

Photo of the Month

Frisco Tunnel at Winslow



The Frisco Railroad's Winslow Tunnel
(Neg. #22410, Courtesy of Randy McCrory)

Building the Winslow tunnel on the Frisco line was a Herculean task. Once the tunnel shaft was completed in 1882, its entire 1,726 foot length was lined with brick to a thickness of four feet. This was the longest of the three tunnels on the Frisco main line and cost over \$200,000 to build, a considerable sum of money in 1882.

The 1882 Frisco Annual Report stated the "Winslow tunnel was the most expensive and difficult part of the work" in building the Arkansas Division to Van Buren. The town of Winslow was established at the north end of the tunnel. It was named for Edward F. Winslow, President of the Frisco between 1880 and 1889.

Building tunnels was a particular challenge for railroads. Much of this process was overseen by mining engineers and crews of hard-rock miners did most of the dangerous work. Before the days of hydraulic and compressed air drills the holes for dynamite were drilled by hand. This was accomplished with a long, hand-held chisel held by one man that would be pounded by another man with a sledge hammer. This took a steady hand and a good eye on the part of the man with the sledge hammer and nerves of steel for the one holding the chisel.

Reflecting the ethnic bias of the day, the Rogers New Era, reporting on construction of the tunnel, wrote that "Some 75 Irishmen and 400 Kansas negroes are working on the Frisco tunnel through the mountain south of Fayetteville." Due to the violence that often erupted between different ethnic groups, all of the line camps were segregated.

The Winslow tunnel was enlarged in 1969 during "Operation Big Bore". The project was undertaken to allow for passage of larger diesel locomotives through the tunnel.