



Early Texas Train, photo taken 1938.

One of the grandest events in Smithfield's history was the arrival of the St. Louis, Arkansas, and Texas Railroad (the Cotton Belt) in 1887. Watching the work train laytracks constituted much of the excitement of the day, as men and boys would run down to Big Bear Creek for weeks to take it all in. After the tracks finally reached town, some boys would walk to Bransford, its new site being slightly less than three miles up the tracks, just to pay a dime to ride the train back home. The railroad fare from Smithfield to Fort Worth was thirty-five cents, and the trip took about an hour to cover the eighteen or nineteen miles in good weather. During storms the same trip took three or four hours.

For a time the railroad, which had 679 miles of track in Texas and had been recently absorbed by the Jay Gould system, stopped twice a day, at 10:10 in the morning going southwest to Fort Worth and at 10:10 at night going to points east such as Plano and Greenville. Mail bags would be tossed off or passengers could climb aboard or detrain. The morning stop in particular attracted townsfolk who would gossip and collect news from the conductor. The tracks bypassed the Smithfield business district by about a quarter mile. Undaunted, storekeepers and others moved their buildings southward, closer to the depot, and a new business district was established.

About the time of the arrival of the railroad Louia



Mr. Moody Walker at Smithfield Station

Brown bought out Dan Hightower and put up a new building filled with general merchandise, including drugs, hardware, implements, buggies, and wagons. Some of the doctors practiced on occasion in the store's back offices. Brown retired from the mercantile business in

1898 and moved to his 350 acre farm, roughly including the area that today lies between Mid-Cities Boulevard, Rufe Snow, Chapman, and Smithfield Road—the North Park and Fox Hollow additions.

A common saying of the day was that the Cotton Belt railroad began nowhere and went nowhere, but it opened up potential commercial development, and in the late 1880s Smithfield received its first real industry. Louia Brown put up \$500, as did Dave Smith and Birdville entrepreneur Richard Boaz (pronounced boze), to build the Smithfield Canning factory near the depot alongside the tracks, at present 8201 East Main. Smith was the manager and employed twenty to thirty women and children, who canned tomatoes, corn, peaches, and peas grown by area farmers and shipped the tin cans out by railroad. John Brown's berry farm, a mile to the southeast, north of what would become Mangham Field, supplied part of the fruit. Successful for a time, the cannery closed after four or five years because local farmers started getting higher prices at the market in Fort Worth.

The train enabled John Thomas Shivers (1855–1923), who emigrated from Alabama to Texas by covered wagon in 1871, to follow through on his plans. He bought, on credit, 240 acres of timberland for \$13 an acre in the present Thornbridge Addition off the 8300 block of Davis Boulevard. He hauled the logs to the depot and shipped them north to pay for his place. He built a log house, later framed, and remained there on the far northeast outskirts of the Smithfield community.



Aerial view of James & Mabel Shivers' farm, circa mid-40s, in the 8300 block of Smithfield, now Davis Boulevard.