

# History of the Tucson & South Western Railroad

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*A fictional tale of the railroad operated by SASME*

The Tucson & South Western began life on August 26, 1880. R. L. Freiberg owned several mines in the Washington Camp and Duquesne areas of the Patagonia Mountains in Southern Arizona. Wagons hauled the ore through the mountains north to the smelter at Crittendon, a slow and costly way to process ore. Freiberg secured financial support from backers in New York and Pittsburgh and commissioned a survey crew to search and map a route for a rail line.

Two crews began looking; one worked north following the route the wagons used. The second crew headed southwest looking for a passage to Line City as Anglos called Nogales at the time. The Crittendon crew ran into one setback after another. Three different routes were proposed but none was suitable. All had some portion that was too steep even for narrow gauge trains.

The Line City crew proved successful and mapped a route 31.3 miles, through San Antonio Pass at the border, then west over 4% grades across two more passes and through the proposed towns of Buena Vista and Brickwood Canyon before turning north a mile from the border and ending at the Calabasas Smelter. A Shay locomotive provided power to handle the twists and grades.

Construction began in the spring of 1882 and completed Saturday October 11, 1884 with an enormous barbecue and dance commemorating the driving of the last spike. Almost before the celebration ended, the surveyors were mapping a route westward to Arivaca and on to Quijotoa. Construction began as soon as a suitable route was mapped.

In 1885, a Col. Sykes secured support for the Calabasas, Tucson and North Western Railroad. The road was to build north from Calabasas, continue to Tucson, then head northwesterly to Florence and Phoenix, both towns without railroads. On January 13, 1886, engineering work commenced, however, by August 1 only about 800 feet of grading had been finished. With the money from the backers in Tucson and New York nearly spent, they had yet to lay any rail. Sykes traveled to New York to try to secure additional loans. He got a cool reception to his request for more money as the price of copper was edging downward.

Freiberg was not too concerned about the price of his copper, as he, William Greynolds, his surveyor, and H. J. Laws, his chief engineer, had recently traveled north to Crown King in the Bradshaw Mountains. There had been several gold strikes in the area and mines and towns were popping up. His initial business in the area had been to purchase the McNary and Crown King Railroad, a financially troubled narrow gauge line that connected several of the mines with the Bradshaw Mountain Railroad. After completing the purchase, the three men played a little poker at the Crown King Saloon. Freiberg's usual good luck was with him and by the end of the night he owned two mining claims, one placer and one of gold bearing quartz. Freiberg returned to Tucson with the claims while Laws and Greynolds stayed behind to manage the operation of the

McNary and Crown King Railroad and start preliminary work on setting up the mining operations of the Busted Flush mines.

The strikes seemed promising and on the strength of these claims, he received financing to take over ownership of the Calabasas, Tucson and North Western. Construction began northward and within a few months, trains were operating as far north as the San Xavier mining district. Almost seven years to the day after the Southern Pacific reached Tucson, the first CT&NW train quietly arrived in town.

The CT&NW had planned to reach northward to Globe and on to the Deer Creek coal fields for a total trackage of 350 miles. There had even been some discussion about heading south to Topolobampo, Mexico. However, due to the cyclical nature of the prices of metals and minerals Freiberg decided that he could not rely on passenger and mining freight traffic alone. He wanted a line to the Pacific coast and a seaport.

Before Freiberg could begin work on a line to the coast, he learned that the Santa Fe railroad was interested in divesting the New Mexico and Arizona railroad. Freiberg approached the Santa Fe and began negotiations. He made an offer that the NM&A seemed to find acceptable. He returned to Tucson confident in his offer. The SP, however, countered with an offer the NM&A could not refuse and Freiberg could not beat.

The setback only inspired Freiberg to push harder to build across western Arizona and California. The survey crew had already mapped a suitable route. It had been difficult finding a route with enough water to supply steam engines through one of the hottest and driest deserts in the country. The Papago (now known as the Tohono O'odham) tribe had agreed to the road and assisted in mapping the route through their reservation in exchange for jobs.

Freiberg felt that if he was to be able to compete with the powerful Southern Pacific, the line to Quijotoa, originally planned as a narrow gauge railroad, would have to be standard gauge. This would require additional funding. He started by selling his interest in the Calabasas smelter. The NM&A had been taking some business away from it anyway, routing ore to the bigger and more efficient smelters in Benson and Douglas.

With the money from the smelter as seed money, he traveled to the east to solicit investments. He found that Sykes had soured many investors against the CT&NW. Freiberg returned to Tucson and incorporated a new railroad, the Tucson and South Western Railroad. As opposed to the north-south orientation of the CT&NW, the T&SW charter called for it to build to the west from Tucson with the ultimate goal of reaching the Pacific.

With this new company formed and a route already mapped, Freiberg this time tried the west coast to raise money. He found the money he needed in San Diego. Construction began in October of 1898. It took nearly two years to reach El Centro. There they built a yard to interchange with the Southern Pacific and the San Diego and Arizona Eastern.

Opposition to building any further was strong. The other two railroads pressured the California legislature who in turn denied various permissions and permits for the line to continue. While

Freiberg had his lawyers working on those problems, he turned his attention to other possible rail ventures. Logging was becoming another profitable industry in the northern part of the state. He found the need for rail service in the White Mountains and Mogollon Rim area. The T&SW operated several small narrow gauge lines serving logging companies and interchanging with the Apache Railroad at Springerville.

Mining was still big business for the company. The gold had quickly played out at the Busted Flush but it was producing a modest amount of copper ore. The McNary and Crown King Railroad still turned a profit connecting several smaller mines with the Bradshaw Mountain Railroad.

He decided that it was not practical to build another line across the California desert. The best solution was to merge with the San Diego and Arizona Eastern. Representatives from the two lines met and reached an agreement, the boards and the ICC approved, and on May 1, 1910, the two lines came under Freiberg's control.

The first order of business was to improve the line. The route suffered from having to dip into Mexico a couple of times along its route, combined with difficult terrain and lack of water. Mr. Greynolds had been retired for a number of years but consulted with the survey crews from both railroads. Greynolds put together a crew from the two lines. It was a good match as the SD&AE had looked into the relocation problem for a few years and knew the area well and the T&SW crew had a penchant for finding enough water in the desert to power locomotives.

After almost forty years of mining and railroading, Freiberg retired in 1914 and handed the reins of the railroad to J.C. Compton. Compton had been with the railroad under Freiberg for ten years but came from a family with huge holdings in real estate. He oversaw the completion of the realignment of the SD&AE. After that, though, Compton did not see any more opportunity for expansion. The board and investors agreed, so Compton turned his energies to business matters. He was concerned about the ebb and flow of the mining industry. He completed the relocation of the mainline within two years.

Under Compton's guidance, the railroad began to divest itself of its mining and related industries. The cash then went into purchasing real estate, especially in and around Tucson, Phoenix and San Diego.

World War I had boosted revenues as the mines geared up to meet the demand for material. The railroad geared up, also. Older 4-4-2 locomotives were retired in favor of new 2-8-0 Consolidations and 2-8-2 Mikados. Modern steel cars replaced older wooden cars. The T&SW enlarged the icing facility in Tucson to compete with the SP for refrigerated traffic. Passenger business increased and the railroad built a modern block and concrete passenger terminal to replace the old one story wooden building.

In 1921, Compton learned that the Phelps Dodge Mining Company wanted to sell their railroad, the El Paso and South Western. They felt that their line needed to go somewhere. They realized that a third line to the Pacific would not be profitable and the Southern Pacific had control of south Texas. They had nowhere else to go, so they offered it to the Southern Pacific.

The EP&SW had made preliminary talks with the SP Board but had not reached an agreement. Negotiations were put on hold when Arthur Curtis James, the chief EP&SW stockholder and last survivor of the old Phelps Dodge partnership set sail in his yacht, the Aloha from New York on an around the world cruise. Compton did not want to wait and try to out bid the SP. In a bold move, he set sail from San Diego and met up with James in Japan. James was so impressed with Compton's initiative that he agreed to sell. Compton offered a lower dollar figure than the SP but added the transfer of ownership of the remaining mines the T&SW owned in the Bisbee mining area. This gave Phelps Dodge control of all the major mines in Bisbee. The PD board accepted Compton's offer and the ICC approved the merger. On November 1, 1924, the El Paso and South Western officially became part of the Tucson and South Western.

The T&SW was content to operate as a bridge line between El Paso and El Centro. Their connections with the SP, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe, and the Rock Island as well as interchanges with Mexican railroads at Douglas, Naco and Nogales kept the T&SW busy. They still primarily moved passengers and mining related freight and down turns in the price of copper still had negative effects on the railroad.

Freiberg retired without having achieved his goal of a line to the Pacific. However, after the war the railroad was in good financial standing. Their real estate holdings were increasing. They had purchased an interest in an oil company, Pittsburg Petroleum. It, along with several other companies had struck oil in West Central Texas. While Pittsburg Petroleum was moderately successful, the railroad had the foresight to purchase the surrounding land. They incorporated the town of Pittsburg and then sold the land to families and businesses that moved to work the oil fields. Within a few years, the area had grown enough that companies such as Texaco and Pennzoil bought property to expand their operations.

World War II brought another increase in traffic The T&SW moved freight and passengers from Kansas City via the Rock Island. Freight from the Gulf coast came from connections with the Texas & Pacific at El Paso. A T&SW subsidiary, the South Western Fruit Express moved California, Arizona and Mexican fruit and vegetables in refrigerated cars to markets in the east. Occasionally, even the SP would reroute traffic over the T&SW to overcome a washout or derailment delay.

Motive power had grown to include 4-8-2 Mountain and 4-8-4 Northern types from Alco, Lima and Baldwin. Not long after the war, E3 diesels began to handle the passenger traffic in new stainless steel cars.

By the mid-fifties times were lean and like most of its contemporaries, the T&SW saw the decreased maintenance of diesel locomotives as a way to save money. The railroad relegated the remaining steam locomotives to a few of the branch lines and remaining mine roads.

The line changed with the times through the sixties, seventies and into the eighties. Freiberg's dream of reaching the Pacific became reality with the buyout of the SD&AE. The line either abandoned or sold unprofitable branch lines. Amtrak took over passenger service. The liquidation of the Rock Island in 1980 disrupted service to the east temporarily.

The T&SW tried to purchase the Rock Island line from Tucumcari to Kansas City but was outbid by the SP subsidiary, the SL&SW (Cotton Belt). A few years later, however, the SP and ATSF proposed to merge. The T&SW opposed the merger. They saw an opportunity to expand their line to the east. They told the two lines that they would remove their opposition if the SP sold them their old Texas & Pacific line to San Antonio. The SP agreed. The ICC eventually denied the merger of the SP and ATSF but the sale of the T&P was allowed to stand.

San Antonio was growing and the T&SW moved considerable traffic from the Pacific via trailer on flat car/container on flat car, TOFC/COFC.

In 1995, the Union Pacific, no longer the nation's largest railroad after the merger of the Burlington Northern and ATSF, reclaimed the title when it merged the SP into its system. As part of the merger, the T&SW again got concessions and was able to purchase the old Missouri Pacific line to the Gulf coast.

The Tucson and South Western is still a bridge line, however it is bigger and healthier than Freiberg probably ever imagined. Traffic interchanges with the Union Pacific, BNSF, Kansas City Southern, numerous shortlines and a strategic partnership with the Ferromex in Mexico. A new seaport is under construction in Mexico to provide a less expensive port of entry. The railroad is financing huge remodeling and construction projects in Tucson and Benson. Although most of the mines originally served have closed, the T&SW still owns and ships coal from its Mesar mines. It remains strong with the revenues of shipping commodities ranging from gravel to grain. Its tourist passenger excursion business to former mining towns like Crown King provides valuable good will and name recognition. It operates hundreds of locomotives equipped with the latest state of the art computer command control as well as, on the tourist line, steam locomotives nearly one hundred years old. The company still owns more real estate in Tucson, Benson, Vail, Pittsburg, Crown King and Indian Springs than any other single company does. It supports the community and education by donating labor to a regional model railroad association every November as well as instructing the population on techniques such as how to paint a locomotive or making rocks out of plaster.