THE COMING OF THE RAILROAD TO GREENVILLE

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While the steam locomotive was aborning in the early nineteenth century, a canal craze swept over the young United States of America. Promoters proposed a plan for the canalization of the entire state of Georgia from Savannah to the mountains and even through the mountains to connect with rivers in Alabama.[2] Fierce competitive spirit stimulated by local and regional jealousies, competition among states, bankers and merchants hoping for increased trade resulted in a bitter struggle between the Southern coastal cities of Baltimore, Norfolk, Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah for predominance as ports of entry and export.

In South Carolina, the city of Charleston found her trade languishing, particularly in her competition with Savanah. The Georgia port flourished as the productions of fields and forests from the sand hills to the mountains moved to Hamburg on the South Carolina side of the Savannah River opposite Augusta for shipment to the coast by river boat. Wagoneers found this trip easier than the difficult roads through the soft sand of the fall line and the mud and marsh of the low country roads. Drovers brought herds of cattle, flocks of turkeys, and even gaggles of geese on foot over the mountain trails from the West to Hamburg, the colonial-times Fort Moore. While Savannah enjoyed

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[1]In his prefatory remarks, Barton explained that this paper derived from his career-long experience with the Southern Railway Company and the following sources: archives of the Southern Railway Company; the Office of Public Relations of the Seaboard Coastline Railroad; selected records at the Greenville County (S. C.) Courthouse; selected articles in the Tricentennial Edition of the Greenville (S. C.) *News* (especially those of Marion McJunkin Hewell); Editor of *American Heritage, Railroads in the Days of Steam* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, 1960); Joseph Chamberlain Furnas, *The Americans: A Social History of the United States, 1587-1914* (New York: Putnam, 1969); Fairfax Harrison, *History of the Legal and Financial Development of the Southern Railway System* (n.p., n.d.); John Belton O'Neall, *Annals of Newberry* (Charleston: S. G. Courtenay and Company, 1859); Lance Philips, *Yonder Comes the Train* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1965); Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *A History of Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt to 1860* (New York: Octagon Books, 1968 -- originally published, c. 1908).

[2]The state of South Carolina spent $1,888,654.46 between 1817 and 1828 in a massive program of canals and river improvements. In 1828 the State Superintendent of Public Works reported that cotton could be marketed by water from every district of the state except Greenville, - *Ed.* See David Kohn, editor, *Internal Improvements in South Carolina, 1817-1828* (Washington, D. C.: privately printed, 1938).

the distinct advantage of a navigable river reaching into the interior piedmont, Charleston's hinterland was limited to the comparatively short Ashley and Cooper river valleys. The only access to the interior of South Carolina was limited wagon service over the poor roads of the era.

Charleston interests realized their unfavorable competitive position and saw that immediate action was needed. Early, the Charleston merchants and bankers had supported the efforts of the state to open navigation to the interior by river improvements and canals. By the late 1820's it was obvious that inland navigation to the interior by the Santee River system was no answer to the problem. Consequently, agitation began for the building of a railroad into the interior. This resulted in a public meeting in Charleston on August 6, 1829. After speeches from some of Charleston's leaders, the meeting adopted a resolution asking the legislature to direct that two surveys be made: one for a canal to connect the Ashley and Savannah rivers and the other for a railroad from Charleston to Augusta. From this beginning developed the South Carolina Railroad from Charleston to Hamburg which opened in October, 1833.

The South Carolina Railroad did not bring the great flow of trade through Charleston that its promoters had anticipated. Almost immediately after the completion of the railroad to Hamburg, a campaign began to generate interest in and to raise money for the construction of a rail line from Charleston through Columbia and across the mountains to Cincinnati to tap the products of the "Great West" -- Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. After a charter was secured in South Carolina, the Charleston interests called a meeting in Knoxville with commissioners from the Carolinas and Tennessee to discuss the possibilities of a trans-montane railroad. Led by Robert Young Hayne, then Mayor of the city and well-known for his recent nullification debate with Daniel Webster, the Charleston group and the representatives of states along the proposed right of way launched the Louisville, Cincinnati, and Charleston Railroad project.[1] However, jealousies and suspicions arose among the

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[1]The project was sometimes called the Charleston, Columbia, and Cincinnati project, particularly in South Carolina. *Ed.*

promoters, the national economy collapsed into sharp panics of 1837 to 1839, and Robert Y. Hayne died in 1839. The railroad was not constructed.*

In the early days of railroad construction there was intense cut-throat competition among towns, counties, states and regions. North Carolinians were reluctant to invest in or charter a railroad which promised substantial benefit to South Carolina. Georgia was even more hostile. For several years the Augusta city council blocked efforts of the South Carolina Railroad to bridge the Savannah River or even to transfer freight cars across the river by ferry for further movement to the North or West. The Georgia legislature, as long as possible, blocked all construction of railroads connecting with other states. This jealousy and irrational competition, aided by the financial panic of 1837 delayed railroad construction in the South. This was perhaps one of the main contributing factors in her defeat in the War between the States (1861-1865).

Evidence of this intense competition was no where better illustrated than in the attempts of the southeastern ports to tap the rich trade of the West. After the failure of the Louisville, Cincinnati, and Charleston project in 1839, the dream of a railroad to the West did not die. By the late 1840's cotton prices had recovered somewhat and the South Carolina Railroad Company attempted to renew interest in the project. However, there was little capital available and South Carolina promoters argued and temporized. Meanwhile, the Georgia legislature financed the construction of the state-owned Georgia Railroad from Augusta to Marthasville which opened in 1845. A second road, the Western and Atlantic, was built from Marthasville to Chattanooga on the Tennessee River. Marthasville, renamed Atlanta, became a railroad center with several roads radiating from it. The town grew as an important distribution and financial center among southeastern cities. It was so important by the 1860's that General William Tecumseh Sherman's army destroyed it to interrupt the flow of supplies to the Confederate troops in Virginia.

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*In the 1890's the Columbia to Cincinnati line was completed.

Within South Carolina, the abandonment of the Louisville, Cincinnati, and Charleston railroad project for a line from the port of the Great West did not allay permanently all hopes of realizing parts of the dream. The "Columbia Branch" from South Carolina Railroad at Branchville to Columbia opened in 1842. In 1845 the legislature granted a charter to the Greenville and Columbia Railroad Company for the purpose of constructing a railroad from Columbia to Greenville. The new company also had the power to unite with and become a part of the South Carolina Railroad Company. John Belton O'Neall, fifty-one-year-old lawyer, former state senator, and chief justice, became the first president of the Greenville and Columbia Railroad. His perserverance, enthusiasm and integrity were major factors in the eventual completion of the railroad despite such difficulties as floods, panics, and ever-present financial straits.

A major early problem was determining the route that the Greenville and Columbia would follow. The 1845 charter authorized the directors of the company to select the route they considered best. As soon as the directors opened the subscription books for the purchase of stock, every village between Columbia and Greenville demanded that the proposed road pass through its area. Anderson, Newberry, Laurens, and Abbeville were the chief contenders. Potential stockholders in these towns refused to subscribe if their wishes were not met. At one point it seemed that Anderson, not Greenville, would be the western terminus. The Greenville group, headed by Vardry McBee, opposed this vigorously. McBee doubled his subscription for stock and other Greenvillians increased their subscriptions provided the original plan with Greenville as the terminus was followed. These promoters threatened that if their demands were not met, the Greenvillians would cancel their subscriptions and put their money into another line which would be built by the newly-formed Greenville Railroad Company. Consequently, after much legislative and financial wrangling and numerous charter amendments, the final route followed generally the Saluda River from Columbia to Greenville as O'Neall and

McBee had insisted, with branches to Abbeville and Anderson.[5]

The route decided, the officers of the Greenville and Columbia opened the subscription books for potential stockholders. In the revised charter the state agreed aid in financing the project by matching dollar for dollar the amount raised by private subscription with bonds of the South Carolina Railroad held by the state. When this scheme failed to raise the money necessary, the Greenville and Columbia contracted a floating debt of $800,000 which it refunded periodically until the completion of the road in 1853. Eventually this mortgage issued to fund the floating debt was refunded with state-endorsed bonds. The Greenville and Columbia Railroad, with its branches to Abbeville and Anderson opened in December, 1853, the first railroad to reach Greenville and the first railroad to penetrate the South Carolina Piedmont.[6] Perhaps the arrival of the first railroad gave Greenville a head start manufacturing which has not been overcome entirely to this day. The onset of the War Between the States, however, delayed full realization of the economic impact of the Greenville and Columbia.

After the War Between the States it was necessary to rebuild the Greenville and Columbia.[7] Again the state came to the rescue of the financially distressed railroad by extending its lien on the property. Some $700,000 of state-endorsed bonds had been issued under the caption "Confederate States of America." These bonds were not legal after the collapse of the Confederacy. Therefore the state endorsed a new issue in 1866, bringing the state's interest in the road to $900,000. When the Greenville and Columbia was forced into involuntary bankrupt-

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[5]John Caldwell Calhoun had led a group of potential subscribers who proposed the Anderson terminal with proposed extension along the Seneca River (where Calhoun owned land) through Pendleton District to Chattanooga and Cincinnati. When the O'Neall-McBee interests won out making Greenville the western terminal, the Anderson-Pendleton interests secured a charter for the Blue Ridge Railroad to be built through the mountains to the West.

[6]The Spartanburg, Union, and Columbia from Alston to Spartanburg was completed eight years later.

[7]Former Governor Martin F. Ansel told me a few years before his death that he remembered as a boy watching the construction of the Greenville and Columbia line south of Greenville. This illustrates the unreliability of memory as the basis for written history. Actually, Ansel was born only two years before the original construction of the road. What he saw was the repairing and relaying of the railroad just after the War was over, at which time he was a lad of school age.

cy in 1870, the state treasury was repaid while private and institutional stockholders suffered tremendous losses.

The Atlanta and Charlotte Airline Railroad (soon absorbed into the Richmond and Danville system) was Greenville's second railroad. Its first train arrived in the city of 1872. Both passenger and freight stations were at the end of West Washington Street within a few hundred feet of the present Southern Railway passenger station. The Greenville and Columbia freight and passenger stations were at College Place off Augusta Road near Vardry Street, and there were no connecting tracks between the two.* In 1886, however, the Richmond and Danville leased the Greenville and Columbia for ninety-nine years. A connecting track was constructed from College Place station to the Richmond and Danville stations and joint use of the facilities at the end of West Washington Street began, although the old passenger station at College Place continued in use for a number of years. Through the Richmond and Danville system Greenville had rail connections with points between Washington and Atlanta, and through these terminals with both the West and the East. In the panic of 1893, the Richmond and Danville system went bankrupt but was reorganized in 1894 as the Southern Railway Company. The Southern brought under one management a conglomerate of existing lines, some owned and others leased by the company.

The Greenville and Laurens Railroad completed its line from Laurens to Greenville in 1886, with its first train run on September 8, 1886. This third railroad to enter the Greenville market became part of the Charlestson and Western Carolina which, in turn, became part of the Atlantic Coast Line. Now it is a part of one of the ten major railroads of the nation, the Seaboard Coastline Railroad Company.

The railroad known as the "Swamp Rabbit" which the late Frank Hamblen described as "shorter than most but as wide as

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*For an account of Thomas Claghorn Gower's horse drawn street railway which operated between the two railroad stations from 1873 to 1897 see Thomas Charles Gower, "Greenville's First Street Railway System," *Proceedings and Papers of the Greenville County Historical Society, 1962-1964*, pp. 33-38.

any" was the fourth railroad built into Greenville. The "Swamp Rabbit" was built as the Carolina, Knoxville, and Western Railroad, later became the Greenville and Knoxville, and is now the Greenville and Northern. It has had an uncertain financial history which I have not documented. Since the road has had only marginal impact upon the business life of this area, I made only a desultory effort to record its genesis. The original charter was obtained in 1902. In 1906 H. H. Prince, W. H. Patterson, and C. S. Morrison filed for a revised charter, increasing its capital stock.[9] The most interesting data regarding the Greenville and Northern was given to me by word of mouth, which may not always be in strict accord with the facts.

The inimitable Norwood Cleveland says he remembers quite clearly when the Greenville, Knoxville, and Western was completed to Marietta in 1893, terminating just in front of the Cleveland home. His story is that a ceremony followed similar to that enacted earlier by the first trans-continental railroad took place at Marietta -- a golden spike was driven into the last tie. The lad who handed the spike to the railroad official was Norwood Cleveland! I would believe Norwood Cleveland implicitly but it seems incredible he was old enough to play such a role in 1893. However, that is his story and who am I to deny it.

The railroad remembered best as the "P and N" was the fifth railroad to be built to Greenville and the only one which depended from the beginning on electricity for motive power. In the early twentieth century James Buchanan, Duke's Southern Power Company (now Duke Power Company) had a surplus of electric power. Southern Power Company had two electric street car properties, the Anderson Street Railway Company and the Greenville Traction Company. At this point some speculationis in order: seemingly, Southern Power Company (ie, the Dukes), as the result of their experience with street car systems, saw an opportunity to use their surplus power for an interurban electric railroad which could be

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[9]For a somewhat different appreciation of the railroad see Mrs. Robert Norman Daniel, "The Swamp Rabbit," *Proceedings and Papers of the Greenville County Historical Society, 1962-1964*, pp. 22-32. *Ed.*

operated at very favorable terms competitively. For sure, on January 3, 1910, J. B. Duke, B. M. Duke, W. S. Lee, H. J. Haynesworth, Ellison Smyth, Lewis W. Parker and W. J. Thackston secured a charter for the Greenville, Spartanburg, and Anderson Railroad. The four million dollars of stock, less that held by the incorporators, was quickly sold and construction began. The railroad, later renamed the Piedmont and Northern and now a part of the Seaboard Coastline Railroad, was constructed in two segments: a South Carolina Division and a North Carolina Division. Federal regulations prohibited the construction of a new interstate railroad which would substantially parallel an existing road. The Southern Railway Company protested to the Interstate Commerce Commission that the proposed interurban would in fact substantially parallel Southern's tracks. This view was sustained and the Interstate Commerce Commission withheld permission for an interstate connection of the two divisions of the Piedmont and Northern. The two divisions did operate intra-state for many years but were not connected into a single line.

Seventy-five years ago when the Southern Railway Company and I arrived in Pickens County no one would have been so bold as to predict that my life span would see the decline and demise of the new, romantic, powerful instrument that lent meaning to the statement "Westward the course of empire wends its way." The mighty steam locomotive yielded to deisel electric power in the post World War II years, at the time the most efficient and economical power source known. To the best of my knowledge only one steam engine operates on a main railroad in the eastern United States today. It runs on the Clinchfield Railroad between Spartanburg and Irwin, Tennessee, on occasional excursion runs. Perhaps this is fitting for the Clinchfield Railroad is a line that partially realized the old dream of Charleston merchants for a railroad from that city to the "Great West."

But the railroads made their impact. Joseph Chamberlain Furnas expressed it well when he wrote:

> Thoreau, in his cabin by Walden pond, resented the invasion of his privacy when the railroad was constructed between Boston and Fitchburg. However, the excitement and romance of the rails penetrated his retreat and he wrote: "The railroad changed life's tempo.

> The cars' arriving and leaving are epochs of the village day. Farmers set their clocks by them. Men have improved in punctuality. Thus one institution regulates a whole area. Men talk and think faster than they did in the stagecoach and office."

We can assume that the railroads of the nineteenth and early twentieth century had a similar effect in Greenville.

But we had no Thoreau to record the fact!