

*Top: Frisco GP7 #561 with mixed freight delivering coal to the power plant on 2/26/78.*

*Middle: SW9 #308 with mixed train for the power plant and on to Ozark. 5/21/77*

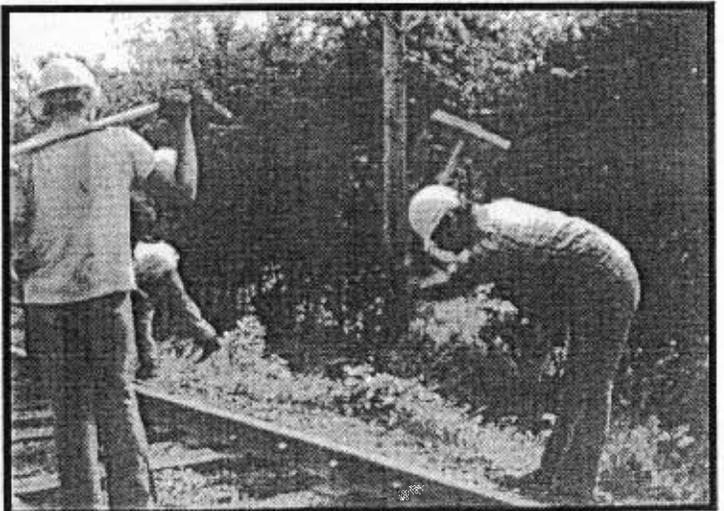
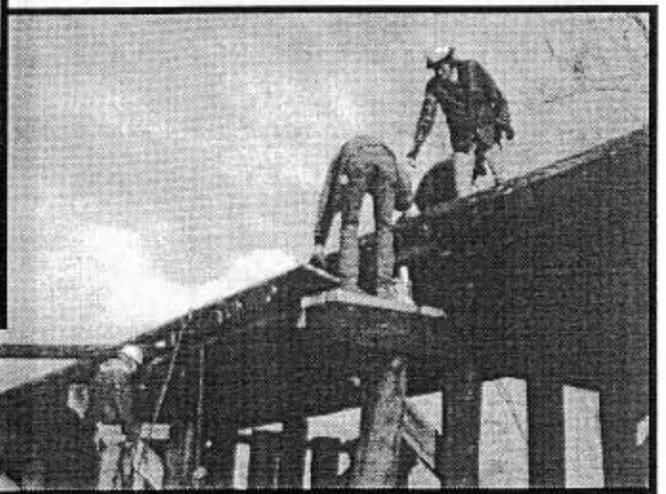
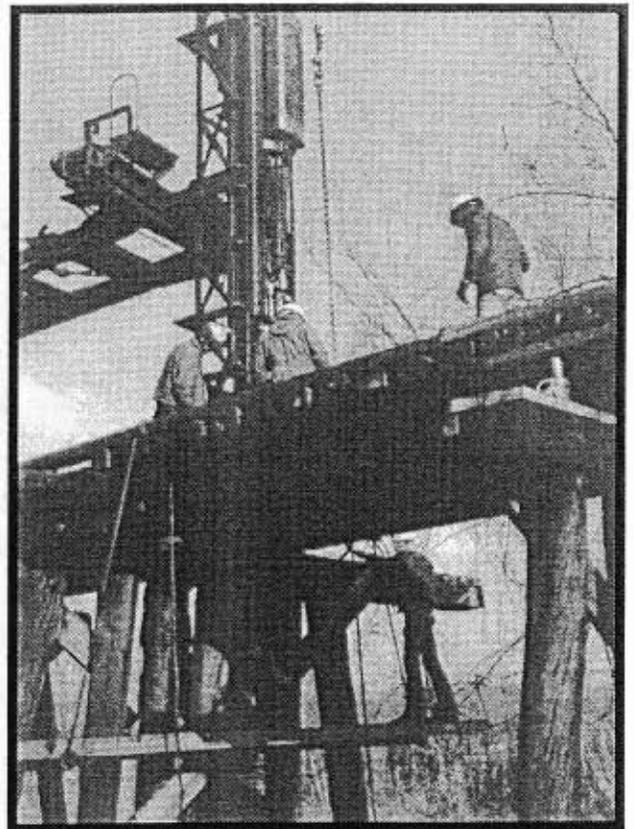
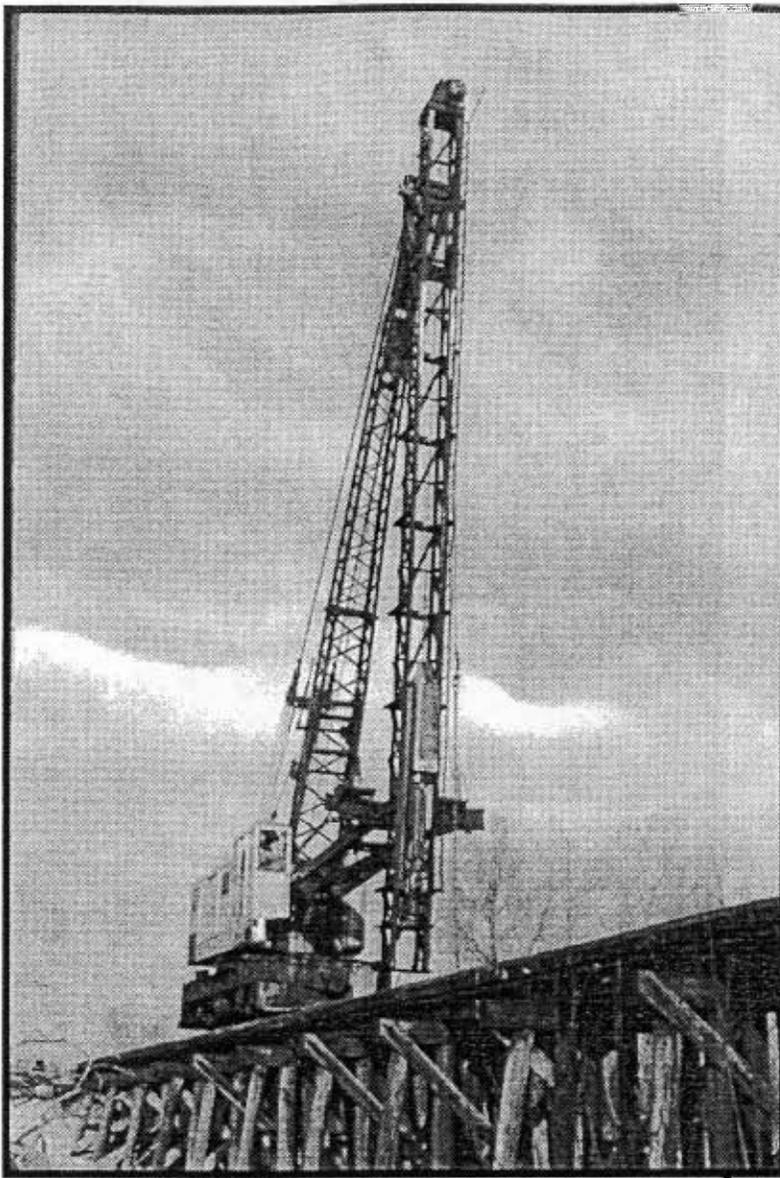
*Bottom: SLSF SW9 #308 switching new coal cars at James River Power Plant.*

*All photos by H. Hall*

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Natural gas was the fuel of choice having many advantages over coal including being delivered by pipeline which requires no special handling equipment. Natural gas burns cleanly requiring no cinder and ash disposal. Coal was the last thing CU wanted to burn at the James River Power Plant.

The Federal mandate required that the conversion be complete before 1979, but availability of gas became a problem in the winter of 1974-75 and the next winter (1975-76) 100% of the electricity generated was produced using coal. Inadequate coal-handling equipment at the CU plant was one of several problems that had to



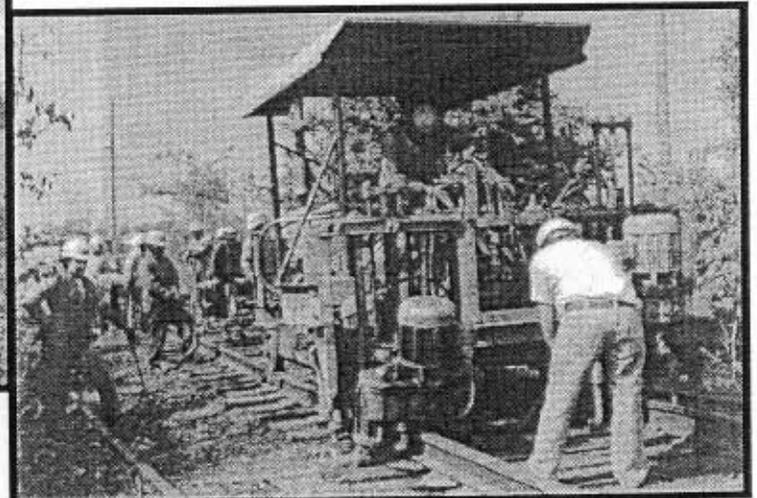
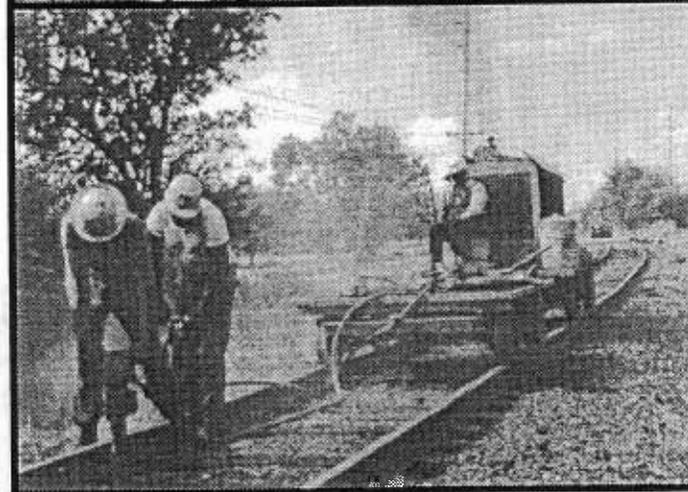
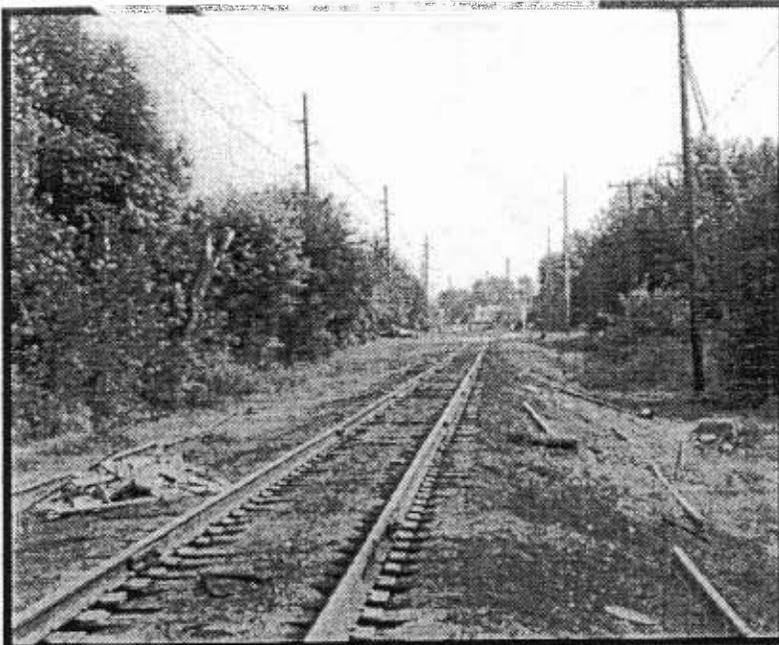


*Top Left: Frisco "American" pile driver #98001 was used to replace and add pilings to the north end of the James River bridge. An Eastern Division TT lists the bridge ratings from MK Jct. to Kissick as 53.6. Presumably the bridge ratings were brought up to the 70.4 rating of the main lines. Sept. 1976*

*Top Right and Middle photos: Bridge gang at the James River bridge approach adding pilings and stringers. Nov. 1976*

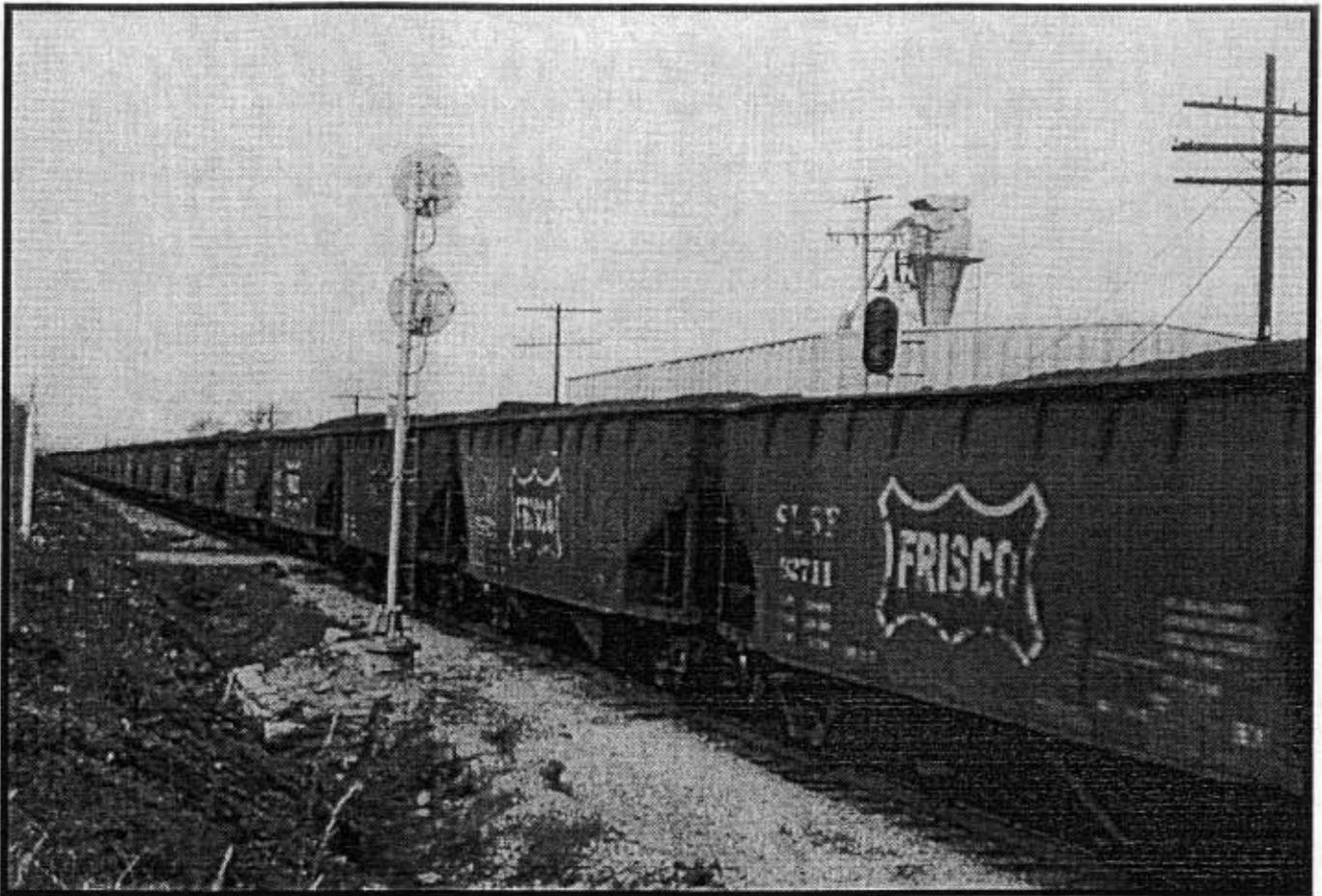
*Bottom: Frisco Trackman Brian DeSpain setting spikes for the air spikers following near the Southern Hills development. Sept. 1976*

*Photos by the author.*



be overcome. Frisco was largely unprepared to handle coal shipments. Track, roadbed and bridges on the Ozark branch dated from an earlier time and were maintained for traffic of a light nature. This restricted the cars that could be moved over that track and also restricted the class of locomotives to the same faithful, but tired VO's and SW's that had worked the line for many years. Most of the Frisco coal hopper fleet consisted of a relatively small number of worn-out two-bay 55-ton cars from the late 40s and early 50s. That first winter of coal burning was a nightmare of unpredictable coal deliveries due to car shortages and problems at the mines in Kansas and Oklahoma due to the severe cold weather. Early on there were no unit trains, or barely blocks of coal hoppers, and cars would trickle to the mine and back. Delivery of coal became such an issue that if a handful of coal loads made it to the west yards the cars would be immediately brought to the plant. A June 1, 1976 article from the News & Leader described unloading coal the previous winter and the difficulty CU people had breaking up coal frozen in the cars. Power plant crews were required to use sledgehammers and long rods to free the coal. Demurrage charges for frozen hoppers became a point of contention between CU and Frisco and experimental truck deliveries were made which illustrated CU's displeasure with the situation.

*Top: Upgraded rail, new ties and resurfaced ballast between Elm & Walnut St.. Middle: Left side has been upgraded, right side still has the old rail. Lower Left: The Southern Region Rail Gang drives spikes with air hammers using an Ingersoll-Rand compressor. Right: A Jackson Tamper is used to bring the unspiked ties, on the left, up to the base of the rail so spikes can be set. Photos by author. August-September 1976*



I had photographed coal shipments heading for the power plant as early as 1974, but all of that was on fragile track using elderly rolling stock. An improvement program began in the summer of 1976 to modernize the track. A rail gang from the Southern Region, a bridge gang and local MOW people spent most of the summer and fall of 1976 replacing ties, rail and reconditioning bridges from MK Junction to just beyond Kissick near the county line. Recent conversations with former employees suggest 115-pound relay-rail replaced 90-pound rail. The existing ballast, mostly lead-mine chat, was resurfaced and grade crossings rebuilt. The bridge gang used an "American" pile driver to replace and add pilings, replace caps and add stringers. An odd choice was made by the Missouri Highway department to not separate the crossing at US 60. Some unused sidings near St. Louis Street were removed, but for the most part the majority of industrial sidings and team tracks were improved with 115-pound turnouts. The traffic to Ozark was so light that no money was spent improving that portion of the line and derailments continued to be common below Kissick until the line was abandoned in the 1980s.

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*Top: A train of old hoppers loaded eastbound at Nichols Junction. CU initially bought coal from Bill Patch (later Cherokee Coal) of Garland, KS. Cost of the coal was \$20.68 a ton, and \$4.32 for delivery by rail (Nov. 76). Right: Hopper 91072 built almost 30 years before was typical of the tired fleet of cars Frisco used the first few seasons to supply CU. It is in the west yards ready to head to Kissick in Dec 1976. Photos by the author.*



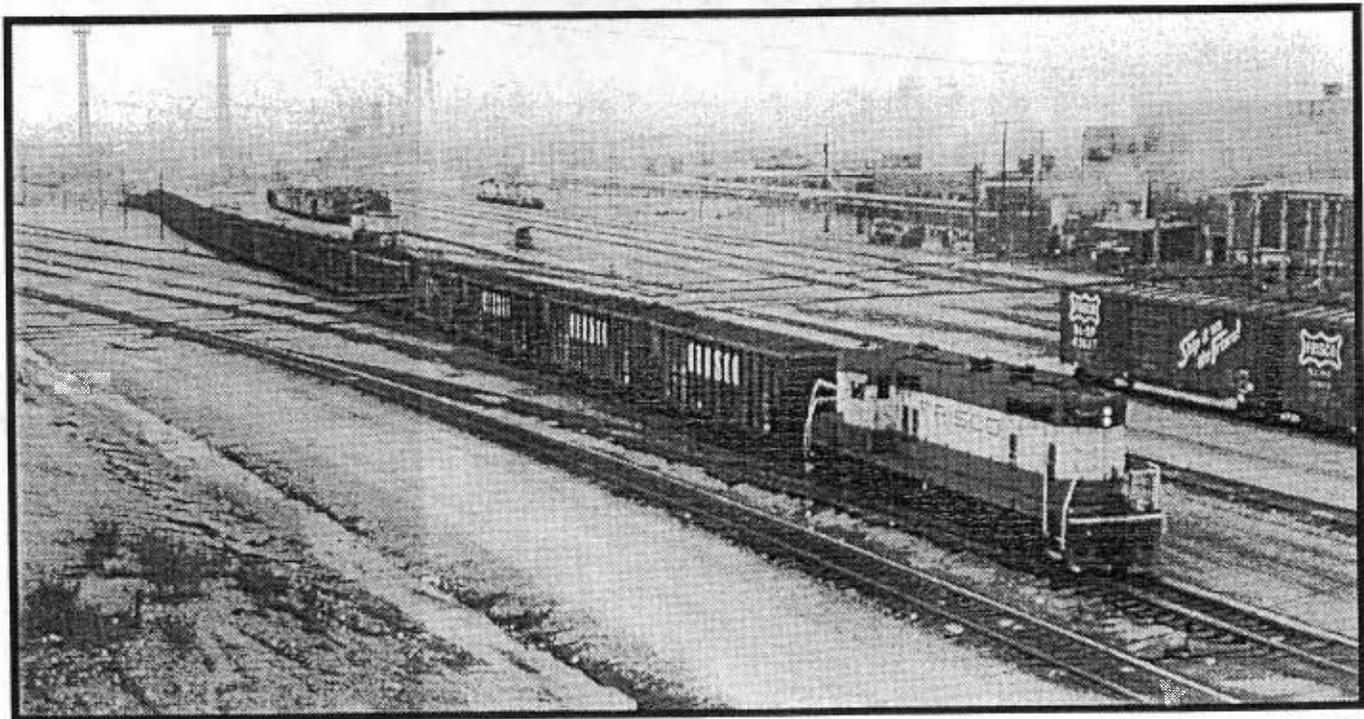
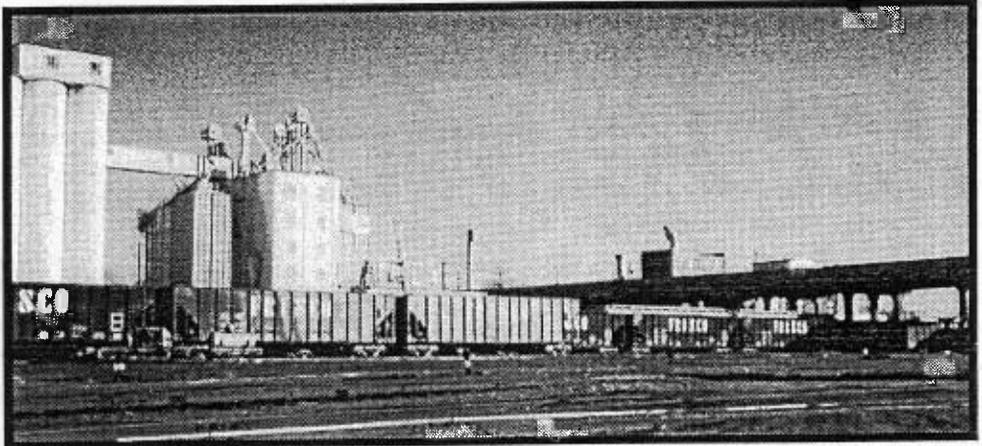
*Top: The south yards did not have enough storage tracks for the new hoppers and so the old north yards were also used to store the cars, in this case car #87827. Dec 76 Photo by author*



*Middle: New SLSF hoppers in the 87000 to 88000 series in storage in the south yards. These cars were built in the Springfield West Shops and delivery predated track and facility improvements which required use of the old cars for some time. Dec 76 Photo by author*

*Below: Frisco GP7 #521 in west yard with train of new coal cars. 11/06/77 H. Hall photo*

At the same time track was being improved, the Springfield car shops began construction of new 100-ton hoppers to replace the 25 to 30 year-old hoppers. Oddly, the new cars immediately went into storage until the unloading and track





*Top: SLSF GP38 #675 and following unit with empty hoppers at Langston. This image summarized the goal of the track improvement project. Better coal handling conveyors at the power plant and improvements at the coal mines made the shipping of coal a routine process. Quite a change from the chaos of the winters of 1974 thru 76. 10/06/80*



*Right: Frisco GP38 #648 & GP35 #763 with an empty coal train on James River Bridge. 6/24/79  
Both photos by H. Hall*

improvements were complete that winter. Lines of new-unused cars piled up in the old North and South yards. Old locomotives and cars continued to be used for some time after the track was reconditioned, but road units such as GP38s with new hopper cars began to be the norm after the winter of 1976/77. Both City Utilities and Frisco became proficient in handling coal and deliveries were spread out year round to reduce the headache of coal frozen in the winter months.

In the years since, under BN and BNSF, delivery has been further improved with larger bathtub gondolas, better rail and crushed-rock ballast, and the latest and largest AC traction locomotives. City Utilities has improved the conveyor systems used for moving coal around the property and has enlarged the yards and storage tracks allowing for longer trains. An employee, or railfan from 1975 would be impressed by the changes.

Thanks must go to several people who supplied information and photos. Harold Hall supplied many photos of trains at Galloway and Kissick. Brian DeSpain worked on the track improvements, Dave Fraley of City Utilities provided background information for the James River Power Station Ray Wells helped with research and J. Lilly provided a much needed and appreciated photo.

## **Frisco Railroader's Son**

*(Continued)*

Mother, my six-month old brother Walter Jr., and I moved on the Pea Vine to Willow Springs. My dad had rented a farm located on a high hill southwest of Willow Springs. Our farm was adjacent to the main Frisco Railroad line. Our home overlooked the valley and town of Willow Springs.

The next three years were exciting for the Johnson clan. Dad's work schedule was from 11:00 pm to 8:00 am, seven days a week. He was home by 9:00 am, ate the meal mom would have ready for him and then off to bed. Quiet time! That was almost impossible for two growing boys. We had our chores to do. Mom milked the cow, Daisy. I fed her, cleaned the barn and helped with chicken chores. My main duty was to ride herd on my little brother who by now had become mobile and wouldn't stay in one place for any length of time. Oh yeah, in October 1929, we boys became brothers to a baby sister named Violet Mae. She was a neat plaything.

Mother churned sweet cream butter and sold it to the country club. They also bought the buttermilk. I walked and delivered the butter and buttermilk. Mother let me have the money from the buttermilk. My first sales commission. WOW!

The most exciting experience for me was my walks to school. I started to school at 7:45 am and arrived at school at 8:45 am. My daily tour took me down our hill to the Frisco tracks along a small creek that ran through "Hobo Jungle". The hobos kept a neat camp. They always cleaned up the cans and containers, turned them upside down and placed a rock on top so they would be ready for the next bunch.

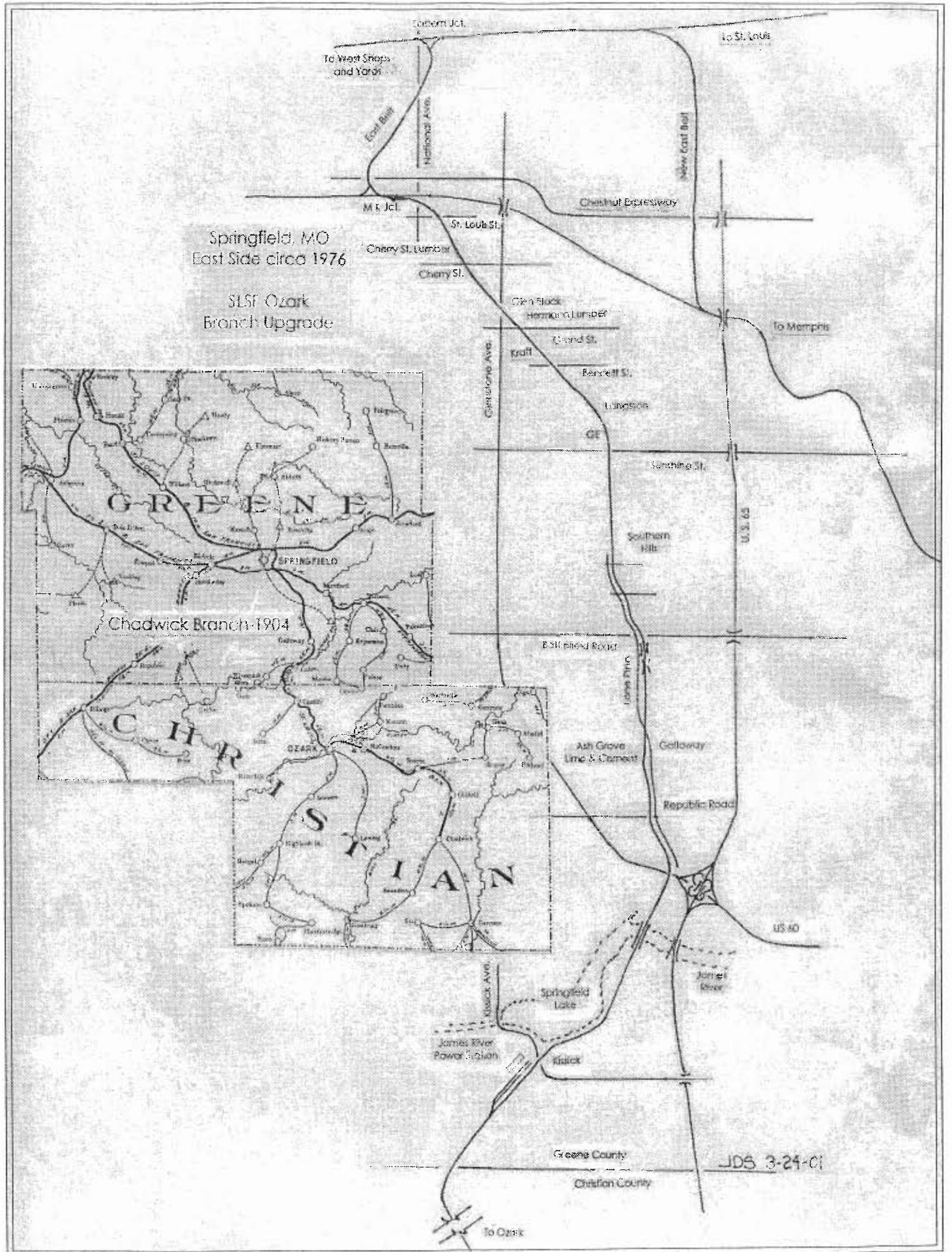
From there I would cross the tracks and approach the roundhouse. By this time dad would have the passenger engine fueled with coal and water, ready for the train crew to leave on their daily schedule on the Pea Vine line to Grandin. I don't remember for sure what the number was on the locomotive, I think it was 509. I do remember my dad calling it his "6 cup percolator". It had 2 drivers on each side so you know it was a small engine. It looked like a tremendous smoke-belching, steam-hissing beast to a seven year old Frisco Railroader's son!

In the year of 1929 the nation experienced a financial hiccup. The latter part of 1929 the Frisco Railroad decided to phase out the roundhouse at Willow Springs. Eventually everything was moved to the Springfield, MO terminal. Dad's boss could not guarantee what would happen with employment in Springfield, as a result in March 1931 my parents moved to Guthrie Center, IA and started farming.

This was a closing chapter in the history of steam railroading in many men's lives. However there are lasting memories, resulting in story telling that will live on forever.

Springfield, MO  
East Side circa 1976

SLSF Ozark  
Branch Upgrade



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