



COTTON BELT RAIL HISTORICAL SOCIETY TYLER TAP CHAPTER SPRING-SUMMER 2025 NEWSLETTER



After a 5 year absence, our newsletter is back. Once Covid hit Tyler and shut down the Cotton Belt Depot Museum and the Harvey Hall train show, our membership severely dropped, but has slowly been on the uptick thereafter. Had your editor kept up with the newsletter, perhaps some of that could have been avoided. A lot has happened the past 5 years along with current newsworthy tidbits that will be touched upon in the next few installments.

In 2024 we received a call from one Linda Nall of Shreveport, she being the daughter of Cotton Belt's last president Robert Maurice (Bob) Nall. When the SP closed down the Cotton Belt building in Tyler, Bob saved things from the rubbish bin he thought important and after his death, Linda kept them in storage. She was in the process of moving to South Texas and wanted them saved and we retrieved them from her locker in Shreveport. There wasn't any bright shiny objects, but a lot of records going back as far as the Tyler Southeastern Rwy accounting books from 1895, files on trucking subsidiary Southwestern Motor Freight, and records of servicing large customers such as NiPaK, Kelly Tire and Brookshires Distribution in the 60's and 70's. Bob was VP under President HJ MacKenzie and became president after Mac retired in 1969, and was mayor of Tyler after retiring from the Cotton Belt. Photo below of Bob on business car Fairlane, and a shot from his collection of the Tyler main line and freight house, looking from the Tyler depot towards Spring St.

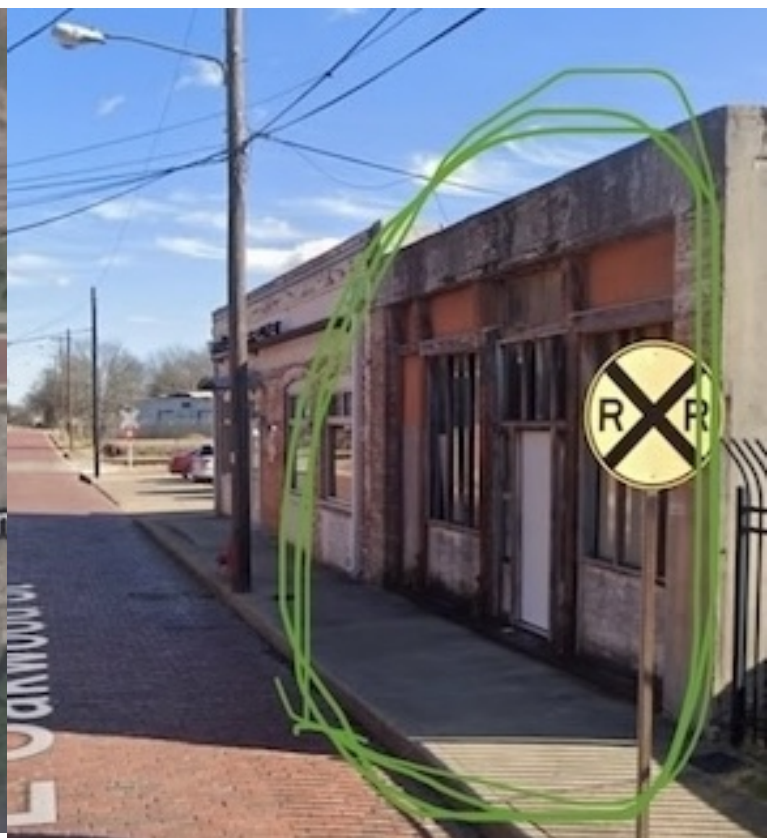




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Earlier this Spring, Tyler Transit, our landlord ,informed us we would have to vacate the warehouse across the street from the depot. They offered to provide us a shipping container to store the items we want to keep, and drop it on our lot behind Innovation Pipeline. Our lot is shown in red here, the warehouse in blue. Their goal is to demo the warehouse building (front facade circled in green) and replace it with a parking lot. We offered a land swap, our lot for the warehouse which would save the 100+ year old structure and provide them with space for 3X the parking that the warehouse lot would give them. That offer was rejected and since they are the landlord and don't charge us rent for the spaces, both the museum and warehouse, we don't have much leverage. One day soon we will all need to get together and move items from the warehouse into the container. As of this mailing, the container is not yet on our property.





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The museum has received some kind donations over the past couple years. Our own Mary Jones donated a steam locomotive bell that her husband Earl had mounted in their backyard. Earl has passed and Mary needed to move into a smaller space, and she was kind enough to donate the bell to the museum. Steve & Lisa White drove to Katy TX to pick up a model train collection that was donated to us consisting of some O scale track and a variety of model trains in various scales. Steve also replaced some older Lionel stamped metal track in our operating display with the newly acquired track of superior quality. Recently the Chicago & North Western Historical Society donated a stack of Cotton Belt slides of newer SSW diesels from the 70's and 80's that didn't meet their mission but certainly meets ours and we had them scanned digitally as well. For the little tikes, we acquired a Brio train set of wooden trains, track and table top and it gets a lot of play time from the youngest visitors to the museum.





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We did experience some unfortunate losses during the past year. Jimmy Jones moved to Tucson AZ in 2024. Jimmy was a fixture at the museum on Thursdays and served as museum director. Because his Thursday slot has not yet been filled, we are only open on Friday and Saturday now. James Monroe died suddenly in Sept of 2024, and was a docent one Saturday per month and a delight to converse with. Barbara Gotcher passed away in February of this year. She was always ready willing and able to help with any task asked of her, not only of our museum but also the other organizations she was a part of, and brought a smile to everyone she met. David Glenn Wilkins passed away in April of this year. Glenn was a part of this organization from its inception and had a hand in every aspect of its being. The museum and historical society would not exist were it not for Glenn.

Unfortunate as all the above is, we continue to operate and keep alive the memories of the Cotton Belt with existing and new members. We hope y'all will join us for quarterly meetings in the Genecov Room of the Chamber of Commerce Bldg. The 2025 second quarterly meeting is June 19th 6:30 pm and is highlighted by a talk from Tony Wilson of Cotton Belt doings in Camden ARK, and on Sept 11 the third quarterly meeting will feature a talk and juicy photos of the Tyler Ice Co ice house by Shane Murphy. The last 2025 meeting will be a dinner in early December, time and place yet to be determined.

You have noticed this newsletter is sent electronically via email. This is the new normal for this (hopefully) quarterly publication. It takes more time to print, fold, stamp and mail the paper than it does to create the documents. By accepting this means of delivery, future newsletters will more likely to be forthcoming. Come visit the museum, come to our quarterly meetings, but whatever you do, don't miss out on what this organization has to offer. Until next time