

# History of the Bartlett-Florence Ry.

1909 - 1911

## Early Area History

In the late 1840's, immigrants from a number of Eastern European countries began settling Northern Williamson County. All of their supplies and produce were carried in and out of the area by wagon. A well defined trail running between Austin and Waco soon became established. A stage line began providing mail and passenger service along this route as early as 1852. Stages stopped at Round Rock, Georgetown, Corn Hill and Salado for fresh teams and to allow passengers a brief rest stop. After the Civil War, large cattle drives moved north along the same route used by the stage line and the wagon trains. The trail taken by the cattle herds became known as the Chisholm Trail.

## Corn Hill and Florence, Texas

The two most prominent communities that developed in the area during this period were Florence, which was settled in 1848, and Corn Hill, which was established in 1855. Cotton became the leading crop in the area after the War Between the States. By 1871, a gin with a capacity of three bales a day, was built in Corn Hill. A larger steam operated gin was built there in

1878. Florence also had an early cotton gin. Both communities had populations of several hundred people and a variety of businesses, typical of small frontier communities. Small colleges were established in both communities.

Farmers and teamsters used wagons to moved cotton and other products and supplies back and forth to the nearest railhead. Often several wagons would travel together in what was called a wagon train. This provided the teamsters both safety and additional assistance if any difficulty was encountered during the trip.

Round Rock became the railhead for Northern Williamson County when the I&GN built the first railroad across the area in 1876. It also became the southern terminus of the stage line for a few years, until the Georgetown Railroad pushed its lines north from the I&GN into Georgetown in 1878.

## Bartlett, Texas

The community of Bartlett was created as a new town site by the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad in 1882, as its main line was pushed south from Hillsboro toward Taylor. The land was donated to the MKT

by John T. Bartlett and J. E. Pietzsch. The sale of lots in the Bartlett town site began in late 1881, and the rails of the MKT reached the community in the summer of 1882. By 1884, the new town had a cotton gin, hotel, mercantile and grocery store, four churches, a school and a population of 300 individuals.

Even though railroads served Eastern and Southern Williamson County, Corn Hill and Florence remained isolated from rail service. Therefore, stage service between Corn Hill and Salado, and from Corn Hill to Georgetown existed until after the turn of the twentieth century.

## Schwertner, Texas

This small community was settled by Bernard Schwertner and his family in 1877. The Schwertner family were farmers who immigrated to the area from Austria. An actual town was established in 1903, when Adolf Schwertner erected the community's first cotton gin. A second cotton gin was built along Donahoe Creek a few years later by Frank Schwertner. The nearest rail connection was the MKT at Bartlett, eight miles east of Schwertner.

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Wagon trains loaded with cotton bales had to transport all of the areas produce to the the nearest railhead at Georgetown, Texas between 1878 and 1910. Rails of the Bartlett Western Railway finally reached Florence in December, 1911.

Photo Courtesy of: Jack Taylor Collection



The Bowers Construction Company did the roadbed and tracklaying work on the Bartlett-Florence. Tracks were completed to Jarrell in March 1910. After the B-F was sold to the Bartlett Western, the company finished laying tracks to Florence by the end of 1911.

*Photo Courtesy of: City of Florence, Texas*

### Early Railroad Interest

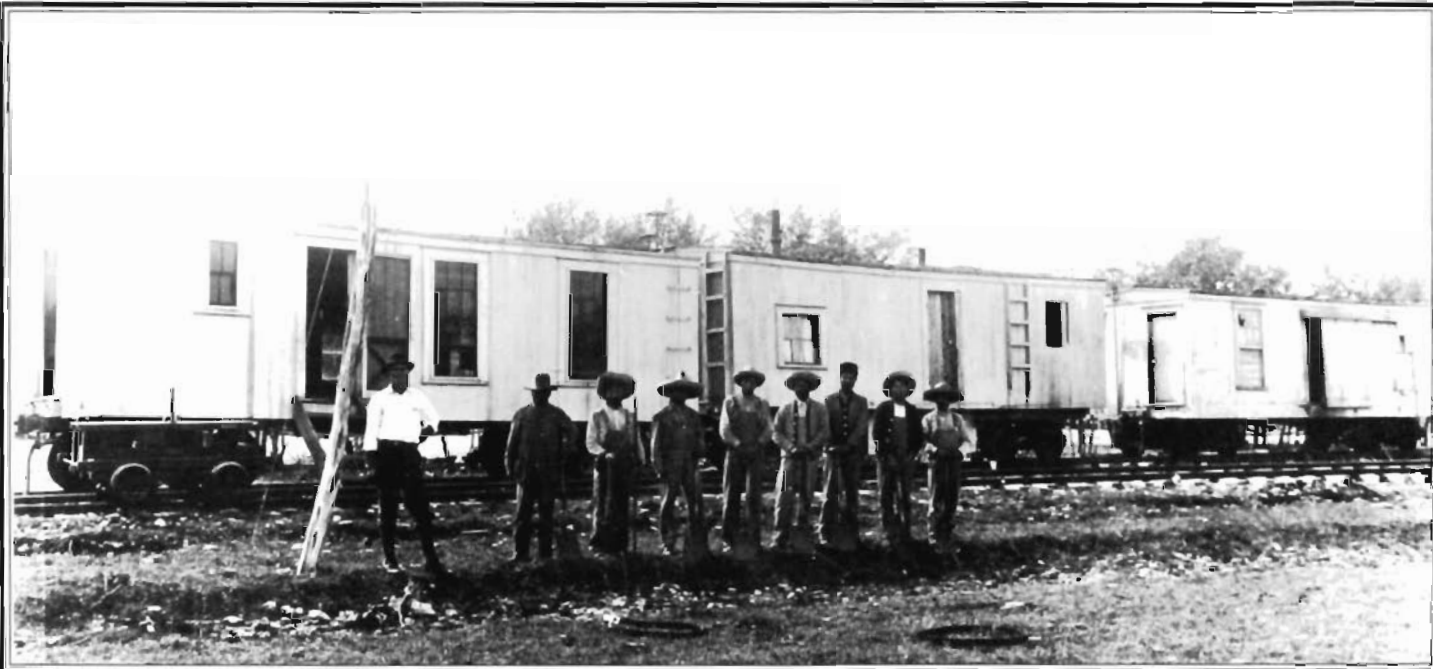
Each of these early Williamson County communities were isolated from each other except by primitive dirt roads. All transportation moving between them was by wagon or by stage. Although the rich black land prairie soils in the area proved to be excellent farm land, the clay soils became impassable during wet weather. By early 1903, there was talk of building a railroad to provide more reliable trans-

portation service for the area. The first proposal was the construction of an electric railway to connect Corn Hill and Davilla. The proposed line was called the Bartlett, Corn Hill and Davilla Electric Railway. The proposed line was surveyed but never went any further due to lack of financial support. In 1909, talk about an interurban line between Rockdale and Florence caused a lot of interest in the area. The Bartlett Tribune and other local papers

had weekly articles devoted to the prospects of an east-west line to serve the region. A survey was made again by the proposed company, however, the Rockdale-Florence Interurban Railway Company never materialized.

### Bartlett Florence Railway Company

By the end of August, residents of Bartlett and Florence had abandoned their interest and support of an interurban line in favor of a proposition to connect only the two



The Bowers Construction Company brought in its own construction crew and crew cars for the project from Quanah, Texas. John McGlothlin supervised much of the construction. He and his family lived in one of these cars for many years.

*Photo Courtesy of: Ruth McGlothlin*