ABOUT RAILROADS IN CUBA.

HOW SIR WILLIAM VAN HORNE BUILT HIS NEW TRUNK LINE TO SANTIAGO.

(Special Correspondence of the Deseret News by Frank G. Carpenter.)

SANTA CLARA, Cuba, Aug. 4.—Within the past few weeks I have traveled over the most of Cuba by rail. It is now possible to go from one end of the island to the other, and branch lines are planned for the east and west which will eventually make every part of the country accessible by train. There are already more than 1,500 miles of trunk lines, and of these more than one-third have been built since the war. The Cuba railroad, owned by American and Canadian capitalists, headed by Sir William Van Horne, completed its main line in 1902 and the trains are now running on the branch which joins that with the new port of Antilla, on the Bay of Nipe. The Cuba road has now 450 miles of track, and it has thrown about 70 per cent of the whole island open to settlement. I shall write fully concerning it later on.

GOOD RAILROAD PROPERTIES.

The older railroads of Cuba are well established, and they now have large earnings. Their stock is far above par and is growing in value every day. There had been about $65,000,000 invested in such roads up to 1895, and they were then making net earnings of more than $4,000,000 per annum. The roads have been improved since then, and nearly all have made extensions.

Cuba is one of the oldest railroad countries on our hemisphere. It had railroads before any other country of Spanish America, and as far back as the days of Jackson's presidency a concession was granted for a railroad from Nuevitas on the north coast of Camaguey, a distance of 45 miles. This road is still in existence, and it has a large traffic.

The western railway of Havana runs from that city for a distance of 200 miles down into the province of Pinar del Rio, reaching the famous tobacco fields. It is well built, well equipped and makes good time. It has first and third class cars, and does a good business in both passengers and freight. The through rates are about 3 cents a mile first class and half that for third class.

THE UNITED RAILWAYS.

The United Railway company line extends from Havana eastward through the provinces of Havana and Matanzas, with branch lines covering the whole of Havana, including Batabano, the famous fishing center and fort on the south. This road has 265 miles of track. It is well built and one of the best managed on the island. It is connected with the Cuba road by the Cuban Central railway, which runs from Jovellanos to Santa Clara, thus completing with the United railway the trunk line from Santiago to Havana. The Cuban Central railway is rough to an extreme and is in bad condition, although it goes through one of the richest parts of the island and has a large traffic. In addition to these there are branch lines, which are more or less under the control of the main lines, and also the plantation railroads, about 1,000 miles in length, which have, I am told, cost over $11,000,000.

All of the railroads with the exception of the Cuba road, are owned by British, Cubans and Spaniards, the British having by far the largest holdings. The cars are on the American plan, with seats facing the front and aisles running through the middle. They are usually comfortable, and especially so on the trunk line from Havana to Santiago. The United Railway company has parlor cars, with wicker swivel-back chairs, which are especially adapted to this climate, and the sleepers, which carry you from the east to the west in about 24 hours, are made in the United States after a Pullman pattern, but higher and with lower seats than our sleeping cars. Indeed, one can now travel comfortably all over Cuba. I came from Havana to Jovellanos in a chair car, riding all day in it at an extra charge of 10 cents over the ordinary rate, and I have several times ridden over the Cuba road with ladies in my party quite as comfortably as upon any railroad at home.

The porters and conductors of the sleeping cars are yellow-faced Cubans, who speak broken English. The conductors on the main lines are Cubans, and there are newsboys dressed in suits of gray linen, who work the train with papers and novels in Spanish and English. Smoking goes on in all the cars, and after our breakfast at Matanzas I noticed that the newsboy puffed a big cigar as he shoved his wares to the passengers.

So far there are no dining cars. From 20 to 30 minutes are allowed at the stations for meals, which cost from 50 to 75 cents. There are also lunch counters, and at nearly every stoppage peddlers bring fruit and eatables to the car windows.

HOW THE CUBAN ROAD WAS BUILT.

The Cuban railroad is by far the longest on the island, and it will eventually be one of the best railroad properties of this part of the world. It runs right along the backbone of Cuba, extending from Santa Clara, which is west of the center of Cuba, eastward to Santiago, opening up a country which heretofore has been accessible only from the coasts. This is the widest part of Cuba, and it has some of the richest soil and best material resources. The trunk line is 294 miles long, but, with the branches, there are altogether about 400 miles more of track, and the system will be extended until it includes eastern Cuba like a net.

The Cuba road is one of the wonders of modern railroad building. Its main line was constructed within less than two years, and that without a government concession, without a right of way and without the asking of a dollar of the public. It was planned, financed and built by Sir William Van Horne, who had completed the construction of the Canadian Pacific, and, Alexander like, was looking about for other worlds to conquer. He had come to Cuba just after the war on his way to British Guiana, where he had interests in gold mines, and the railroad people here had taken him over their systems in a special car. Sir William never travels without a map. He is a shrewd observer, and as he rode about over the central and western provinces he saw the potential wealth of the island. He realized the profits that could be made in sugar, tobacco and fruits, and was impressed with the fertility of the soil. In looking at the map he saw that seven-tenths of Cuba seemed to be undeveloped, and that its whole eastern half had no great railroad and practically no farms. He asked us to the character of the land and was told it was fully as good as that of western Cuba, but that it was inaccessible, although a number of railroads had been planned in the past, and the Spanish government had once offered to guarantee 8 per cent dividends on the cost of construction if a trunk line were built.

It Was Subscribed to in Shares of Fifty Thousand Dollars Each—Something About Its Projects And Its Possibilities—Sugar Mills For Eastern Cuba—The New Port on Nipe Bay—In the Cuban Backwoods—The Western Railroad and the United Railways of Havana Owned by the British.

CUBAN PICNIC PARTY WAITING FOR THE TRAIN.
(Specially Photographed for the Deseret News by Frank G. Carpenter).

The more Sir William investigated the subject the more he became convinced that such a road could be of vast good to Cuba, and that it would eventually be a profitable undertaking. He did not come to this conclusion until he had sent his engineers over the line on horseback and had traveled over the most of it himself on horseback and in wagons.

RAILROAD TRAVEL IN CUBA.

As soon as he decided, however, that it would pay, he started for New York, and there financed the road in less than two days. He wanted big men, and rich men; men who would not expect immediate results, and men who could afford to lose their money if things went the wrong way. He started out to get over $7,000,000 in $50,000 shares, and picked out 18 men of whom he expected to ask $400,000 each to begin with. These men were among the leading capitalists of the United States. They were men accustomed to dealing in large sums, and it took but a few words to get their subscriptions. Among them were E. H. Harriman, James J. Hill, Granville M. Dodge, and others. Sir William had only to point out that here was one of the richest of all countries, lying in the front dooryard of the world, with millions of acres of undeveloped lands, surpassing all others in their ability to raise sugar, tobacco and other money crops. He showed them that similar lands in Hawaii costing as high as $300 per acre pay an interest on the investment, and that these undeveloped lands could be gotten from $1 to $5 an acre, and that by the thousands of acres. The map spoke for itself, and there was no trouble in getting the subscriptions. This was five years ago. Since then almost twice that amount has been spent, but the trunk line of the road has been completed, a great harbor opened up on the biggest and best bay of Cuba, sugar plantations and other enterprises begun, and a system of development originated which in time will probably be of great profit to the investors.

BUILDING NEW RAILROADS IN CUBA.

The building of the Cuba road was a wonder. The American syndicate had no right of way. Cuba was then in charge of the United States, and the Foraker amendment forbade that any concession be granted during the military occupation. Sir William Van Horne had the Spanish railroad laws translated, in the hope of finding a loophole in them that would enable him to go ahead, but there was none. He then fell back on the common right of every man to build upon his own land, and decided to buy the lands on which the railroad was to go, from the center of the island to Santiago. He did this, and was then only blocked where the route crosses the public road, and he could have the right of way only by consent of the government. He knew, however, that the people wanted the road, the officials wanted it, and also that no one was likely to object to what every one wanted, and that he could therefore build across the public roads without a concession. He did this, and no one has objected.

He used Cuban workmen to construct the line, and he says that they are as good labor as can be found anywhere. It took some time for the natives to learn to handle the pick and shovel, but after that they worked rapidly and conscientiously, clearing the forests and laying the tracks. Some Spaniards also were imported from northern Spain, and the work was done quickly and well.

BIG SUGAR MILLS.

This is, however, only the first stake in the development of the enterprise. The Cuban company, which is the name of the syndicate owning the road, has several hundred thousand acres of land and it will buy more. It is already clearing the forests and laying out great sugar plantations. There is one at Jatibonico, between Santa Clara and Ciego de Avila, where in the neighborhood of 3,000 acres have already been cleared and a mill, grinding a thousand bags a day, is building. This mill alone will represent a population of eight or ten thousand people when it and the plantation connected with it are in operation. Similar mills will be built by the Cuba company and other syndicates all the way along the road to Santiago and Nipe bay, and it is believed that 100 mills could be profitably established. Each such mill should be worth to the railroad about $250,000 a year in gross traffic receipts, so that the possibilities are enormous. There are already five sugar mills owned by private companies along the road and the Cuba company has, I understand, agreed to build a mill for an American corporation which recently bought about 2,500 acres of land not far from Ignacio.

As I have said, the road runs along the backbone of the island. The richest soil lies in the valleys and it is the intention of the company to build branch lines down the valleys all along the way so that the trunk will be fed by these lines, making the system look like the veins of a leaf. Other extensions are planned to Santa Cruz and Bayamo on the south, the latter reaching the main line at San Luis not far from Santiago.

CUBA'S NEW PORT.

One of the most important parts of the Cuba road is that which was opened this year to Antilla on Nipe bay. This bay is large enough to hold the harbors of Santiago, Matanzas, Havana and every other good harbor in Cuba and leave room to spare. In a great part of it the water is over 500 feet deep with a depth great enough for big steamers close to the shore. Wharves have already been built at Antilla and the Ward Steamship company has contracted to put on regular steamers from New York. The ships will be of from 3,000 to 5,000 tons and will make the trip in two and one-half days. Through rates from New York to Havana, via Antilla and the Cuba railroad, will be sold at the same rate as to Havana direct and it is probable that a large part of the tourist travel will come or return home this way. Arrangements have been made with the ships going from New York to Jamaica to call at Santiago or Antilla and passengers will be able to go through this part of Cuba on their way to and from Jamaica.

The Nipe day harbor will have all modern conveniences for handling freight. At Havana everything is loaded and unloaded in lighters. The Cuba company will transfer its freight from the cars direct to the steamers, and it will have such loading and unloading facilities that it will pay vessels to go there rather than to Havana or any other port for that reason alone. Indeed, it is expected that Nipe bay will within a short time be the chief port at the eastern end of the island and that it will seriously injure the trade of Santiago.

I wish I could show you the backwoods of Cuba which have been opened up by this new railroad. Leaving Santa Clara the train takes you for miles through a rich farming country with sugar mills, tobacco fields and pastures on each side of the track.

Farther on the road enters the woods, and you ride for miles through a tangled jungle of great trees loaded with orchids and bound together with vines. There are mahogany, cedar, liquam vitae, palms and tropical trees. Here they are cutting the forests and there is a saw mill where the logs are being trimmed up for shipment. The mahogany lies on the ground in great piles with cords of ties stacked up beside it.

Your next sight is a clearing where the forest has been cut and burned over. There are stumps as high as your waist, half burned logs lie on the ground, but throughout the whole clearing the rows of sugar cane are sprouting, and nearby are patches of bananas which have grown up and almost hidden the stumps. No plowing is needed for such land. The cane is put in a hole in the earth, the bananas set out and all grew without cultivation.

Every now and then you pick up now towards with real estate signs stating that tracts of five long will be given free to the first settlers who will build houses satisfactory to the company. As a rule a half dozen thatched buildings and the depot constitute the settlement, and so far the pioneers have not yet arrived.

There are many places along the road where the trees have been cut and the fire started so that you ride through a blazing flame and white smoke. Further on are rough pastures fenced in with wire, with native grass growing among the stumps and fat cattle feeding upon it. About Camaguey the country has long been cleared for pasture, and farther on I saw many new clearings on both sides of the road.

Camaguey is the headquarters of the Cuba railroad. It is a city of 35,000 people which has until now been accessible by railroad only from Nuevitas. It is here that the chief offices of the Cuba company are, and here also is the Camaguey hotel, about the best on the island, which was built by Sir William Van Horne.

Going farther eastward the road runs for many miles through the woods, with scattering settlements here and there, to Alto Cedro, about 50 miles from Santiago. It is there that the branch goes off to Nipe bay, which is, I judge, 25 or 30 miles distant. The Nipe road is also through the wilds, but the land has been cleared close to the water, and it is now growing sugar cane, cocoa, oranges and bananas, and is already shipping fruit to New York.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

G. B. Burhans testifies after four years

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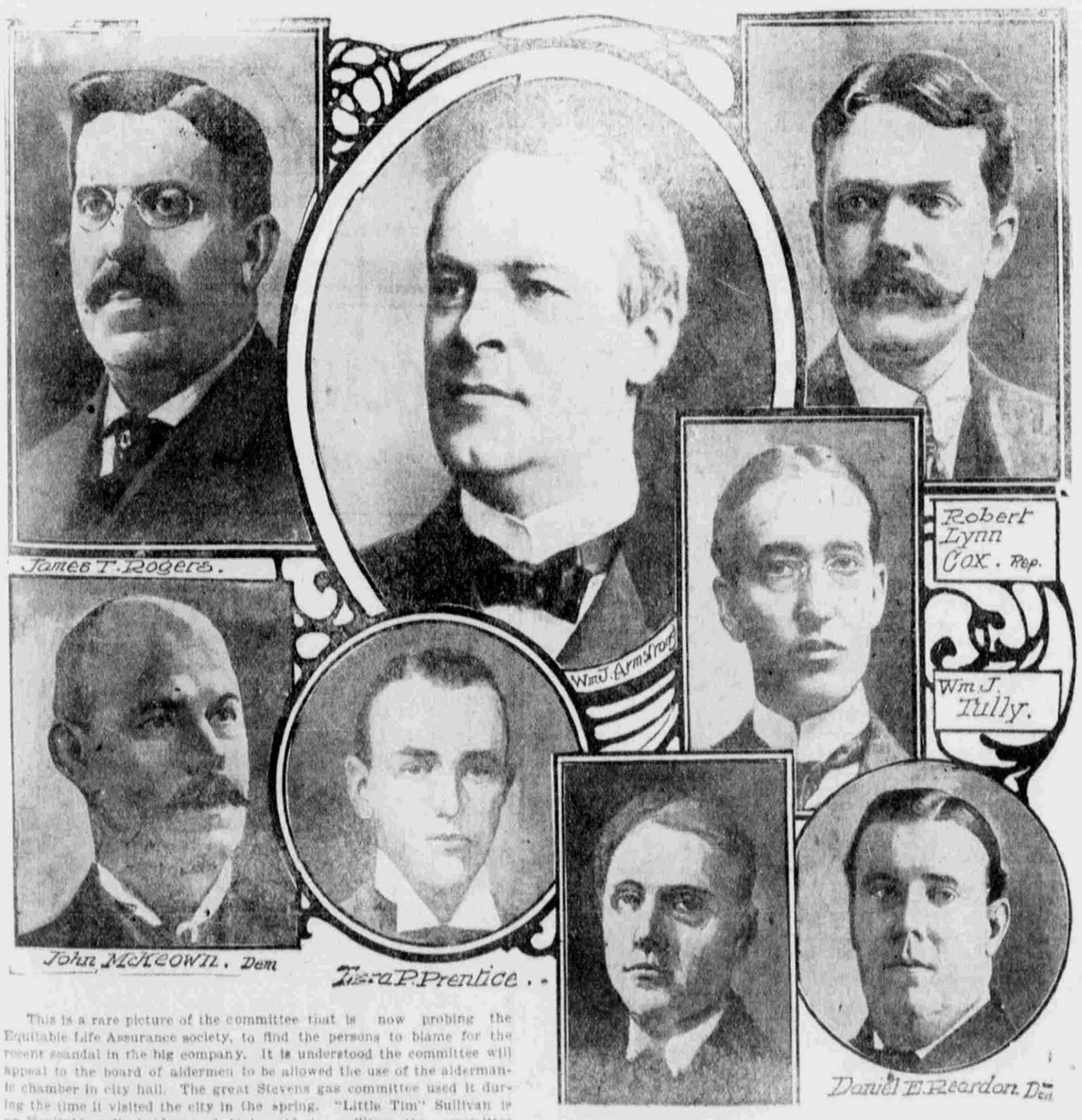

This is a rare picture of the committee that is now probing the Equitable Life Assurance society, to find the persons to blame for the recent scandal in the big company. It is understood the committee will appeal to the board of aldermen to be allowed the use of the aldermanic chamber in city hall. The great Stevens gas committee used it during the time it visited the city in the spring. "Little Tim" Sullivan is an Equitable policyholders and, it is said, is willing the committee should "go the limit" in its investigating. It is more than likely, then, that the committee will get the aldermanic chamber.

Frank S. Johnson, sergeant-at-arms of the assembly, will act in that capacity for the committee. Simon Fleischman, and Tracy Becker, of Buffalo, have been mentioned in connection with the office of assistant counsel, but the "mentioning" stage is about as far as that side of the political situation has developed.

Senator Armstrong, chairman of the committee, declares that it was the unanimous sentiment of the seven members that the investigation which they are to make should be taken up immediately and continued without interruption. Armstrong's assistant investigators are Senators Tully and Riordan and Assemblymen Rogers, Cox, Wemple, Prentice and McKeown. Prentice will act as secretary.

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