

A special train of Santa Fe Eastern Division Superintendent C.T. McLellan departs the Santa Fe depot at Leavenworth, Kansas, in the mid 1890s. The Pollywog Line, as a nickname for the Leavenworth District, first appeared occasionally in the *Leavenworth Times* about 1886 and implies a certain amount of affection by local residents, but also suggests poor swampy conditions. It seems to have been directed to the portion of the line north of city beyond Government Hill. —*Kansas State Historical Society*

The Pollywog Line

Santa Fe's Leavenworth District, Part One

By Jeff Needham

The history of Santa Fe's Leavenworth District is rooted in the struggle of four Missouri River cities—St. Joseph, Missouri, Atchison, Kansas, Kansas City, Missouri, and Leavenworth, Kansas—to control the trade traveling west to the Great Plains and Intermountain West by way of the Missouri River. The building of the Leavenworth District was the last attempt by Leavenworth interests to grab a share of this business.

At the conclusion of the Civil War Leavenworth was larger than Kansas City with a population of 7,500, but by 1870 it was falling behind Kansas City in growth.¹ The growth of Kansas City has normally been attributed to the opening of the Hannibal Bridge, the first railroad bridge over the Missouri River in 1869.² While this was an important event, Leavenworth had built its own bridge by late 1871 and

the arrival the Rock Island in Leavenworth in 1872 provided a direct connection to Chicago.³ The Missouri Pacific had arrived in 1868 and the Kansas Pacific (later Union Pacific) had completed a branch in 1869, so the city was well served by early railroads.

Leavenworth had the advantage of being adjacent to Fort Leavenworth, but being positioned above the northward bend of the river, any rail routes built west would encounter adverse topography. Another disadvantage was fragmented Leavenworth leadership. While Kansas City had strong civic foresight,⁴ Leavenworth was dominated in from 1865 to 1890 by David R. Anthony, the brother of suffragette Susan B. Anthony, and a former abolitionist. Anthony was a tireless promoter of all things Leavenworth, but as the editor of the *Leavenworth Times*, was very opinionated to the point of settling disputes with gun fights or

fist fights. His reputation was as a “pistol-packin’ pencil pusher,” and “when he took his regular table at the Planters’ Hotel, he always carried his twin six-shooters in case anyone wanted to talk politics.”⁵ His leadership style was no match for the more reasoned Kansas City men.

Another Leavenworth leader, and close associate to Anthony, was Leonard T. (L.T.)

1. Charles N. Glaab, *Kansas City Railroads*, page 94, discussion of town size of Missouri River cities.

2. Charles N. Glaab, *Kansas City Railroads*, pages 1-9, The Legend of the Bridge.

3. The Collections of the Leavenworth County Historical Society (online), Harry Seckler, *Leavenworth Times*, November 10, 1946.

4. Charles N. Glaab, *Kansas City Railroads*, pages 97-98, discussion of the relative strengths and weaknesses of river towns.

5. Stephen Fried, *Appetite for America*, page 17, For example, Antoney shot and killed a rival editor who criticized his anti-slavery position. See other end note credits for Jason Schwarz and Cecil Howes.

Smith. He was the promoter and President of the Leavenworth Northern and Southern (LNS) Railroad, the corporation organized that built the Leavenworth District. Anthony vigorously promoted the LNS in the *Leavenworth Times*.⁶ The LNS was the last attempt by Leavenworth business interests to build a railroad to compete with Kansas City. The LNS was chartered in 1886⁷ to build a line connecting with the Santa Fe near current Bonner Springs, Kansas, through Leavenworth, and then northwesterly into “the rich plains” of Nebraska and beyond. It also had a charter to build southwesterly from Leavenworth that was never seriously attempted.

The Leavenworth Topeka and Southwestern

Of course, Santa Fe had made its decision early as to which of the four river towns to align with—Atchison. But by

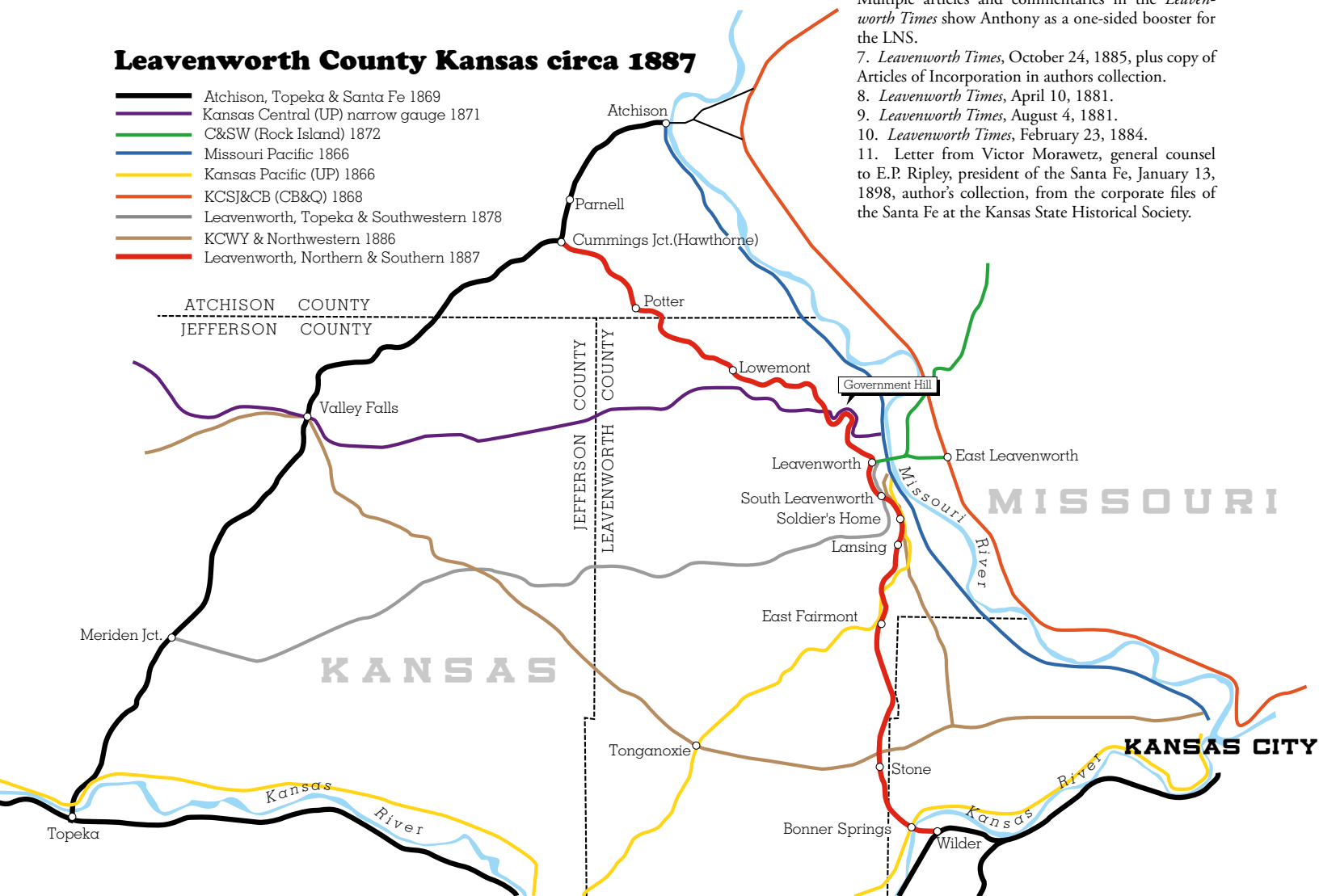
1888 it had built through Kansas City and onto Chicago. Thereafter, Leavenworth seemed to be of little concern to the Santa Fe. Rock Island interests, with local backing, incorporated the Leavenworth Topeka and Southwestern (LT&SW) in 1880 to build west from Leavenworth, through Topeka and into the plains.⁸ The *Leavenworth Times* provides a glowing report of the prospects for this line to serve the “Golden Wheat Belt” of Kansas and build onto Colorado.⁹

This quickly caught the attention of both the Santa Fe and Union Pacific. In a transaction, the details of which are obscure, the two railroads were able to jointly purchase the LT&SW before it was completed. They then enter into an agreement to have each railroad operate the line for alternating five-year periods. This arrangement continued until the financial panic of the 1893. The first tangible sign of trouble

occurred when Union Pacific refused to operate the line past January 6, 1894.¹⁰ Santa Fe assumed operation of the line after some months of inactivity when C.T. McClellan, superintendent of the Eastern Division was appointed receiver. In a letter to the chairman of the board of the Santa Fe, the general counsel for the railroad clearly stated the line was originally purchased to “prevent the construction of a new line into the interior of Kansas and avoid rate disturbance.”¹¹ Counsel went on to say that if they lost control of the LT&SW, both the Burlington and Chicago Great Western could purchase the line and gain access to Topeka. Thus the decision was made by the Santa Fe management to operate the line on its own to prevent competition from new rivals in Kansas.

Leavenworth County Kansas circa 1887

- Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe 1869
- Kansas Central (UP) narrow gauge 1871
- C&SW (Rock Island) 1872
- Missouri Pacific 1866
- Kansas Pacific (UP) 1866
- KCSJ&CB (CB&Q) 1868
- Leavenworth, Topeka & Southwestern 1878
- KCWY & Northwestern 1886
- Leavenworth, Northern & Southern 1887



6. I.E. Quastler, *Missouri Pacific Northwest*, Professor Quastler is retired from San Diego State University and kindly supplied his research notes to the author. Multiple articles and commentaries in the *Leavenworth Times* show Anthony as a one-sided booster for the LNS.

7. *Leavenworth Times*, October 24, 1885, plus copy of Articles of Incorporation in authors collection.

8. *Leavenworth Times*, April 10, 1881.

9. *Leavenworth Times*, August 4, 1881.

10. *Leavenworth Times*, February 23, 1884.

11. Letter from Victor Morawetz, general counsel to E.P. Ripley, president of the Santa Fe, January 13, 1898, author's collection, from the corporate files of the Santa Fe at the Kansas State Historical Society.

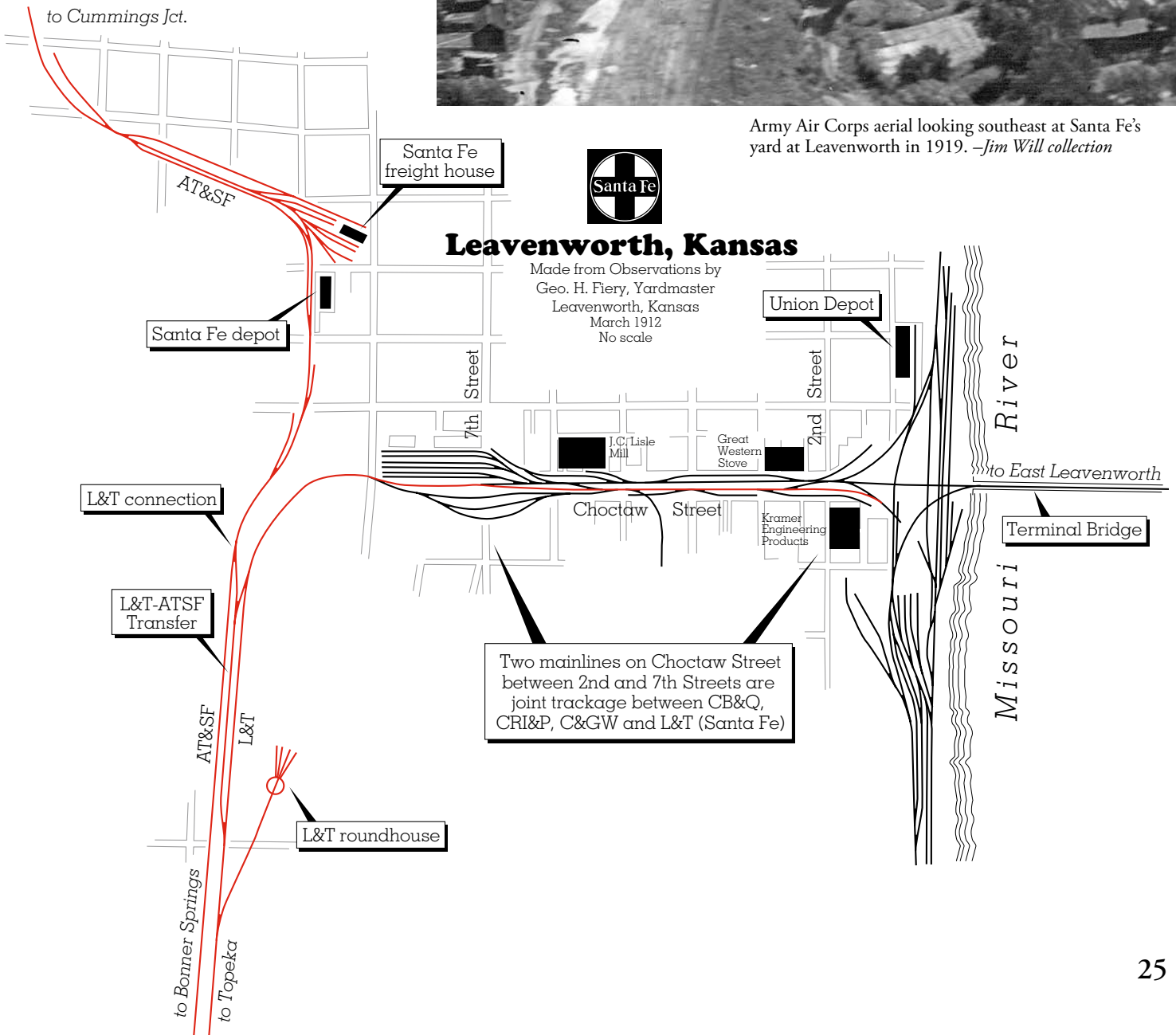
A tangible benefit of Santa Fe's decision to continue to operate the LT&SW was access to Choctaw Street in Leavenworth. Many industries adjoined Choctaw Street, including major shipper Lisle Milling Co. (later Bay State Milling). After the arrival of the Leavenworth Terminal and Bridge trackage in 1894 on the north side of Choctaw, the newspaper reports indicated that Santa Fe continued to provide switching services to the Terminal and Bridge tenants. It also provided Santa Fe with ownership and access to the Union Depot Co., which L.T. Smith had organized in 1887.¹² Finally, Santa Fe used the LT&SW roundhouse rent free and would have lost this access had the LT&SW fell into rival hands.

The line became a wholly-owned company fully controlled by the Santa Fe when

12. Santa Fe Track at Depot, *Leavenworth Times*, May 23, 1888.



Army Air Corps aerial looking southeast at Santa Fe's yard at Leavenworth in 1919. —Jim Will collection



L.T. Smith, the Promoter

Leonard T. Smith seems to have been the opposite personality from his close ally David R. Anthony. While Anthony was argumentative and even violent, Smith was affable and positive. Later in life he was often referred to by the title Honorable or Colonel, despite never having served in either public office or the military.

Smith was a native of New York and had spent time in Kalamazoo, Michigan, before coming to Kansas in 1857 at the age of thirty.¹ Many settlers in pre-civil war Kansas were abolitionists with strong ideals, but Smith's business career suggests he worked the "middle ground" to get practical things accomplished and promote Leavenworth.

He established the Leavenworth Waterworks, owned the Planters Hotel, worked to bring the Missouri Pacific Railroad to



Leonard T. Smith
—Kansas State Historical Society

Leavenworth, before getting caught-up in the "narrow-gauge fever" of the early 1870s. His Kansas Central empire was planned to link with the Rio Grande in Denver and build east to St. Louis. At 140 miles in length and lasting until 1890, it was a significant slim gauge line.

Besides building the Leavenworth Northern and Southern, he organized and built union depot at the east end of downtown Leavenworth in 1887. He built the Santa Fe depot on the west end of the downtown area and, remarkably, both depots remain in use today; the Santa Fe depot as a restaurant and the union depot as a community center—both a lasting legacy for Smith.

Smith died in April 1891 while visiting Mexico City.² His remains were returned to Leavenworth in a special car supplied by the Mexican Railway according to the *Times*. Fred Harvey was listed as one of his pallbearers, thus confirming a relationship between the early Leavenworth business leaders.

1. Access Genealogy, *Leavenworth Times* obituary.
2. *Leavenworth Times*, April 21, 1891.



No discussion of the Santa Fe in Leavenworth would be complete without a mention of Fred Harvey. Harvey lived in Leavenworth the entire time he was associated with the Santa Fe. There has never been any evidence he had any business dealings or influence on the building of the Leavenworth district. His career is covered wonderfully in Stephen Fried's *Appetite for America*. The book has a good description of the Harvey's social life in Leavenworth (see pages 20,21) and people such as L.T. Smith and wife, would surely have been part of his social circle. The Harvey home survives as a museum at 7th and Olive, providing Santa Fe enthusiasts a good reason to visit. —Google Street View

Santa Fe Treasurer Edward Wilder personally purchased the railroad for \$100,000 at a receiver's sale at Oskaloosa, Kansas. Presumably Santa Fe funded Wilder for the transaction and then appointed him as a board member. The *Leavenworth Times* reported "the Santa Fe will not allow any other line to purchase it and get a short line to Topeka."¹³ It was renamed the Leavenworth & Topeka Railroad in 1900.

Building the Leavenworth Northern and Southern

L.T. Smith is curiously absent from the planning and sale of the LT&SW. He was the most entrepreneurial of the Leavenworth leaders, having already established the waterworks in Leavenworth, bought and sold the Planters Hotel, brought the Missouri Pacific to town, and promoted the Kansas Central narrow gauge as Leavenworth's competitor to the Kansas Pacific and Atchison's Central Branch Railroad.

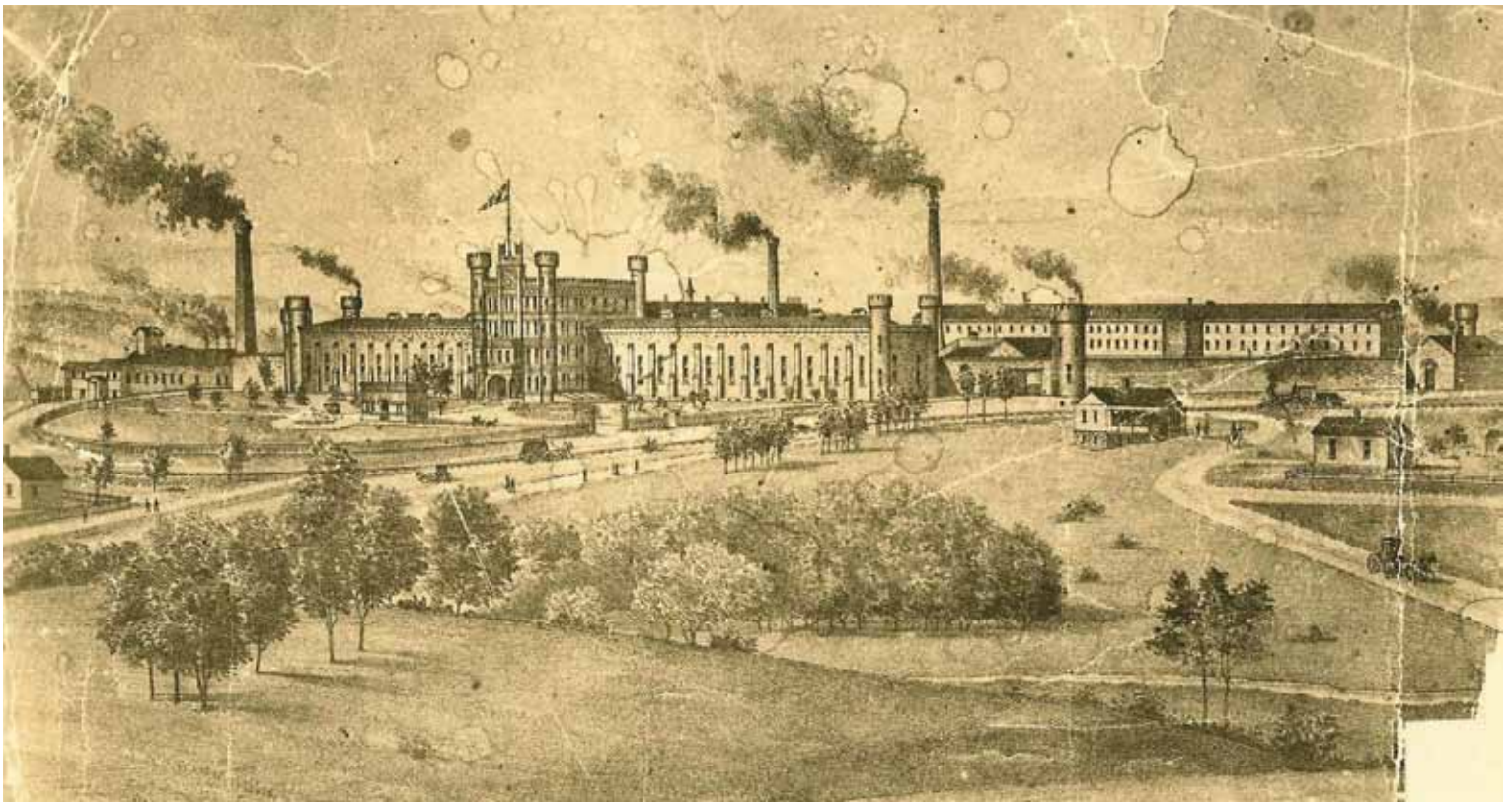
Smith's priority between late 1879 until he was ousted as president of the Kansas Central, was focused on attempting to extend the narrow gauge westward. He was paid a generous \$5,000 per month for these efforts and already had profited from Jay Gould's purchase of the line. This drama is covered in detail in I.E. Quastler's Kansas Central book.¹⁴ Smith was odd man out as president of the Kansas Central when Commodore C.K. Vanderbilt and Jay Gould schemed together. Smith continued

as president until early 1883 when he was replaced with Union Pacific President Sydney Dillion, which undoubtedly done for economic reasons.¹⁵

Having lost control of the narrow gauge, Smith was a railroad entrepreneur without a railroad. He promptly got involved with Kansas City promoters to build a line northwest out of Kansas City, through Leavenworth to the northwest. This route had always been a goal of the Kansas City business community to divert trade away from Chicago.¹⁶ A charter for the Kansas City Wyandotte and Northwestern (Northwestern) was filed on September 30, 1884. Smith was happy to participate as a board member since he likely felt much of the trade could be intercepted at Leavenworth as long as the mainline passed through his home town. Also, coal mining was increasingly important to Leavenworth, and Smith certainly felt lines northwest out of Leavenworth would be a great asset for the distribution of Leavenworth Coal.¹⁷

Smith quickly became disillusioned with the plans of the Kansas City group when it became clear they would not build

13. *Leavenworth Times*, October 12 and 13, 1899.
14. I.E. Quastler, *Kansas Central Narrow Gauge*, page 52.
15. I.E. Quastler, *Kansas Central Narrow Gauge*, page 62.
16. I.E. Quastler, *Missouri Pacific Northwest*, page 13.
17. *Leavenworth Times*, October 17, 1886. Vote for Bonds is an article that illustrates the Leavenworth attitude towards coal distribution.



Kansas State Penitentiary circa 1887. The Penitentiary Mine tippie is at far left with the tall smoke stack. The tracks in the foreground are Kansas Pacific (UP). —*Lansing Historical Society*

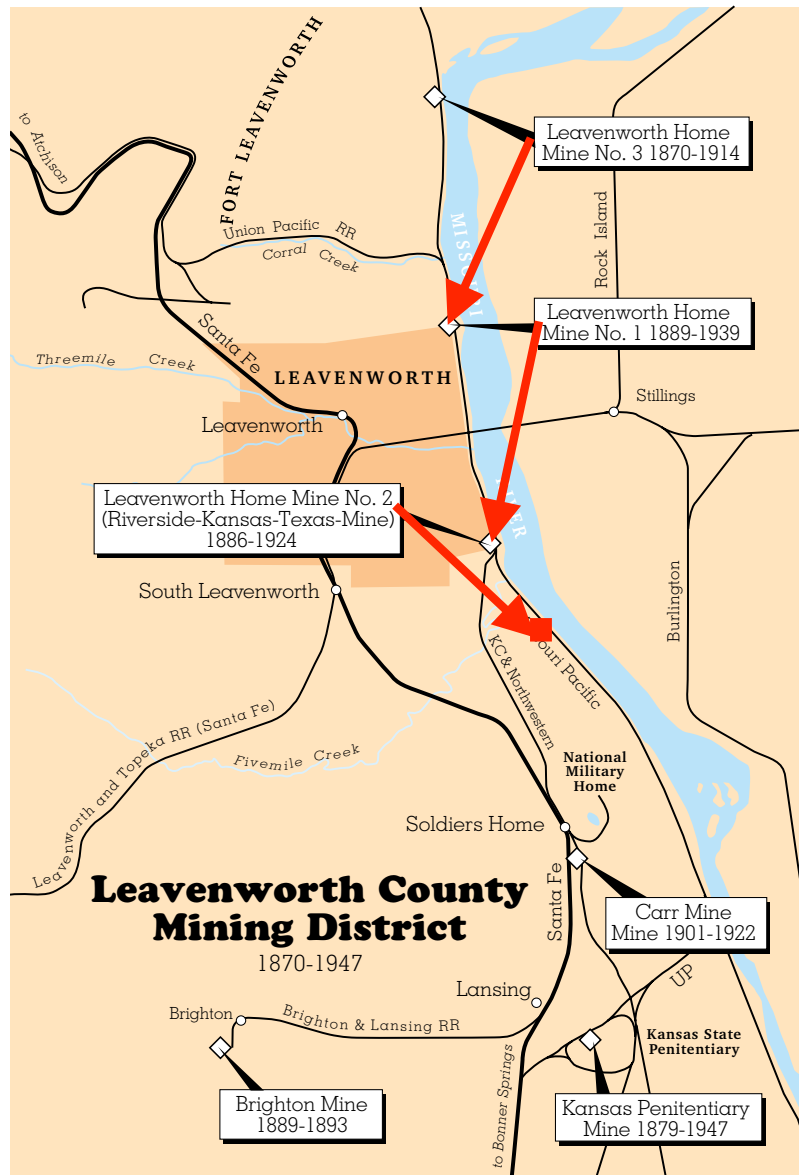
through Leavenworth. Eventually Leavenworth was served by a branch built to tap the coal mines. At a board meeting of the Northwestern on August 31, 1885, Smith resigned stating he refused to have anything to do with “this (railroad) which is antagonistic to the interests of Leavenworth.”¹⁸ The *Leavenworth Times* started a publicity campaign against the Northwestern which illustrated Anthony’s close relationship with Smith. When Smith filed the charter for a new Leavenworth Northern and Southern (LNS) on October 24, 1885, to take virtually the same route as the Northwestern, Anthony’s *Times* was a major supporter.¹⁹

Smith was now in a race to build the LNS before the Northwestern. His efforts focused on acquiring right of way, selling bonds in Leavenworth, and arranging long term financing. In regards to the latter, he made several week-long trips to the east in March 1886 and reported in the *Leavenworth Times* that his trips were successful.²⁰

18. I.E. Quastler, *Missouri Pacific Northwest*, page 17.

19. *Leavenworth Times*, October 24, 1885.

20. *Leavenworth Times*, April 4, 1886, “Report on the honorable L.T. Smith’s trip.”





Government Hill, MP 23, about 1890. The former narrow gauge Kansas Central is at left while the Leavenworth North & South Railway (ATSF) diverges off to the right.
Northern and Southern

= THE =

Leavenworth, Northern & Southern Railway Co.

TIME CARD No. 2.

IN EFFECT MONDAY, 12:05 A. M., JUNE 13, 1887.

THE COMPANY RESERVES THE RIGHT TO VARY FROM IT AT PLEASURE.

Westward.	MILES FROM STATION.	STATIONS.	Eastward.
1.	MILES.	MILES.	2.
4.15 p. m.	.0	Atchison. 11.	3.25 p. m.
4.50	6.4	Parnell. 24.	2.55
5.12	8.7	Cummings Junction. 32.3	2.45
6.55 p. m.	31.9	Leavenworth. 11.	1.00 p. m.
7.00 a. m.	31.9	Leavenworth. 11.	12.10 p. m.
8.40 a. m.	54.3	Wilder. 11.	10.30 a. m.

TRAINS DAILY EXCEPT SUNDAY.

A. A. ROBINSON,
CHIEF ENGINEER.

Leavenworth Northern and Southern Railway Timetable No. 2, effective June 13, 1887, prior to full Santa Fe control. —Jim Will collection

A “full corps of surveyors are to start work shortly,” the *Times* went on to report.

Smith’s trips east were one of the more intriguing aspects of the building of the LNS. Based on events about to unfold, he must have visited Santa Fe management and bankers in Boston and negotiated an agreement that Santa Fe would fund the project and own the line if Smith could obtain the land and local bonds. Details of these trips are not known, but the manner in which the line was quickly built confirms Santa Fe backing as early as April of 1886.

Now with surveying wrapping up, it was critical that the local bonds fall into place. To build enthusiasm for a critical vote in Leavenworth, Anthony stated that the LNS “will result in the establishment of a system more powerful than the Missouri Pacific Railway” at Leavenworth Board of Trade meeting on October 15, 1886.²¹ Apparently, Anthony still thought of the LNS as an independent Leavenworth-controlled venture. The bonds were approved on October 18, 1886, and the progress rapid.²²

Santa Fe backing was clearly revealed when Santa Fe President William Barstow Strong visited Leavenworth on October 24, 1886, by way of the LT&SW, and met with Smith. It was reported in the *Times* that the meeting was “to locate the freight house”—certainly a doubtful duty for President Strong.²³ It seems much more likely Strong wanted to see how his assets were going to be used. Shortly after this, on October 27, A.A. Robinson, second vice president of the Santa Fe, made a similar visit and the *Times* reported that “after spending a pleasant time with L.T. Smith he returned to Topeka in a special car.”²⁴

The real purpose of these visits was the preparation of a contract for Smith to sell the LNS to the Santa Fe. This contract was signed on November 12, 1886. Smith received \$15,000 at execution of the contract, and would receive another \$20,000 upon completion of the line.²⁵ Construction now proceeded at a rapid pace and was

21. *Leavenworth Times*, October 15, 1886, “Men and Measures.”

22. *Leavenworth Times*, October 19, 1886.

23. *Leavenworth Times*, October 24, 1886, accompanied by J. D. Chase superintendent, “pleased with thrifty appearance of Leavenworth.”

24. *Leavenworth Times*, October 28, 1886, “Viewed the location of the facilities and was escorted to Planters House Hotel.”

25. Copy of contract B203, Kansas Historical Society, Santa Fe Corporate Files, authors collection.

completed by June 1, 1887, 46 miles from Wilder, on the Eastern Division Kansas City Branch, to Cummings Junction (later Hawthorne) on the mainline.²⁶ Smith was reported to have said with great exclamation, “thirty days ahead of schedule.”²⁷

Operations commenced on June 13, 1887, as shown in LNS timetable number two. Smith’s excitement can be explained by the execution of a contract on July 1, 1887, where the Santa Fe assumed full financial control and paid any outstanding debt,²⁸ including his \$20,000 payment. Smith was replaced by W. B. Strong as president, but remained on the board of directors. The Leavenworth Northern and Southern continued to exist as a corporate entity until February 15, 1899, when it was sold to the Santa Fe for one dollar, thus officially ending the individuality of Smith’s line.²⁹

The railroad was largely built over about a seven-month period, which was very fast by any standard. The terrain was favorable south of Leavenworth, but the glacial hills north of Leavenworth were more challenging. Despite the speed of construction, the quality of the line was not compromised. The evidence remains: two stone and brick arch structures, stone bridge abutments, as well as the Leavenworth depot, the Lansing depot, and a portion of the Leavenworth freight building survive. The only exception to the quality of construction was the Kansas River bridge at Bonner Springs. This major structure was rebuilt twice before 1915 and remained in use until the end. It can be said that Smith spent Santa Fe’s money wisely.

The Pollywog was off to a good start. The nickname Pollywog appears in occasional newspaper references and implies a certain amount of affection by locals, but also suggests poor swampy conditions. It seems to have been directed to the portion of the line north of Leavenworth and first appears in print when the *Leavenworth Times* reported the line would be sold³⁰ to the Burlington. ❁

26. Terminology per an 1891 employee timetable, collection of the Railroad and Heritage Museum, Temple, Texas. References to division names.

27. *Leavenworth Times*, June 1, 1887, description of last spike ceremony.

28. Copy of contract B211, Kansas Historical Society, Santa Fe Corporate Files, authors collection.

29. Copy of Contract 611, Kansas Historical Society, Santa Fe Corporate Files, authors collection.

30. *Leavenworth Times*, November 9, 1899.



Santa Fe motor M-105 on Bridge at Bonner Springs. The bridge here across the Kansas River was rebuilt twice before 1915. —Jim Will collection

Compare the photo, right, taken of No. 84, the mixed train from Leavenworth, crossing over the Union Pacific near Lansing on October 9, 1965, with the photo below as Jim Will, the author, and Chuck Hitchcock (pointing) inspect the same bridge abutment 52 years later in August 2017. —Right, Steve Patterson; below, Bob Gatton

