

BARRY COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A  
HISTORY  
OF THE  
CHICAGO, KALAMAZOO & SAGINAW  
RAILROAD

C. K. & S. RAILROAD

BY  
FLORENCE SERGEANT LANG

1970

A  
History  
of the  
Chicago, Kalamazoo, & Saginaw Railroad

The history of the Chicago, Kalamazoo & Saginaw Railroad starts in 1872. A group of men organized to promote a Railroad to be called the Kalamazoo, Lowell and Northern Michigan.

Officers:

Thomas Cobb	Kalamazoo	President
A. J. Brown	Hastings	Vice President
George Kidder	Kalamazoo	Secretary-Treasurer

Some narrow gauge road bed was constructed but no rails laid. Because of the Panic of 1873 there was an almost complete lack of money and the idea was abandoned. In 1883 interest was renewed and reorganization took place. Much interest was stimulated by the Hastings Banner newspaper. The name was changed to Chicago, Kalamazoo and Saginaw, and the route altered eliminating the town of Lowell and changing to the regulation road bed from the narrow gauge.

Work and construction was started by the Kalamazoo and Hastings Construction Company, in 1886.

At this time the stockholders were listed as follows:

Andrew J. Bowne - Hastings; Bush & Patterson (Fred Bush and Thomas Patterson) - Kalamazoo; William Dewing - Kalamazoo; Charles Burton- Hastings; Leroy Cahill - Kalamazoo; William Eaton - Kalamazoo; G. E. Dunbar - Kalamazoo; Ed. Woodbury - Kalamazoo; Frank Henderson - Kalamazoo; Oscar Allen - Kalamazoo; Thomas Cobb - Kalamazoo; Peyton Ranney - Kalamazoo; Henry Badger - Kalamazoo.

\$131,500 Subscribed

In charge of Engineering - Mr. Frank Balch

Kalamazoo

In charge of construction - Mr. Lewis Sergeant

Kalamazoo

On July 24, 1887 a track of 19 miles was completed going north from Kalamazoo to the southern edge of Barry County. A selected group of

men took the first ride. Quoting from the Kalamazoo Gazette "At the invitation of Mr. Frederick Bush "the Vanderbilt-Gould of Kalamazoo" a number of distinguished gentlemen from Kalamazoo took a ride on the Kalamazoo, Hastings & Saginaw rail-road (changed to Chicago, Kalamazoo & Saginaw). The following gentlemen composed the party - Thomas Cobb, President, Fred Bush, capitalist and railroad promoter, Charles Dayton, Jonathon Parsons, F. Briton, H. Lane, W. S. Dewing, Frank Henderson, Ed Woodbury, J. Shakespeare and Prof. French. To the astonishment of all the engine and caboose started out at 25 miles an hour". The road was now in operation and the stamp of approval given by the "distinguished gentlemen".

In 1888 with completion of the road - service started from Kalamazoo to Hastings. In September 1889 service was extended to Woodbury. In 1901 a line went into operation south of Kalamazoo 8 Miles to Pavilion; making 56 miles in all. There were also 4½ miles of spurs running to factories immediately south and north of Kalamazoo. In 1901 a six stall round house and a 60 x 60 foot shop were built in Kalamazoo. Also a round house at Woodbury (north end of the line) operated by hand.

A very comprehensive article on the development of the C.K.&S. appears in Mr. Harold Burpee's "History of Barry County". Incorporated into his story is a thesis by Richard Clarke written for his Western Michigan University history class. Mr. Clarke is the grandson of Tom Clarke who was conductor on the C.K.&S. railroad. Also, an article by Mr. M. L. Cook of Hastings; and interesting quotes from former employees of the C.K.&S.

The Kalamazoo Gazette of September 1887 states "Kalamazoo is sure to receive great benefits from the R.R. The gentleman who have labored so many years to secure its construction are entitled to great credit for their perseverance. None have worked harder than the Hon. Thomas Cobb and Frederick Bush. They are entitled to the thanks of the whole community."

The 6 day a week schedule was composed of 2 passenger trains daily - baggage car attached. Leaving Kalamazoo at 6:10 A.M. and 2:30 P.M. One freight leaving Kalamazoo at 7:45 going north. Going south to Pavilion were two mixed passenger and freights. These trains connected with the Grand Trunk east-west line. The passenger coaches were heated by stoves.

Other connections were:

D.T.M. at Richland Junction  
Michigan Central at Hastings  
Michigan Central at Kalamazoo  
Pere Marquette at Woodbury

The October 1902 Time Table lists the following station stops:

Pavilion	Milo (Crooked Lake)
Pomeroy	Delton
Kealy	Cloverdale (Akers Point)
Kalamazoo	Schultz
Streeter	Hastings - connect to M.C.
East Cooper	Coats Grove
Richland Junction	Woodland - connection Pere M.
Cressey	Woodbury

James Dewing – General Manager  
Lewis Sergeant – General Superintendent

The fare from Kalamazoo to Hastings - 93¢

In 1909

Passengers carried	109,432	
Tons of freight	160,550	35% coal
Net income in excess of	\$50,000	

Seventy freight cars switched to Michigan Central daily and approximately an equal number to the Pere Marquette. The Kalamazoo Gazette of 1898 gives the number of workers employed as 52, exclusive of Officers and Directors.

1908 Switching revenue - \$4,441.00

1917 Switching revenue - \$117,960.00

The freight business was the largest income factor for the small railroads. In 1891-1892 the C.K.&S. operated a coal business both wholesale and retail; probably to increase the freight. This proved to be very profitable.

The coal operation was taken over in 1893 by Lewis Sergeant and operated by him in addition to his Superintendence of the C.K.&S.

The Railroad Commission had ruled that a public utility could not operate a commercial business; so in 1915 the Michigan Central bought the C.K.&S. and the coal business was bought by E. M. Sergeant - son of Lewis Sergeant. It is still in operation as the E. M. Sergeant Coal and Fuel Company using the old C.K.&S. depot as the Fuel oil office.

This railroad was one of the few locally owned and operated R.R. in the United States; and with no funded debt.

Also unique was its operation by telephone instead of telegraph. This was changed in 1907 at which time the Federal Communications of Rail Roads ordered the "Switten Train System" installed. In the telephone operation - each station and Mr. Sergeant's home had a telephone connected only with the other telephones on the line. To call one of these stations, one rang 1 long- 1 short- 1 long- 2 short, etc. Each phone having its distinctive number of rings with no connection with the Bell system. The phone hung on the wall a crank used to ring.

The Hastings Fair was always a boon to the passenger service. It was widely advertised and the passenger trains crowded. It was said the engineer slowed the speed to give the conductor time to collect the fares. Going to the Hastings Fair is still talked about by the "old timers".

In the summer of 1908 the "Fisherman's Special" was inaugurated. This was a Sunday train leaving Kalamazoo at 7:00 A.M. - and returning at 10:00 P.M. with added stops at Wall Lake and Wilkinson's Lake. There was always a flurry of excitement preparing the picnic lunch and getting to the depot at 7:00 A.M. These excursions were very popular.

In 1933 and 1934 at the time of the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago, two excursions were run. The train going to Woodbury and back Saturday nights to pick up passengers for the Fair. At Kalamazoo the coaches were attached to the M.C. and taken to Chicago and back on Sunday.

The common name for these small railroads was "jerk water". The name originating from the early days when water tanks or other means of obtaining water were not available. The train stopped along a creek or body of water where the crew used buckets to jerk the

water from the stream for the locomotive. Mr. Sergeant has been widely quoted for his reply to someone who ribbed him about the size of the C.K.&S. "It may not be the longest road but it is just as wide".

The C.K.&S. was also called the "Cuss, Kick and Swear". However their "Hunting and Fishing Guide" called it "The Great Inland Lake Route". This booklet described the availability of 46 lakes to the stations along the route. It was said the engineer would stop the train for anyone standing nearby with a fishing pole over his shoulder.

This small railroad had a large part in developing the resorts at near by lakes and the establishment of villages along the tracks. It was also of great value to the farmers in getting their produce to market.

Before the days of the automobile and the interurban, one could travel to Gull Lake from Kalamazoo – taking the C.K.&S. freight to Richland Junction - riding, in the caboose - waiting 2 or 3 hours for the D. T. & M passenger train. This train took these hardy people to the Yorkville Station. A small wood burning steamer called the "Brownie" met the trains, taking the passengers and baggage thru a 3/4 mile long outlet stream to their destinations and cottages, at Gull Lake. This stream in those days was called "The Glen" or "Lover's Lane". Now it has the official name of "Gull Creek".

There is an amusing story about a traveling salesman who boarded the C.K.&S. several times a year. He always presented a \$50.00 bill claiming he had nothing smaller in denomination... thus riding free. Mr. Sergeant was told about this by the conductor. When it came time for Mr. Salesman to make his next trip \$49.07 in small change was put into a leather bag and given to the conductor. Sure enough the \$50.00 bill was again presented. Mr. Salesman was given the bag of change and requested to count it. It is said he never rode the C.K.&S. again.

In 1934 with the greatly increased use of the automobiles and buses the train passengers had noticeably decreased. Passenger trains were discontinued. One passenger coach was hooked to the freight train Tuesday – Thursday and Saturday. 1937 saw the tracks from Woodbury to Hastings torn up and finally only freight service from Kalamazoo to Pavilion were in operation. The whole Michigan Central System had been sold to the New York Central. In 1968 the Penn Central bought the New York Central system.

As of now - 1970 - the tracks going south of Kalamazoo are operated and owned by the Grand Trunk and are in constant use by the Fisher Body Company. Going north from Kalamazoo the road is in operation by the Penn Central to Parchment- Richland Junction and Doster. Freight Only.

The working hours at the C.K.&S. were long. 7:00 or 8:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. for the office and six days a week. Later the women employees' hours were reduced to 4:30 P.M. Some of the train workers started at 4:00 A.M. - as has been noted the first passenger left at 6:10 A.M. and the baggage had to be loaded - fires built in the coaches, etc. In days before automobiles Mr. Sergeant very often rode his bicycle to the depot at 4:00 A.M. then back home for breakfast and immediately back to the depot... about 2 ½ miles from his home. It has been told that he frequently helped load the baggage car if it seemed the work was not proceeding fast enough to suit him.

According to Mr. Howard Burnhan, who was employed by the C.K.&S. from 1923 until its "demise", "A man worked until his work was finished disregarding hours - everyone helping everyone else". It was much like one big family. Often employees would come to Mr. Sergeant's home to "talk over" personal or financial situations.

Mr. Sergeant rarely took a vacation. In 1914 the Board of Directors insisted he take a month's vacation "do not show up for four weeks". He went to Mexico to see how their railroad system operated. He was back at the office in three weeks.

Appointed General Superintendent in 1887 at the completion of the R.R. Mr. Sergeant served in this capacity until his retirement in 1925 at the age of 80 years. At this time he was the oldest living R.R. employee in United States. A banquet was given at his retirement by a group of Kalamazoo business men. The following quotations are from the Gazette of October 1925:

Toastmaster Mr. Fred M. Hodge - Pres. Kalamazoo Paper Co.

"Never in my life as a business man have I ever seen greater loyalty in any organization than existed in the C.K.&S. during the career of Mr. Sergeant as head of the road. I wonder in the Michigan Central realized when they purchased the C.K.&S. the man power they were securing".

Mr. Bertrand Hopper - Gen. Manager of the Kalamazoo Stationery Co.

Spoke of "the pleasant relations that had all along existed between shippers and the C.K.&S.. management".

Mr. Jacob Kindelberger - Pres. Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Co.

declared "I believe one of the greatest messages I could give to the young business men of today would be to point to the labors of Mr. Sergeant and his loyalty of purpose".

Mr. D. J. Hacket - General Superintendent of Mich. Central, who took over the Superintendence of the C.K.&S at Mr. Sergeant's retirement said "No man would ever be allowed to occupy Mr. Sergeant's chair; and any time he chose to return to the office his place is always assured him".

Mr. Sergeant had returned to Kalamazoo from 2½ years in the Civil War – having enlisted at the age of 16. He was wounded twice. His cousin Fred Bush employed him as a carpenter in the firm of Bush & Patterson contractors. This firm built the G. R. & I stations from Kalamazoo to Cadillac and Petosky with Mr. Sergeant in charge of construction. The present restaurant "Whistle Stop" in Kalamazoo was originally the G.R. & I train station. Mr. Bush, one of the original stockholders of the C.K.&S., became Vice-President and General Manager until his death in 1892.

It could not be determined definitely whether Bush & Patterson built all of the depots on the C.K.&S. line; but since this firm had previously built the G.R. & I stations and Mr. Bush was one of the promoters of the C.K.&S. I think it can be assured. The Kalamazoo, Hastings, Construction listed as building the road may have been sub contractors.

The velocipede ridden by Mr. Sergeant to inspect the tracks is now in the R.R. display in the Henry Ford Museum at Dearborn, Michigan. It was placed there by Michigan Central Gen. Supt. Mr. Hacket. The inscription reads:

"Four Wheel chain drive cycle-car built under the supervision of Mr. Lewis Sergeant, Superintendent of the Chicago, Kalamazoo and Saginaw about 1890 and used by him in supervising operations on the railroad".

“Presented by the Michigan Central Railroad” – I might add that this Velocipede was also ridden by the Sergeant boys while waiting for the D.T.& M. train at Richland Junction to take them to Gull Lake - until their father found out about it!!!

The Kalamazoo C.K.&S. station and freight house are still standing at E. Michigan Avenue – looking very much the same.

Dr. Willis Dunbar in his recent History of Michigan Railroads “All Aboard” has written a chapter on the “Little Fellows”. In reference to the C.K.&S. he states “It was one of the larger Little Fellows”. Also the “Little Fellow” now belongs to history. But in their time they played a significant role in the development of the State. Without them, towns could not have grown, agriculture development could have been curtailed. In some instances they were the sole means of transportation to the county seat. They served as feeders to the big railroads. They will be remembered by thousands of railroad fans who have special affection for them”.

Florence Sergeant Lang

Sources used for these articles

Barry County History by Harold Burpee  
Richard Clarke's thesis on the C.K.&S.

Louise Brock's thesis on the C.K.&S. - Reference Room  
Kalamazoo Public Library

Howard Burnhan -Kalamazoo - Employed by C.K.&S.  
and Michigan Central  
from 1923 until recent  
retirement.

Kalamazoo Gazette

My own memories. Florence S. Lang (Mrs. Julia H.)

Written at the request of Mr. Charles Hartley  
President of the Barry County  
Historical Society

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