luxuriant farmlands are as beautiful as ever, and one can only reflect, at this late writing, on the thrill and charm of riding across them on that slow mixed train of another, unhurried age.

W. H. Henderson

7 December 1967

SOURCES:

- "The Kentucky Engineer," August, 1951
- Meacham's "A History of Christian County"
- "The Hopkinsville Kentuckian"
- "The Kentucky New Era"