



# The St. Louis, Oak Hill

by **Michael C. Kelly**

**T**he St. Louis, Oak Hill & Carondelet Railway Company was chartered in 1885 under contract with the Missouri Pacific Railroad to build a 6.4-mile line from Tower Grove station on the Missouri Pacific to Carondelet on the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad. The “Oak Hill,” as it would come to be known, was organized by Capt. John Bofinger and George Ward Parker, a prominent business owner in the Oak Hill area of the southwestern part of St. Louis. Bofinger and Parker signed a contract with the Missouri Pacific in November 1885 and began acquiring land for the right-of-way from various property owners, with names that would be familiar to today’s St.

Louis residents: McRee, Tholozan, Berthold, Russell, and, of course, Parker.

By September 1886, a dispute over salary arose with the Missouri Pacific’s Assistant Secretary, G. H. Smith. The original salary agreement was between Bofinger and MoPac First Vice President H. M. Hoxie. Bofinger and Parker had acquired just under 24,000 feet of right-of-way by September 1, 1886, and an agreement was reached to hand over land on September 30, 1886. Bofinger was to be paid a salary as president of the Oak Hill line upon completion, per agreement with Hoxie, which wasn’t formal but documents did exist. Hoxie passed away in September 1886, and MoPac’s Assistant Secretary George Smith and the board

**Below:** This view shows MoPac’s Shaw Avenue crossing on the Oak Hill Line looking west-southwest in the early 20th century. —*photographer unknown, MPHS collection*



# Oak Hill & Carondelet Railway



denied Bofinger's agreement for salary, so Bofinger resigned in April 1887.

A May 1887 agreement was reached between the Oak Hill and Guy Phillips, a contractor, to build the 6.3 miles of track between Tower Grove station on the MoPac and Carondelet on the Iron Mountain. The final 1.5 miles of right-of-way was acquired, which included a passage through Carondelet Park. Part of this agreement was for the railroad to construct a depot on Loughborough Avenue where it entered the park on the east side.

At Broadway Junction, the Oak Hill connected to the Missouri Pacific's Carondelet Subdivision, a branch line that connected Kirkwood on the Missouri Pacific to the Iron Mountain at Carondelet. The purpose of

this branch was for freight trains to bypass the congestion in the main rail yards of St. Louis, whereas the purpose of the Oak Hill was for Missouri Pacific passenger trains to Arkansas and Texas to connect to the Iron Mountain.

The St. Louis region southwest of Tower Grove through Oak Hill was considered "the country" in the late 1800s, and was populated with coal and clay mines. In fact, the area around the Oak Hill neighborhood southwest through Tholozan's subdivision to the Christy subdivision was known as "The Diggings" due to its multiple coal and clay mining operations. The construction of the line cost almost \$500,000, with several bridges required, including the Arsenal overpass. Part of the agreement with George Parker's

**Above:** MoPac 4-8-2 5343 works Train 3, the *Ozarker*, at Tholozan Street in St. Louis on the Oak Hill line in this undated view. —*Joe Collias photo, MPHS Archives collection*



**Above:** MoPac 5343 leads southbound Train 25, the *Texan*, at Carondelet Park in St. Louis, in this undated circa late-1940s view. —Joe Collias photo, MPHS Archives collection

right-of-way acquisition was a spur line built across Morgan Ford into the Parker-Russell Mining & Manufacturing Company in 1886. Industry grew rapidly on the land adjoining the Oak Hill rail — creating a strip of large-scale industrial buildings, while residential areas continued to develop on the tracts just beyond.

A lengthy spur was built shortly after from the same spot (which would become Fyler Yard) south through the Tholozan and Chippewa neighborhoods into the Christy Mining Company. This company, along with Parker-Russell, produced fire brick. Several other fire brick companies were located along the Oak Hill, including the Enterprise Brick on Kingshighway, Missouri Firebrick, Tower Grove Brickworks on Kingshighway, and Superior Brick.

Most subsequent industrial activity in the area was tributary to the railroad, which created a somewhat parallel industrial district along its route. This district extended as far south as Bates, where industry ended and a residential transition into Carondelet Park took place. Immediately after the park was Broadway Junction with the Carondelet branch from Kirkwood, and just past that was Davis Junction and the connection to the Iron Mountain main line.

Farther north, in addition to the mining and fire brick companies, south St. Louis bustled with commercial and industrial spurs. Beginning at McRee with the American Car Company, there were 18 spur tracks south of Iron Mountain Junction and Wilson Avenue south of Kingshighway by 1918. By 1951 various lumber and manufacturing companies were located in this stretch, including Seidel Lumber, Foster Brothers, and Heinicke Coal.

Farther south, from Southwest Avenue to the area just west of the second crossing of Kingshighway, customers included Commonwealth Coal, Blackmer Post & Pipe, BF Goodrich, and McQuay-Norris. From there to Gustine was the most dense with industries. Fyler Yard was located between Kingshighway and Morgan Ford, and was the base for local crews. Customers included Spool Cotton, Mound City Supply, American Can, Englander Manufacturing, Parker Russell Mining, Merck, and the long spur to Christy Brick, which crossed Chippewa and terminated near Kingshighway and Christy.

Continuing south of Morgan Ford, the line crossed Chippewa, Meramec, Gravois, and Gustine, and served numerous customers including National



Candy, Knapp Monarch, Donk Brothers, and several door and sash companies. The area around Gustine was particularly dense with long spurs on both sides of the main line that splintered off into more spurs that served various warehouses and trucking companies. The industrial area ended at Bates Street, with customers on both sides of the main line including Vandeventer Lumber (later Stockman Lumber), Merchants Coal and Ice, and another brickyard. From there, the line passed through a residential area before entering Carondelet Park at South Grand.

The line was double-tracked the entire length from the crossing of the Frisco west of Tower Grove to Broadway, and the Davis Junction Yard limits were in effect the entire length; signaling was directional ABS. Movements against the current of traffic were restricted to 25 mph.

Regarding passenger trains, the original approved charter mandated four passenger trains each way daily, and no less than four passenger depots, specifically one at Carondelet Park at Loughborough, and another at Arsenal.

By 1903 there were nine commuter stations along the line south of Tower Grove: Shaw, Kingshighway, Reber Place, Oak Hill (Morgan Ford), Chippewa, Bates, Carondelet, Ivory, and Broadway Junction. Daily-except-Sunday southbound trains 155, 157, 159, and 161 stopped at all stations. The same was true with northbound trains 156, 158, 160, and 162.

In addition to the locals, the line hosted eight daily through trains: 1, 3, 7, and 9 southbound, and 2, 4, 6, and 10 northbound. Trains included: 1, 3, 5, and 6 *Iron Mountain Through Express*; 2, 4, and 7 *Iron Mountain Fast Mail*; Train 8 was an express local from Broadway Junction; trains 9-10 were the *Memphis Express*, and trains 23-24 were the Belmont passenger train.

By 1932 the all-stops locals had been discontinued, but the line still saw five passenger trains each way daily, with Oak Hill (Morgan Ford) still an in-between stop. Train numbers were 1, 3, 7, 17, and 25 southbound, and 2, 4, 8, 18, and 26 northbound.

By 1943 Oak Hill was no longer a scheduled stop, only a milepost in the timetable. The line still saw five daily passenger trains each way, plus one local scheduled freight to and from Ivory Yard in Carondelet. The postwar boom saw passenger train traffic increase to seven through trains each way. Southbound they were 1 and 21, the *Texas Eagle*; 3, *The Ozarker*; 7, *The Southerner*; 25, *The Texan*; 31, the *Sunshine Special*, and 37, which was mail and express. The northbound counterparts were 2/22, 4, 8, 25, 32, and 38, respectively.

As the 1960s unfolded, the frequency of passenger trains was down to four each way in 1962, including the *Texas Eagle*, *Southerner*, and *Ozarker*. But by the end of the decade and the coming of Amtrak, the line would host a single passenger train each way, the *Texas Eagle*, which Amtrak still operates today as trains 21-22.

**Above:** MoPac U30C 961 leads a northbound at Shaw Avenue in October 1969. — *Michael J. Kelly photo, Michael C. Kelly collection*



**Above:** A trio of MoPac GP16s (rebuilt from RS-11s) with 71 leading roll the southbound "Heavy Hauler" past the State Mental Hospital at Arsenal in 1975. The train is about to cross the Kingshighway overpass, which is the second crossing of Kingshighway within a mile as the crow flies. —*Charlie Duckworth photo, MPHS Archives collection*

**Opposite page top:** MoPac GP16s 76 and 71 lead the southbound Heavy Hauler through Carondelet Park in the morning on October 11, 1976. —*Paul Dalman photo, Michael C. Kelly collection*

Freight operations saw through freights to and from points south, transfers between the 23rd Street yard downtown and Ivory yard in Carondelet, plus locals switching the many industries along the line. Crews based out of the 23rd Street yard had the responsibility of switching local industries on the Oak Hill line, as well as the daily transfers from 23rd Street to Ivory yard, which also ran via Oak Hill.

This transfer, commonly known as the "heavy hauler," usually traveled light down the Oak Hill line to Ivory and returned with traffic blocked for the A&S, ICG, and 23rd Street industries. The heavy hauler seldom handled cars from 23rd Street to Ivory, with this traffic instead going via Lesperance as there was not room in 23rd Street for Ivory-bound traffic. This train was discontinued in April 1974 and all traffic ran via Lesperance. That year, the Missouri Pacific conducted an analysis of all traffic in the St. Louis terminal. The study found that with the discontinuance of the Heavy Hauler, car dwell times in 23rd Street became excessive. For the three-week period of September 22 through October 12, 1974, the average dwell time in 23rd Street for Ivory industries or DeSoto subdivision locals was over 69 hours.

An experiment was developed to reestablish the Heavy Hauler, this time running in both directions between 23rd Street and Ivory via the Oak Hill line. The period from October 30 through November 23, 1974, saw dwell times for Ivory and De Soto-bound

traffic decrease by a staggering average of 27.5 hours per car. The study found the best time to operate the train was 6:00AM from 23rd Street to Ivory, which allowed traffic to make the 11:00AM departure of DeSoto local L713. A round trip from 23rd Street to Ivory and back was between two and three hours.

The Heavy Hauler experiment resulted in dramatic reduction in terminal dwell times for cars arriving at 23rd Street bound for Ivory. The detention time reduction of 27.5 hours per car on 18 cars per day resulted in a savings of 20.3 cars per day per MP's study. It also reduced the traffic between 23rd Street and Lesperance Street yards, which meant less congestion in Lesperance Street yard and improved service to Ivory shippers.

Another part of the terminal project addressed

**Opposite page bottom:** Fyler Yard was located just east [timetable south] of the Kingshighway bridge, and was the base of many switching operations. The track curving to the left went south to the Christy Mining/Brick Company. The embankment to the right had a track upon it that crossed Morgan Ford to serve the Parker-Russell Mining Company and the businesses that followed in its place over the years. The Oak Hill depot was also located here. MP SW1200 1120 has both mains fouled while switching Fyler Yard in April 1984. —*Craig Shaw photo, Michael C. Kelly collection*



customer complaints of dirty/unusable cars spotted at their docks. Photographer Clyde Anderson worked for the MoPac at the time, and was part of this project. Per Clyde, “There were a lot of customer complaints that the empty cars MoPac was spotting at industries were dirty or otherwise unsuitable for loading. So we set up an experiment where we assigned car inspectors to inspect the empties at Fyler Avenue Yard for loading and also inspect cars that were released empty from industries. That project reduced the rejection rate to almost zero. One of the biggest benefits was having the inspectors check empty cars before they were pulled. We found that a lot of customers were leaving trash in the cars. Until the customer cleaned the car, we refused to pull the car, leaving it on demurrage.

“Customers quickly learned that using empty cars as dumpsters was no longer acceptable. The industry job conductors were supposed to inspect the empties before pulling them from industry, but that was rarely done. Industries putting trash in the cars would close the doors, and it was often difficult for conductors to open the doors to inspect the cars. The carmen we had assigned had trucks with tools, if necessary, to open the doors. Also, the carmen did mechanical inspections of the cars, and if there were any defects would direct them to the RIP track for repairs so it wouldn’t be spotted at another industry and get rejected because of defects. Box cars with defective load dividers was a common defect.”

Also prior to this terminal study, crews based out of Ivory were not permitted to assist road trains up the Oak Hill line. Instead, a crew out of 23rd Street had to be called, which would result in anywhere from

**Right:** MoPac B30-7A 4844 leads five other units south on an iron ore empty at Shaw Avenue in February 1984. This train is bound for either Pea Ridge or Pilot Knob. —*Craig Shaw photo, Michael C. Kelly collection*

**Below:** The same train crosses Kingshighway south of Arsenal on this south St. Louis landmark bridge in February 1984. The bridge to this day still has faint traces of the “Route of the Eagles” advertising. The chemical company site behind it is now a Home Depot. —*Craig Shaw photo, Michael C. Kelly collection*



30-minute to two-hour delays for road crews.

The primary trains affected by this were the iron ore trains that ran once or twice daily between St. Louis and Cadet (Pea Ridge) or Pilot Knob, Missouri. These trains operated through Ivory Yard to 23rd Street via the Oak Hill line to avoid Lesperance Street Yard and the steep approach to the MacArthur bridge.

Frequently these trains required assistance to get up the 1.3 percent ruling grade of the Oak Hill line, or had mechanical problems, or insufficient time under Hours of Service. Due to the 23rd Street yard crew issue, a local labor representative suggested to the railroad that a change be made to allow Ivory crews to assist



the road trains up the Oak Hill line instead of 23rd Street. This was approved in 1976.

The Ivory crew assisted as far as necessary, usually cutting off around Gravois/Chippewa. This author remembers seeing this in operation, witnessing MoPac SW1200s out of Ivory shoving on the rear of the ore trains and cutting off north of Chippewa. I remember one evening being invited to sit in the cab of a GP38 on an ore train that had stalled on Oak Hill at Gravois, waiting for a shove to resume the trek north! Fun times for a 10-year-old!

With the Union Pacific merger, a lot of change came to the line. Customers began to dwindle in favor of trucks or businesses closed, and the line saw a lot less traffic. Having been built primarily for passenger service, which was down to, at times, one train per day depending on Amtrak whims, the line was single-tracked from Iron Mountain Junction all the way to Broadway. Eventually even the diamond at Iron Mountain Junction was removed, replaced by a switch off the BN line, which UP and Amtrak trains now take to access the Oak Hill.

Today the line is seeing a revival of sorts. While line-side industries are in the single digits, the line sees daily traffic from three sources: Amtrak's daily-each-way *Texas Eagle*, unit grain trains destined for the Italgirani elevators at Davis Street, and ballast trains from the granite ballast-producing operations between Pilot Knob and Piedmont on the De Soto Subdivision. Much of the line is overgrown, but great photo spots exist at Shaw, south Kingshighway overpass, the Chippewa-Meramec-Gravois area, Carondelet Park, and Broadway. 🍷