

## The Uvalde & Northern Railway and the Town of Camp Wood

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The town of Camp Wood and the railroad were established for the harvesting of cedar and kaolin deposits within and around the Nueces Canyon and Edwards Plateau area. According to A. W. Spaight, about 20 percent or 90,478 acres was cedar woodland available to be harvested.<sup>1</sup> Cedar, a much-needed commodity, was used for house foundations, fuel, lumber, fence posts, and telephone poles. William A Buchanan and Jeff Godbold discovered kaolin, a type of rare clay for making fine china, east of Camp Wood about 1888. Mining began about 1906, and in 1931, test drilling revealed a potential remaining 126,000 tons available to be mined.<sup>2</sup>

With the availability of cedar and kaolin, F. J. Rheiner and F. A. Piper of Uvalde and Will A. Morris, Fred C. Adams, W. F. Brice, and J. J. Ford of San Antonio wanted to harvest these resources as a profitable venture. This business interest resulted in “[t]he Uvalde and Northern Railway Company [being] chartered on March 14, 1914 with the objective of constructing a railroad from Uvalde to a site near Camp Wood Creek in Real County.”<sup>3</sup>

“Members of the first board of directors included L. J. Smith and E. H. McVoy of Kansas City, Missouri, L. J. Wardlaw of Sonora, F. J. Rheiner and F. A. Piper of Uvalde, and Will A Morris, Fred C. Adams, W. F. Brice, and J. J. Ford.... Adams, Norris, and R. C. Walker of Austin advanced the funds to finance the proposed project.... The capital was \$60,000.00 [current value \$1,363,000.00] and the business office was located four miles south of Barksdale in Real County.”<sup>4</sup> On May 29, 1914, construction began a few miles north of Uvalde, and eleven miles had been graded and prepared when workers

were forced to stop construction because of difficulty of acquiring additional right-of-way.<sup>5</sup>

Landowners who had agreed to sell right-of-way access were paid \$30.00 an acre.<sup>6</sup> However not all landowners, as previously noted, favored the building of the railroad through their property. “According to Ben Haygood, employee in charge of track maintenance, men with shotguns once stopped the right-of-way cutters and backed the work crew up 600 feet. The track had to be laid in a curve around this property owner’s land. Haygood also reports one rancher did not like a dirt-filled crossing the company built for him to cross the tracks. He [the landowner] piled 50 ties on the track ahead of the train. When the train came to a stop, he met the crew with a shotgun. Lacking other alternatives, the crew immediately started work on a better crossing.”<sup>7</sup>

Further delays hampering construction were the beginning of World War I, rock had to be blasted and cleared away to make a bed for ties and track, and “a 1916 fire consumed thousands of acres of cedar in the Camp Wood Creek cedar brake.”<sup>8</sup> Fearing that the delays in construction may have voided the original charter of 1914, the Uvalde and Northern was reincorporated on May 11, 1920. At this time, Harry H. Rogers from San Antonio underwrote additional financing. “Rogers formed the Townsite Company with W. A. Thompson and laid out the township of Camp Wood at the northern terminus of the railroad.”<sup>9</sup> The name of Camp Wood was retained from the military outpost in connection with the Spanish Mission San Lorenzo De La Santa Cruz, located just north of the present day city limits. Military historian Bill Badger reports that Captain George C. Wallace on the twenty-third of May 1857 “instructed his men to make permanent camp around the old mission. He called the place G. W. F. Wood in honor of a colleague, Captain Georg W. F. Wood of the First Infantry, who had died three years prior.”<sup>10</sup> An

1860 map of the mission area and the military Camp Wood can be found on page 130 of *Wagons, Ho! A History of Real County Texas*.

According to Haygood, the Uvalde & Northern had a target date of February 21, 1921 to reach Camp Wood. In the attempt to reach this goal, the crew “laid what was called a ‘running’ track. The track was laid and bridges were built, but just well enough to get the train to its destination [of Camp Wood], not sturdy enough to carry heavy cargo.”<sup>11</sup> The track never crossed the Nueces River, but it had over a mile of bridges because of the many creeks and low-lying areas that had to be traversed.<sup>12</sup> Construction to carry heavy freight would be completed soon afterward.

L. J. Dean reported of old-timers telling about “cutting oak ties for the Uvalde and Northern Railroad. They [the work crew] used a gas driven sawmill. To get the large oak logs to the mill, they used a low steel-wheeled wagon. They unhitched the mules and used a 60 foot doubled chain to roll the logs into the wagon. At the mill, they cut regular ties 8’ long and switch ties 13’ long.”<sup>13</sup> “Oak ties were locally cut for the Uvalde & Northern and 8-12 ties could be sawed from a single tree. At a rate of 2,640 ties per mile and 8 – 12 ties per tree, it would have required 8,162 – 12,243 trees to construct the Uvalde & Northern tracks (37.1 miles). Ties had to be replaced every 7 years on average.”<sup>14</sup>

Kelly Switch and Kendrick Switch, two additional locations for loading and unloading freight, were located along the route. Kelly Switch was located near and just south of the present-day 19-Mile Crossing on the right hand side of the road as one travels south toward Uvalde.<sup>15</sup> This writer has no report of the location of Kendrick Switch. Zelma Barber, daughter of Ben Haygood, “painted mileposts for her father to mark Kelly Switch and Kendrick Switch ....”<sup>16</sup>

The railroad was planned to go on to San Angelo, but some landowners in the Barksdale area north of Camp Wood refused to allow right-of-way. “After a gun battle in which one man was wounded the road building stopped at Camp Wood.”<sup>17</sup> Failing to meet its target date of February 21, on March 19, 1921, the 37.1 miles of rail reached the townsite of Camp Wood, and “[t]he Uvalde & Northern, unlike the typical tram line used in logging operations, was a common carrier (Class III) offering passenger service and regular freight shipments.”<sup>18</sup> At this time, the president of the railroad was R. T. Walker, the superintendent and general manager was J. C. Haws, and the agent was F. B. Kirchner.<sup>19</sup> Dean also reported that plans had been made to extend the rail service from Rocksprings to Sonora, but the plan never materialized because of the railroad termination at Camp Wood.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the regular passenger service on the train, “[t]he company also had a separate car called ‘The Doodlebug,’ a motorized coach built on a Model T frame. Andy Hale usually operated it, with its gears just like a regular Model-T. The wheels were the size of truck wheels, but had flanges for running on the rails.”<sup>21</sup> The Doodlebug could be conveniently used for passenger service when the train was not using the track.

Camp Wood became a boomtown and the Uvalde Cedar Company was organized in 1921 with Mr. H. Sholter as company president. Lost Creek Brake was the first timberland harvested. Roads were built west into the cedar country and horse and mule drawn wagons were used at first to deliver the cedar to the railroad freight yard. Over one hundred cutters and haulers worked for the Uvalde Cedar Company in 1921 with most living in a tent city. The Uvalde Cedar Company made a plea for more haulers and choppers because of the high demand for cedar. Haulers hauling cut cedar from the brake to the rail station were being paid “9.00 to \$12.00 per day, and choppers from \$2.50 to \$4.00 per day.”<sup>22</sup> In 1924, it was estimated that over two hundred cedar choppers were

employed and three trains per week were hauling loads of 40,000 posts each trip. In 1928, cedar valued at \$500,000.00 [current value \$6,600,000.00] was shipped from Camp Wood, and in 1929, the Uvalde Cedar Company was said to be the largest cedar shipper in the United States.<sup>23</sup> In 1926, the Uvalde and Northern owned one locomotive, three passenger cars, several freight cars, and in 1929, the railroad sold to William T. Eldridge and became a subsidiary of Sugarland Industries.<sup>24</sup>

Reba Hicks, current resident of Camp Wood, in an interview reports that a group of boys would go to a garage and get used oil to pour on a section of the track that was on a steep incline south of Camp Wood. After pouring the oil on the track, the boys would hide and wait to watch the train as it would struggle trying to maintain traction to go up the greased track. Someone on the train would have to pull a lever that would cause sand to pour on the track to make it possible for the train to continue up the incline. She said the boys would grease the tracks because they thought it was a fun thing to do, and she stated that her brother was a participant.<sup>25</sup>

In March of 1924, Charles Lindbergh and friend Leon Klink were attempting to fly to California along a southern route. During the flight, Lindbergh mistook the Uvalde and Northern Railroad and the Nueces River for his intended route above the Southern Pacific Railroad along the Rio Grande. Lindbergh realized his mistake when the railroad ended at Camp Wood, and he landed in a pasture north of Camp Wood. He returned to Camp Wood and landed on the main street. He attempted to take off to return to his original flight plan, but he hit a telephone pole with a wing and crashed into Warren Puett's hardware store. Waiting for parts and repairs, Lindbergh and Klink remained in Camp Wood for a few days before being able to continue their journey. An historical marker is currently located at the park in Camp Wood that is named for Lindberg in commemoration of this historic event.<sup>26</sup>

In 1935, David Bingham of Uvalde worked for the Uvalde & Northern for about two years. Dave and his cousin Red Luxton were hired as brakemen for \$1.50 for a ten-hour day or until the train reached Camp Wood. Three gates had to be opened and closed along the route. Head brakeman Red opened the gates and tail brakeman Dave closed them. The train and crew would spend the night in Camp Wood before making the return trip to Uvalde. The crew also made repairs along the track and bridges using a broadaxe to make new railroad ties from nearby available trees.<sup>27</sup>

When Harry A. Rogers formed the Townsite Company, he also purchased the rights to the kaolin clay mining; however, the market for mining the clay never developed. Transporting the clay to market in the Eastern United States and Europe proved not to be profitable. After changing ownership a few times, the mines were eventually abandoned resulting in the loss of an anticipated viable resource for the Uvalde & Northern Railroad shipping.

By the end of the 1930's, "[t]he equivalent of 7,543,297 cedar post had been harvested" resulting in 37,716 acres of land harvested for cedar.<sup>28</sup> "The calculation of deforested acreage does not include [acreage cleared for] known quantities of fuelwood shipped by the railroad, posts and fuelwood cut by ranches and other businesses not associated with the railroad, and deforestation due to fire."<sup>29</sup> Replaced by posts made of iron, steel, and treated pine, the demand for cedar posts had declined. Passenger service had ended in 1932. Wool and mohair began shipping by truck. San Antonio and Austin had switched largely to natural gas for heating and cooking, which dried up the need for fuelwood. "No shipments of fuelwood occurred after 1935" [and] "[n]o rail shipments of cedar were made in 1941."<sup>30</sup>

With the decline of the demand for cedar and available cedar to be cut and trucks shipping the cedar that was available, the Uvalde and Northern Railroad had fallen into

an operating loss for many of its last years in operation. Finally, in January 1941, the Uvalde and Northern Railroad posted notice: “The Uvalde & Northern Railroad Company hereby gives notice that on December 5, 1940, it filed with the Interstate Commission at Washington, D.C. an application for a certificate of public convenience and necessity permitting abandonment of the line extending northwesterly from Uvalde to Camp Wood, a distance of approximately 37.1 miles, all in Uvalde and Real Counties, Texas.”<sup>31</sup> Ben Haygood, in charge of track maintenance for the Uvalde & Northern Railroad from 1923 to 1941, directed the removal of track.<sup>32</sup> The track was sold and used in defense for the World War II effort.

Today in many areas, the track bed where the train once traveled is still visible. A few hundred feet from our meeting location today at the First Baptist Church, the rail bed is clearly visible from Highway 55 south of Camp Wood as it abruptly stops at the fence line on the left side of the road before crossing the road to make its entrance on the western side of town. In some areas, utilities companies continue to use the original track bed where their poles were once and still are adjacent to the former railroad. Traveling by car, this can easily be seen as one travels County Road 416, which is located on the left just before crossing the Highway 55 Bridge at Cooksey Park. A sign reading “Cooksey Ranch” arches over the road; however, this is a public access road. Following CR 416, it will eventually re-enter Highway 55 just a few miles south of Cooksey Park. In addition, as one travels from Camp Wood to Uvalde and nears the Indian Creek pass, the track bed is clearly visible again about ten feet inside the fence for about seventy-five to one hundred feet on the eastern side of Highway 55 and on either side of Indian Creek.

- <sup>1</sup> Frederick H. Wills, "Camp Wood, the Uvalde & Northern Railway, and Deforestation," *Journal of South Texas* 17, no. 1 (2004), 51, 53.
- <sup>2</sup> Virginia Buchanan, "Leakey Kaolin Mines: T61," *Wagons, Ho! A History of Real County*, ed. Marjorie Kellner (Dallas: Curtis Media, 1995), 83.
- <sup>3</sup> Wills, op cit., 51.
- <sup>4</sup> Ruben E. Ochoa, "Uvalde and Northern Railway," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/equo2>, (accessed October 26, 2013). Published by the Texas State Historical Association.
- <sup>5</sup> Wills, op cit.
- <sup>6</sup> Jane Knapik, "David G. Bingham, Former Employee of the U&N Railroad," *Uvalde Leader News*, sec B, par. 22, January 23, 1977.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Wills, op cit.
- <sup>9</sup> Ochoa, op cit.
- <sup>10</sup> Bill Badger, "Camp Wood, Texas: A Military History, 1857–1861" *American Military University*, Summer 2000.  
Marjorie Kellner (Dallas: Curtis Media, 1995), 117.
- <sup>11</sup> Knapik, op cit. par. 19.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid
- <sup>13</sup> Dean, op cit., 118.
- <sup>14</sup> Fred Wills, "Uvalde and Northern Railway," *Texas Transportation Museum Online*, <http://txtransportationmuseum.org/history-rr-uvalde-northern.php>, (accessed October 26, 2012). Published by Texas Transportation Museum.
- <sup>15</sup> Milburn Wooldridge, conversation with author, 17 March 2013.
- <sup>16</sup> Knapik, op cit., par. 28.
- <sup>17</sup> Knapik, op cit., par. 25.
- <sup>18</sup> Wills, "Camp Wood," 52.
- <sup>19</sup> Ochoa, op cit.
- <sup>20</sup> L. J. Dean, "Uvalde and Northern Railway: B 21," *Wagons, Ho! A History of Real County*, ed. Marjorie Kellner (Dallas: Curtis Media, 1995), 167.
- <sup>21</sup> Knapik, op cit., par. 35.
- <sup>22</sup> Dean, "Camp Wood," 117.
- <sup>23</sup> Wills, op cit.
- <sup>24</sup> Ochoa, op cit.
- <sup>25</sup> Reba Hicks, conversation with author, 5 Feb. 2013.
- <sup>26</sup> John Minton, "Camp Wood, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://tshaonline.org/online/articles/hic03>, (accessed 26 Oct. 2012). Published by Texas Historical Association.
- <sup>27</sup> Knapik, op cit., par. 10.
- <sup>28</sup> Wills, op cit., 53.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid, 56.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid
- <sup>31</sup> *Nueces Valley News, Camp Wood, Real County, TX*, 2 Jan. 1941, 15, no. 52, p. 4.
- <sup>32</sup> Knapik, op., par. 38.

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