

P. A. Herrington

Ozark Entrepreneur

HOUSTON DO MOVE
ANOTHER STEP ON THE ROAD
TO PROGRESS.

Electric Lights Turned on and Burn Brightly.

Dr. Herrington Serenaded and Banqueted

So read the headline and subheads in the *Houston Herald* on January 23, 1908. The one thousand citizens of the seat of Texas County could read the newspaper by steady carbon filament light instead of the glimmer of an oil lamp. It was the vision and persistence of one man that made it possible—Dr. P. A. Herrington. But Herrington's electrification of his hometown was not an easy achievement nor his only construction effort.

Perry Andrew Herrington was a Houston boy. Born October 23, 1870, he had been pretty much on his own since he was thirteen. He worked at a variety of jobs but continued his education. In 1895, he married another Houston native, Nora Duke. He taught school, saving sufficient funds to attend Beaumont Hospital Medical College in St. Louis. He received his medical degree in 1901. Dr. Herrington returned to Houston to begin his medical practice and also acquired the Houston Pharmacy.

In December of 1906, Herrington bought the Lone Star Mills from G. T. Mires. He announced that he planned to convert the antebellum flour mill site into an electric light plant “if he meets with the encouragement and with the cooperation of the citizens.”

Trained in the medical sciences rather than the physics of electricity, Herrington consulted experts in the field of power generation. Early on he received advice from his brother-in-law, Walter Tweed, who “has achieved success in electrical work

in Illinois.” As to the process and cost of refitting the Lone Star Mill for power generation, P. A. exchanged letters with R. C. Stone, a mill man in Springfield, Mo. Stone sent two associates, one a millwright and the other an electrician, to Houston to inspect the feasibility of the conversion.

On hearing the experts' assessment, a *Herald* reporter wrote “if these gentlemen are correct in their estimates, the power to be placed under control at the Mires dam is something wonderful. In fact it is about the biggest dam power that is unbridled this side of Mammoth Springs.” They estimated the current dam could furnish power of 140-horse. If the dam was raised two feet and some fill cleared, the river could furnish 200 horsepower. Not only was this enough to light up Houston but there would be enough electricity generated to power a railroad to Cabool.

This last possibility stirred the imagination of E. K. Lyles, the editor/publisher of the *Houston Herald*. He enthused, “The old mill we admired by the dam-site for its beautiful surrounds and for such scenes of nature as only classic Piney can produce, but our imagination

could not foresee that possibly these roaring waters might some day supply the power which would not only furnish our homes with beautiful lights but would convey us (on top of the muck) in comfortable coaches to our various destinations and aid us to cut off that storage steal at the Cabool station.” Editor Lyles was an early and ardent supporter of Herrington's projects, a combination of

wishful thinking and strong belief in the doctor's energy and tenacity. It would take quite a number of setbacks before that support waned.

That secondary dream, an electric rail connected to the main line at Cabool, would address a longstanding roadblock to real prosperity. Houston, like many other towns in Texas and Pulaski counties was an “inland” village, meaning it did not have a railroad connection. Waynesville, the county seat of Pulaski County, had seen firsthand the effect of railroad proximity. Towns sprang up along the tracks in the 1870s, rapidly surpassing the venerable county seat in population and economic activity. There had been at least one attempt to link Waynesville with the Frisco tracks at Crocker, the aborted Ozark Transit Company, in 1907.

Likewise, a spur of the St. Louis & San Fran-

cisco Railway ran through Cabool and on westerly to Mountain Grove, leaving Houston trackless. The other nearest railroad access was at Rolla, some 50 miles north. Cabool was 15 miles south. Thus, supplies for Houston businesses were shipped to Cabool and held in storage until picked up. All considered the storage fees legal robbery. The wagon road to Cabool was very poor except in the best of weather. Thus, a connecting railway would be most welcome.

In March of 1907, the Houston City Council granted Dr. P. A. Herrington an exclusive franchise to establish, maintain, and operate an electric light system for the city, which included erecting poles, wiring, and other necessary work. Under terms of the ordinance, work was to begin in four months and be completed within six months after work began. The original hope was that the work would be completed by the annual Old Settlers Reunion, a longstanding event in September. That deadline was quickly discarded.

In July, P. A. purchased the necessary electrification equipment in Springfield and made arrangements for shipment by rail. While there, he also contracted with the Reddy Electrical Company to wire the town buildings for lights. Commercial houses were first on the job list, with



Dr. P. A. Herrington
1870-1960



Located a little less than three miles west of Houston on the Big Piney River, the first owner of record was William Young, who purchased the Lone Star Mills in 1870. Originally a burr mill built before the Civil War, it was rebuilt in 1895 and operated as a roller mill until P. A. Herrington bought it in December of 1906.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Historical Society.



Leavitt's store wired first, followed by Blankenship Pharmacy. The wiring of the town began in September and continued with good progress through October of 1907.

In the meantime, the line poles were set along the route from the mill to town. The dam at the mill was torn out and, with large timbers at hand, Dr. Herrington began the reconstruction.

The dam was built with large logs laid horizontally and parallel with the river. Large log pens filled with rock were submerged on the upstream side. The pens were boxed with lumber and the top floored, creating a mill pond which backed up several miles of the river.

In late October, the large turbine wheel was hauled from the depot at Cabool. It weighed over 8000 pounds and required two wagons for cartage. The Halloween news was that the generator, along with other requisite machinery, was in transit and the hookup would be made soon.

The generator did not arrive at the mill until November 28, a month and a half later than expected. The generator was a solid 6500-pound piece of machinery that was a challenge to move and unload. Dr. Herrington was hopeful that when the concrete work for the foundation was finished, the generator would be put in place, proper connections made, and light would burn in town within a month.

Work on the foundation and placement of the generator moved more slowly than promised but on Wednesday evening, January 15, 1908, electric lights went on in Houston.

Dr. P. A. Herrington was serenaded and banqueted. The town band and a crowd of citizens hurrahed the doctor at his drug store. Herrington passed out cigars and they all smoked in honor of the accomplishment. On Saturday evening, a banquet honoring Dr. Herrington was held at the Lynch House. The supper, toasts, and speeches lauded



The timber and rock dam at the Lone Star powersite was nine feet high. The *Herald* described the power plant in detail: "The power is drawn from a pond that extends two miles up the river and at places is from ten to twenty feet in depth. A well arranged course conducts the water into the forebay, where it is regulated to the wheel by a steel gate. In the forebay are two turbine wheels, the new and large one being a Little Giant double turbine, 42 inches, weight 10,000 pounds; the smaller 35 inches, Little Giant turbine, weight 4000 pounds. This small wheel is what was used in running the Lone Star Mills. The generator is a fine machine, being a General Electric dynamo, 75 K.W., capacity 1500 sixteen candle power lights. There are now some three hundred lights in operation, and this number will likely be increased to six hundred at an early date. The dynamo is placed on a solid concrete foundation some twelve feet in height, and the machinery is all well arranged; the mammoth belts connecting the machinery being 13 inches, double leather, 124 feet in length." Photo courtesy of the *Houston Herald*.

P. A. for his determination. Dr. Herrington, in turn, thanked the two financial institutions and the citizens for their backing of his enterprise. Dr. Herrington was, indeed, the toast of the town.

Dr. Herrington was now in the power business. James Raper ran the electric light plant and resided in the mill building. S. K. Jackson became the local electrician and received \$27.20 for wiring the courthouse. In April, the County Court paid its first electric bill, in the amount of \$6.00, to P. A. Herrington.

In February, still flush from his success in Houston, P. A. made a trip to Cabool. There was talk of running a wire from the light plant to Cabool and lighting that town.

The plant worked well through that first summer. Dr. Herrington was appointed to a committee to confer with the Licking Commercial Club about cooperating on an electric railroad from Rolla through Licking to Houston. The notion of rail service had come to the fore.

At the end of October, problems

developed at the power plant. The large turbine or water wheel needed some maintenance. Electricity was cut off for two weeks. After making some repairs and while lowering the heavy cap that covered the water wheel, one of the chains snapped and the cap fell seven or eight feet,

badly damaging it and part of the wheel. A smaller wheel was put into service running the dynamo but only enough power could be generated to provide partial light. The *Herald* editor noted that "our people find it mighty inconvenient to get along without the lights now



The photograph above provides a wider view of the setting of the Lone Star Mill and dam. The dam was raised by Dr. Herrington to nine feet, which backed up more water, providing more potential energy for the turbine that turned the generator, also known as a dynamo, which produced the electricity. The picturesque mill with its grounds and mill pond were a favorite recreation destination for generations of Houston area citizens. Courtesy of the Old Stagecoach Stop Foundation.

that they have become accustomed to them.” The local blacksmith was called into service, the repairs made, and, by December 17, lights again burned brightly, just in time for Christmas.

At the end of January, 1909, the mill also started grinding corn again, expanding its usefulness. The plant was then estimated at producing 175 horsepower.

With the power plant operating successfully into its second summer, Herrington began making some other preparations. He changed residences in town, sold a large lot of livestock (mules, horses, heifers, hogs), and advertised the sale of two river bottom farms. In July, he purchased a power site and five acres of land on the Big Piney, eight miles from Cabool. In September, he asked the City Council of Cabool for a franchise to furnish light, power, and water to the city for twenty years. During this period of activity, Mrs. Herrington was in St. Louis undergoing an operation for cancer and in the late summer had another operation in Springfield for breast cancer.

Herrington decided to get out of the grinding business in November and offered all of the flouring mill machinery for sale in exchange for cash, notes, or improved farm or timber land. Also that month, a special election was held in Cabool on the question of his electric light franchise. The turnout was poor and the proposition won 54-5.

Interest in the railroad was being fanned by its promoters. A meeting was held in Licking in January of 1910 and P. A. attended, representing Houston. The proposed route was from Rolla south to Houston. As a result, the Inland Construction and Realty Company was formed to not only construct the railroad but to buy land and layout townsites along the proposed route. Officers of the new corporation were Dr. P. A. Herrington, President; George P. Rodgers, from Licking, as Treasurer; and E. E. Young, principal promoter,

as Secretary.

In late June, the generator at the light plant was hit by lightning during a summer thunderstorm. Damage was done and Houston was without lights again until repairs could be made. A few days later, P. A.’s wife, Nora, died at the age of 37 years, after a three year battle with cancer. The Herringtons had two children, Duke (Mrs. Herrington’s maiden name), age 13, and Alice, age 8.

Necessary repairs were made to the dynamo at Lone Star so that electric lights illuminated Houston’s Coyle Park in late August for the 1910 Old Settlers Reunion. The light plant, with W. W. Wall as operator in charge, worked well the rest of the year. Dr. Herrington billed the county \$6 for a month of lights for the courthouse in July.

The dam backed up water for two miles, to an area known as the Narrows, creating a recreational boating, bathing, and fishing area highly valued by the area residents. When Texas County built its first steel bridge, it spanned the Big Piney River just downstream from the Lone Star light plant.



In September of 1910, the Texas County Court contracted with the Kansas City Bridge Co. for construction of a steel bridge across the Big Piney River near Lone Star Mills (in background of picture above). The bridge was 495 feet long and completed in October of 1911 at a cost of \$12,000. This original Highway 17 was rerouted to cross the Big Piney about a mile upstream at Dog’s Bluff in the late 1920s and the bridge was dismantled and moved to Slabtown in 1932. It was later scrapped. Courtesy Jan and Terry Primas.

Julia Parker (educator and mother of former Superintendent of Waynesville Schools Chester Parker), in her 1968 memoir *Out of the Past*, recalled the activities around the dam and mill pond.

It (Lone Star Mill) was by far the favorite recreation area for nearby Houston. On Sundays and holidays during the summer, visitors from Cabool, Licking and other towns joined the throng. Our own townspeople came by horseback, many ladies by side-saddle, in buggies and three seated hacks. In those days people could walk that distance. My friends and I did this quite often and many a romance was fanned by the glorious scenery along the way.

South of the mill and near the cold spring, one could usually find a picnic group, a Sunday School class, or a family and all its relatives. The food was wonderful and the table decorated with branches of dogwood and in the fall, goldenrod.

The daring boys would dive from the top of the dam out over the slabs which were sticking out several feet below. Another favorite “dare devil” stunt was to “shoot the dam” with

boats.

There was always good luck for the fisherman here in the olden days. There were catfish, carp, buffalo, bass, goggle-eye and other species common in Piney River. Every child could expect a thrilling experience with a sun-perch or two.

The old building was purchased by the electric light company and later torn down.

While it is destroyed, our memories remain—memories of Sunday school picnics, days spent with our families and friends exploring the large cave down the river a little way, watching the big logs as they shot down the tie slide and into the river, boat riding and in the winter time, skating on the mill pond.

During the winter of our big ice storm when the ice remained for six weeks, the young folks would skate from town all the way to Lone Star Mill, at that time one of our most popular meeting places.

Dr. Herrington had brought electric power to the city of Houston at a rather early date. The lights were the envy of neighboring towns. The improved and heightened dam also created a popular recreation attraction. Houstonites showered the doctor with accolades for his achievement but nowhere in the recorded public discourse is there any mention of his motivation for going into the power generating business. Why would a doctor invest and risk so much for an endeavor outside of his expertise? It may be that Dr. Herrington was imbued with the progressive spirit of the era, embodied by Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt’s personal characteristics of tenacity, risk taking, and varied interests were widely revered by citizens, although his politics may not have been embraced by the most conservative. Teddy was the model “can do” fellow.

With the power plant declared “a tried success and not an experiment” by E. K. Lyles, the *Houston Herald* editor, Herrington turned his attention and energies to railroad

building. He was no longer listed as the President of Inland Construction and Realty Company. That office was filled by Elbert E. Young, president, general manager, and chief promoter of the railroad between Rolla and Licking. It was reported in the December 8 edition of the *Herald* that more than a quarter of a million dollars in cash subscriptions had been secured along the proposed route of that enterprise. Young's project became known as the Ozark Short Line. (Two excellent articles detail the fate of this project. "The Ozark Short Line: Electric Railway to Texas County" by John F. Bradbury, Jr. was the subject of the *Newsletter of the Phelps County Historical Society*, October, 1997. H. Roger Grant's "The Ozark Short Line Railroad: A Failed Dream" appeared in the July 2006 *Missouri Historical Review*.)

Doc Herrington was bent on a shorter line, one that ran from Houston to Cabool. Editor Lyles trumpeted this "home made railroad," citing Herrington's confidence and energy. The local hero would "take hold of this enterprise and put it through as an individual with no company or corporation at his back; all he asks is the loyal, hearty support of the people. He will ask aid financially, but will not ask for a cent to be paid until something is really done to show for it."

P. A. predicted that he could have cars moving between Houston and Cabool within a year. He began acquiring stock, 24 large mules in January of 1911, to pull the grading machinery. He traded his drug store building for sixteen of the mules. The necessary harnesses cost \$375. That was only the beginning of his investment in the railroad business.

Possibly to aid in subscriptions for Herrington's railroad, the Houston Railroad Committee directed that the donations for Young's road, which had been held in a safe, be returned to the people.

At this point, Herrington had disassociated himself from the Ozark Short Line from Rolla to Licking. Instead, he planned the construction of a road from Houston to connect with the Frisco at Cabool, a rail project of about 15 miles, rather than the 60 miles to Rolla. It would be his railroad achievement.

W. W. Wall was in charge of the daily operation of the light plant. The services of Walter J. Tweed, a civil engineer, were secured to take charge of the survey work. The doctor was still providing some medical services. The case in Circuit Court against him for illegal whiskey sales was continued until the next term.

On February 4th of 1911, a mass meeting was held by the Commercial Club "for the purpose of discussing matters relative to the proposition, making donation contracts, and such other proceedings as the citizens may deem advisable," complete with music by the band. (Interestingly, in a *Herald* column headed "Old Files" and dated September 23, 1891, was an item that stated, "An electric railway to connect Houston with Cabool, Rolla or Salem is being discussed by our people. J. R. Blankenship interviewed some of our business men and in a few hours had a subscription list of \$15,000." Herrington's proposal for a connecting electric railway was not the first.)

The February meeting at the courthouse was well attended. To show that he was serious and had already made considerable investment in

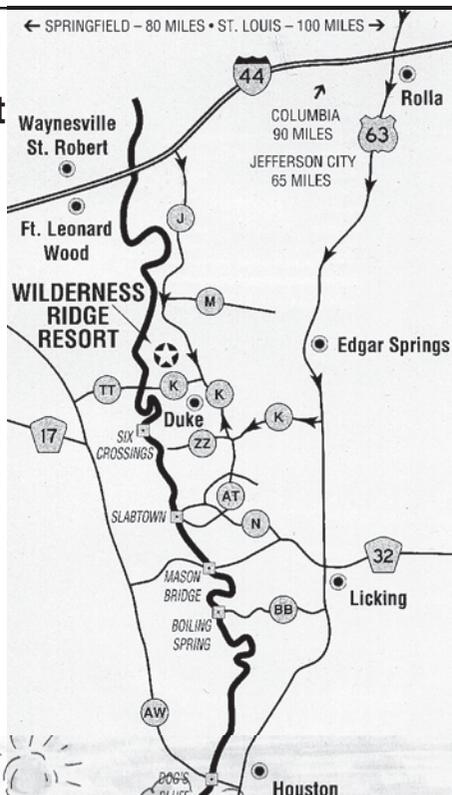
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the project, Herrington paraded his mules in their new harnesses down Grand Avenue, Houston's main thoroughfare. The parade was led by Vin Garwitz's large steam engine and a grader.

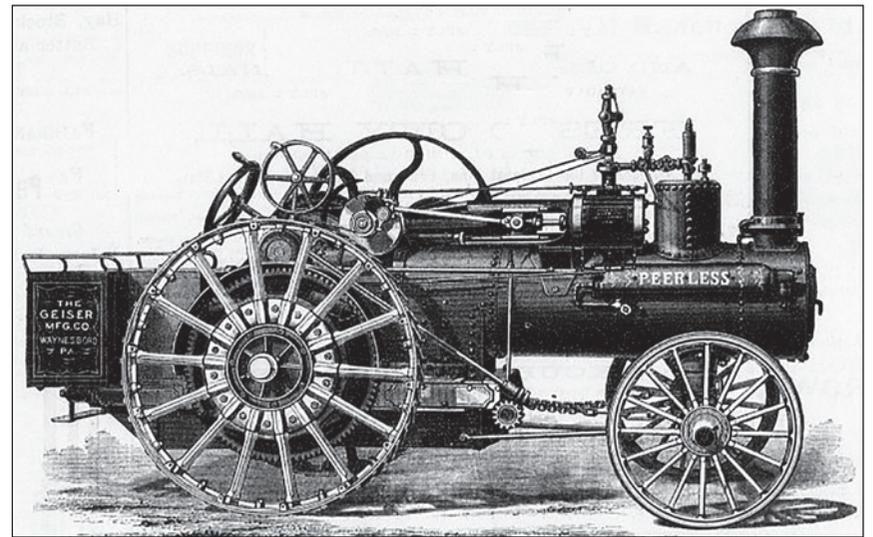
After several speeches and discussion regarding the proposition for an electric railway from Houston to Cabool, a committee was formed for soliciting donations. Several thousand dollars were committed in the first week. However, the donation contract stipulated that no payment was due by the subscriber until progress was shown on the road.

Another fundraising meeting was held in March. Herrington had men cutting timber, which would be sawn into ties when his sawmill became operational. He placed an advertisement in the *Herald* offering to trade a complete plant of flour mill machinery for mule teams or a

sawmill. The doctor also went on an equipment buying trip to Springfield and Kansas City. He was particularly interested in a steam excavator if the necessary funds became available.

Also in March, E. E. Young, President of the projected Missouri Inland and Southern Railway, was arrested by the Secret Service on counterfeiting charges. Released on bond, he proclaimed his innocence and was still predicting that his railroad would reach Licking by the fall. Grading on the Ozark Short Line was underway by May.

Although there seemed to be serious competition to Dr. Herrington's project, he forged ahead. He purchased a 30-horsepower Peerless traction engine (above right) from the Geiser Manufacturing Co. The 36,000-pound engine was used to power a sawmill prior to its use for grading the roadbed. The sawmill



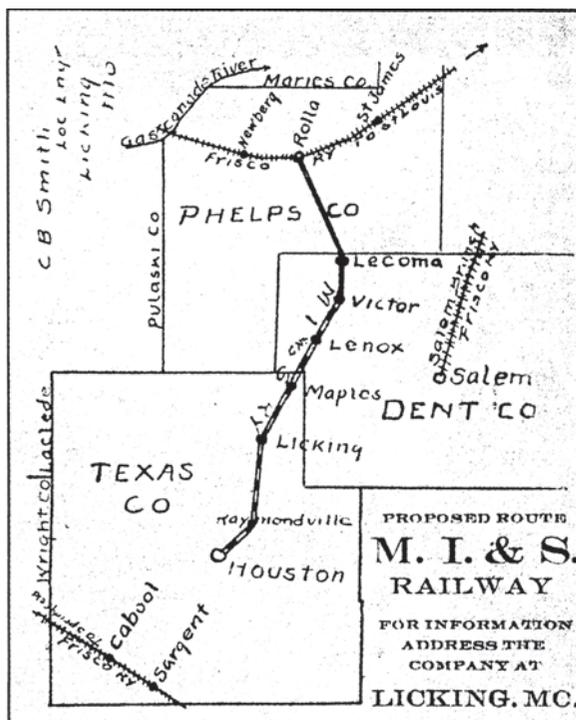
was set up at the mouth of Brushy Creek and by the middle of June, several thousand railroad ties had been sawn with a huge pile of logs nearby that would yield thousands more.

Public subscriptions were lagging for the Houston to Cabool railway. E. E. Young was still ramrodding the Ozark Short Line. A depot at Rolla

was already constructed and some grading had been done. Herrington had a large investment in mules and equipment. In July, he entered into a contract with the Short Line to grade the road from Rolla to Licking, work to commence no later than August 1 and to be completed no later than March 1, 1912. In the meantime, Young was to purchase



Dr. Herrington paraded his mules, wagons, and other equipment on Grand Avenue in Houston prior to the start of grading at Rolla. Courtesy of Texas County Museum, Licking.



Left—The proposed route of the Missouri Inland & Southern Railway, the first name, or what came to be known as the Ozark Short Line. Hopes for newfound prosperity resided in all of the villages along its route. Map courtesy of Roger Grant.

Above—Dr. Perry Herrington's force of men and equipment were photographed at the Rolla end of the Missouri, Arkansas & Gulf Railway, the second name, during the 1911 construction. The block building under construction at right is the depot in Rolla. The Ozark Short Line finished its short life as the Rolla, Ozark & Southern Rwy. Photo courtesy of Alene Parsons, via Brad Gentry of the *Houston Herald*.

steel, engine, and cars in St. Louis. The *Houston Herald* averred that “the new railroad from Rolla south is an unquestionable certainty.”

For his part, Dr. Herrington said that he had given up on the road from Houston to Cabool. There was little interest on the Cabool end. All along, one of the motivators for the railroad project had been the Houstonites' aggravation over what they considered excessively high storage prices for freight at the Cabool depot, which they had to pay until they picked up their items delivered by the railroad. It seemed Cabool was not interested in change. There also had been no more talk by Herrington about the proposed light plant at Cabool, for which he had been awarded the franchise in November of 1909 to supply electricity to that city.

With the temporary abandonment of the Houston to Cabool railroad, the existing subscription contracts needed to be amended to reflect a Houston to Licking route instead of Houston to Cabool. Editor Lyles believed that would be entirely satisfactory to all involved since the connection to the St. Louis market “is what we want and need so badly.”

While Lyles was a railroad booster and unabashed fan of Perry, Herrington was known throughout the region, based on the power plant

success, for his “can do” attitude and tenacity. After letting the contract, one of the other officers of the Ozark Short Line, W. E. Fine said of the doctor,

“We are indeed glad to hear this, as we know the reputation of Dr. Herrington too well to doubt any enterprise which he enters into. He is well equipped with good teams and various kinds of grading tools, and has the largest and best traction engine in this part of the state. In the language of the street gamin, there is no ‘monkey business’ about Dr. Perry Herrington, but when he undertakes an enterprise he hardly sleeps till he accomplishes his purpose.”

Herrington was determined to keep his men and mules busy. He kept buying construction equipment. Three car loads of dump carts, tents, harnesses, blacksmith outfit, etc. were unloaded, one at Cabool and the other two at Rolla. He was still cutting some timber, supplying the lumber for the new bridge at Slabtown during the summer and fall of 1911, as well as hauling the cement used in the bridge construction. One of his six mule teams pulled a load of cement weighing 19,000 pounds. He also sold \$1,000 worth of ties from his huge stockpile to a local tie buyer.

Much hoopla again accompanied

Perry's entry into this roadbed building, with parades of equipment in Licking and Rolla. Perry intended to work both ends of the Short Line, about half of the teams at Rolla and half at Houston, working towards each other.

However, interest in this railroad line had been lagging and donation contracts hard to come by. Some thought that the railroad was going to be built anyway so why put up any money of their own. It may be that others were just tired of hearing of the road and the various schemes. Only about \$12,000 had been raised in Houston and that was deemed insufficient to bring the road to the town. Another railroad meeting was held in September.

Prominent businessmen spoke to the crowd that filled the courtroom. Dr. Herrington waved his contract for grading and allowed how work had begun in earnest. The pitch of exporting products was made to the mostly farming group. After the speeches were made, another \$4,000 was raised, bringing the total to \$16,000. Another \$2,000 was forthcoming in the next few days and a near-term goal of \$25,000 of contracted donations was set.

To us today, financing infrastructure by donation might seem odd. However, there was a tradition of financing improvements by solici-

tation before tax structures were in place. Subscription schools, road building, and even partial funding of bridge construction were part of civic improvement in the rural Ozark counties. It also might seem that more time was spent in meetings to secure subscriptions for the railway and in parades than was spent moving dirt.

On Thursday, September 14, 1911, what was seen as an epoch-making event occurred in the Texas County seat. The first shovelful of dirt was thrown at the Houston end of the railroad. School was dismissed and a large crowd turned out on the east side of town at what was known as Happy Hollow.

Mr. and Mrs. Martin G. Coyle donated the land for the new depot (as they did for the Reunion Grounds) and sidetracks. M. G. Coyle had been a Texas Ranger as a young man, came to Texas County, Missouri and dealt in real estate and investments. He had been an early investor in Perry's electrification effort, as well as the Millard Ginseng Company earlier.

Mrs. Coyle threw the first shovelful of dirt and did it so well that it prompted one wag to remark that M. G. apparently did not do any of the shoveling at home. Whistles at the mill blew, Garwitz's engine was revved full blast, and the band

played loudly to enthusiastic cheers. With very visible progress, the remaining balance of the \$25,000 subscription goal was reached.

Herrington's extended grading contract with the Missouri, Arkansas & Gulf Railway expired at the end of September. During the last sixth months or so, Perry had put his personal investment in men and material to good use cutting timber, sawing railroad ties, hauling materials to the new bridge at Lone Star Mill, and roadbed grading. It was uncertain if another contract would be forthcoming.

At a meeting in the *Herald* office on October 5, more than forty of the city's businessmen signed an agreement to bring the pledge total to \$30,000. Herrington left that night to bring all of his men and equipment back to Houston. They prepared for a winter of work cutting timber, ties, and gathering feed for

the teams. Work resumed on the roadbed north of town in mid-November.

Meanwhile, charges of illegally selling whiskey had been hanging over Dr. Herrington's head. Of several charges, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty on one and could not agree on another. Friends convinced Dr. Herrington to reach a compromise with the state, whereby he paid a fine, costs, and gave up his government license, quitting the whiskey business.

Dirt moving progress was good during the remainder of 1911, getting in 22 days of work in December. Several large cuts and fills were accomplished with the grading. Citizens were encouraged to visit and see "the real railroad building."

It was noted in the newspaper that Dr. Herrington had been absent on several occasions for reasons unknown. He was spending an increas-

ing amount of time in Springfield, Missouri. After one such absence in January, Herrington returned from Springfield with the new owner of his Houston Pharmacy business.

Spring brought a couple of instances of bad luck. The doctor had been neglecting his power plant business and the electrical service had been unsatisfactory for several months. The Big Piney went on one of its spring rampages and washed out about thirty to forty feet of the dam. Herrington promised quick action and that the repairs would extensively improve the plant. W. W. Wall, who had been in charge of the light plant, was replaced by James Raper. Continued high water interfered with dam reconstruction and Perry installed a 60-horsepower gasoline engine for the interim. The doctor was then laid low by a case of malarial fever.

Grumbling was raised to rumbling

about the lack of lights by the third week of May, two months after the washout. Herrington was making progress when a second flood came in the third week of June and carried away many of the timbers. Electricity was finally restored in time for the Old Settlers Reunion the third week of June. Some allowed that the plant was operating better than ever before.

However, the bad streak was not over. A three-and-a-half inch rain in late September brought the Big Piney up again. The new dam work held fine but the Piney was not to be denied its headway. The river did an end run around the north side of the dam and carved a new channel, which left the mill pond dry. Houston was dark again. By the third week of October, the doctor promised service in another week or so and would resume the much delayed railroad work but, on November

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4, a flue fire erupted in the 50 foot chimney at the electric plant. Disaster was averted when Albert Raper, returning home at the mill, climbed the roof without water and started tearing off wooden shingles. This action saved the powerhouse from total destruction. Albert was rewarded with a gold watch by the citizens of Houston for his brave action.

Perhaps to bolster support after harnessing the Big Piney for power again, Herrington turned his attention to a very visible railroad marker—a depot. By the end of 1913, he had finished building a 50 x 24-foot concrete station house, which the *Herald* noted was “commodious enough for the traffic here for several years to come.” That certainly proved correct.

Work on the roadbed did not resume. Financing sources had dried up and the general manager, E. E.

Young, attempted to convert \$28,000 of promissory notes, to be redeemed only when the railroad was operational. Young also cashed a note for \$100, illegally endorsing it. For that forgery, a speedy trial sent him to

keep company with other inmates in the penitentiary at Jefferson City for two years. The Missouri, Arkansas, and Gulf Railroad project was pretty much derailed. Houston had a depot but no railroad.



Herrington finished the depot but not the railroad. The depot still stands on Route 63. It has been repurposed as a small engine business. Courtesy of the *Houston Herald*.

Dr. Herrington was absent again from Texas County in January when the river severely damaged the power plant dam and Houston went dark again. He was still gone in July when he sent James Raper a letter instructing him to begin work on the dam. The repairs required many tons of rock.

Notwithstanding their high regard for the doctor, patience was waning. Citizens who had a financial stake in the power plant met to discuss the situation and possibly to take action themselves. Herrington returned the first week of August and commenced repairs. Electricity was restored the last week of October after nine months of darkness. A small river rise two weeks later indicated the dam was not in top condition. M. G. Coyle took over management of the reconditioning and, in effect, P. A. Herrington was no longer in



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control of the power plant. Notice was given that "the parties who hold the mortgage against the Houston Electric Light Plant have advanced the money necessary to rebuild the dam under contract and agreement with P. A. Herrington that all light rents shall be collected by M. G. Coyle until this indebtedness is paid. Collections will be made by Mr. Coyle the first of each month and settlement must be made with him."

Perry Herrington's woes compounded. He was found guilty of unlawfully selling whiskey and fined \$300. Vin Garwitz sued for money owed him and was awarded \$58.50. Paul Grant lodged a mechanic's lien.

Dr. Herrington's financial resources were spent, as was probably his will. Perry Herrington left Texas County for Lewiston, Idaho. The next time Perry's name appeared in print, January of 1914, was the announcement of his marriage to Miss Fannie Phillips, a Houston native, who had been working

and going to school in Springfield. Perry's brother, Dr. J. J. Herrington, lived in nearby Gifford, Idaho. Perry moved to Canada in 1918 and took up farming. Dr. Herrington died in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, in 1960 at the age of 89.

Perry Herrington, contrary to all predictions, failed in his second entrepreneurial effort. Had he persevered with the original and more modest plan of a railroad from Houston to Cabool, he might have been successful. Whether it would have proven financially successful or operational for very long is another matter.

The Electric Light and Power Plant was sold at auction April 15, 1914, to seventeen Houston businessmen who incorporated as a stock company and continued its operation. The Big Piney went on a rampage in September of 1914 with a 20 foot rise, "highest in years," and the dam "stood the strain and is still intact." However, operation of the power

plant was not trouble-free for the new owners and required periodic maintenance but operated satisfactorily for the next nine years.

In 1923, the stockholders of the Houston Electric Light and Power Company announced they would do some improvement work on the dam which would allow electric service during the day. They also would lower the power house building to one-story. Additionally, a sheet-iron roof would be put on to reduce the fire hazard.

In 1925, the Missouri Power and Development Co. of Willow Springs advanced transmission lines to Cabool and then to Houston. In December, it was announced that the stockholders had sold the Houston Electric Light and Power Company to Missouri Power and Development Company for the total price of \$9,000. Missouri Electric Power Co. subsequently acquired Missouri Power and Development Co.

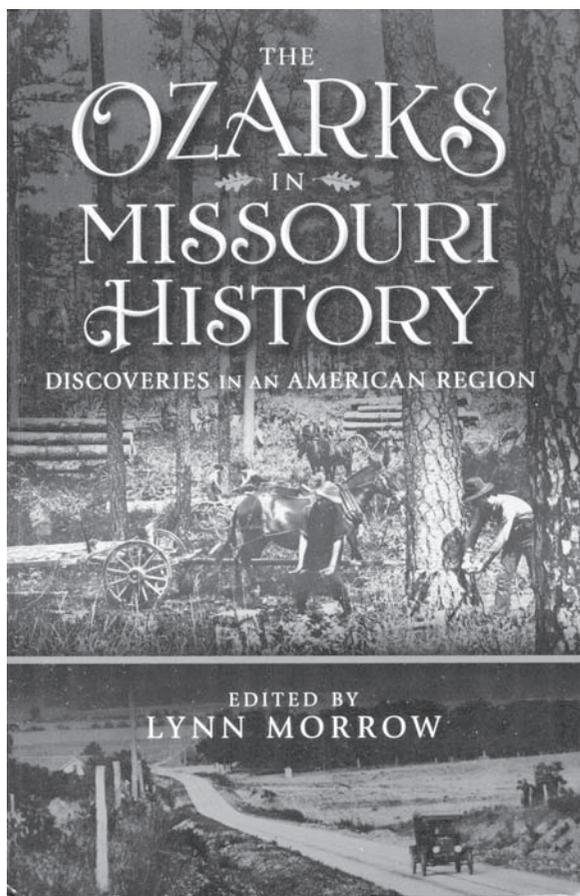
In 1921, Fred Dablemont and

family became residents at the old mill. Fred became chief operator of the light plant. The new owners announced in July of 1926 that it would upgrade the dam and triple the power generated.

The circumstances surrounding the end of Lone Star as a power plant are somewhat murky. Norton Dablemont, son of Fred, recalls his father's story of the end of service in his autobiography *Ridge Runner*, written with his nephew, outdoor writer Larry Dablemont.

It would have been wonderful to have stayed at Lone Star Mill forever but it wasn't to be. The old wheel which generated electricity stopped every now and then and things went dark uptown until dad could climb down in there and pull out the log or whatever it was that had stopped it.

One evening when everything stopped, dad put on his carbide lamp and got down to find out what had gone wrong. He reached down and felt solid flesh instead of the wood



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which normally caused the wheel to jam. And then in the clear water, with the light of his miner's lamp, he could see the white reflection of a man's leg caught in it. Pop really got upset and he went to town to get the sheriff. I guess they canceled the motion picture that night and went to the coal oil lamps everywhere else. It was the next day before the sheriff and some of his help got out there to try to find out what they could about what Pop had already decided was a drowning victim or a murder victim. Knowing Pop, I doubt if he slept a wink that night.

The leg he had felt and caught a glimpse of turned out to be a big eel, as big as any I've ever heard of in the Piney, one about 20 pounds in size, six inches in diameter and several feet long. But it didn't matter, folks in Houston were tired of having electricity interrupted and they were talking about a new way of getting it from

somewhere else. And that was the end of Pop's job.

Whether that incident or aging technology brought the end of the hydroelectric power on the Big Piney is open to question. What is for sure is that the Piney had its way with a big rise on August 14, 1927. The *Herald* noted that, "The waters were reported to have been within a few feet of the bridge at Mires' Mill. About all of the old dam at the old light plant has washed out and the mill pond and fishing and boating resort is no more."

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The remains of the Lone Star power plant and dam on the Big Piney near Houston are still very much in evidence. Photo by Terry Primas.

Terri Mitchell
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