

The Huntsville Historical Review

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President's Page

As the new president of the Huntsville/Madison County Historical Society, I'm proud to be part of a group of some of the most interesting people around. Their enthusiasm and love of history is contagious, and I look forward to a rewarding term of office.

This issue of *The Huntsville Historic Review* should inspire nostalgia for everyone who ever rode a train – anywhere. Many times I boarded the *Tennessean* (see picture in this publication) from Huntsville to Memphis, then down to Mississippi to visit my roommate. The Huntsville Depot was usually quiet, as the train left out very late at night. The sounds, the smells, the jostling of the train – they could never be compared to a journey by bus or airplane. Younger generations will never experience that feeling, however we are all lucky that such a historic treasure, the Huntsville Depot, has been saved from near-demolition.

Bob Adams
President

Editor's Notes

Soon after the publication of this issue, the Bicentennial Celebration will be - pardon the expression - history. Students of the past love to re-enact, recreate, and re-hash, so no doubt someone, somewhere, is already planning the celebration of another historic event. The wonder of this is that in this day and age, those of us who like to dig for information can always find something new about an old story. Which brings us to this exciting issue.

This issue focuses on the Historic Huntsville Depot – in my very biased opinion, the most historic public building in all of Madison County. Two new writers have joined us in this issue: Mr. Winter Forests, an English Instructor with Calhoun Community College, who also works at the Historic Huntsville Depot as a tour guide. As with most students of history, he enjoys digging for more information about the railroad, and has come to love the old building and its legends. Mr. Robert Reeves, Channel 19 news anchor, also tries his hand at writing to compliment the capture of the Huntsville Depot with another historic event that was planned simultaneously – the Great Locomotive Chase. Robert looks out the studio windows from Channel 19 at the Depot, and he also appreciates the fascinating stories the old building has to offer. Our new writers both share a desire to see the Historic Huntsville Depot continue to flourish as a place for people to learn and remember.

As an interesting side-note, I've included letters written to and from my ancestor, J. W. S. Donnell, regarding his somewhat tainted relationship with the Memphis & Charleston Railroad. In history, it is too easy to look back and not appreciate the struggles people before us went through for our conveniences. These letters bring a new perspective.

These two gentlemen have researched their stories thoroughly to capture the drama of the Civil War – one of America's darkest chapters in history.

Jacque Gray
Editor

The Huntsville Depot: An Important Port on the “Iron River”

WINTER FORESTS

The railroad was Huntsville’s first great industry. Although it was not until 1860 that the Memphis and Charleston Railroad Company (M&C RR) chose the city as its Eastern Division Headquarters, the idea of a railroad for north Alabama had been around since the late 1820s. Businessmen as far east as Charleston, South Carolina, had been looking for ways to open up trade with the west, in general, Memphis, Tennessee, and the Mississippi River in particular. In the late 1820s, Major David Hubbard, a lawyer and land owner in the Huntsville, Alabama area, traveled to Pennsylvania to see what a new invention, the locomotive, could do for the businessmen of this area. On his return, he met with Mr. Ben Sherrod of Courtland, another wealthy north Alabama landowner, to discuss ways in which the “iron river” could be brought to north Alabama.

By 1829, Major Hubbard, Mr. Sherrod, and the people of Tuscumbia were convinced that the easiest way to transport cotton from their town to the Tennessee River was by rail. On January 15, 1830, a charter was obtained - no railroad could be constructed without a state charter, and the Tuscumbia Railroad was born. It was the first chartered railroad west of the Alleghenies. The distance of rail needed to connect Tuscumbia and the Tennessee River was just over two miles. Because one of the principle landowners of the area refused to sell his right-of-way, nothing further could be done until 1831. At that time, the plantation in question was purchased by the company.

On June 5, 1831 a groundbreaking ceremony was held for the Tuscumbia Railroad. It was not, however, until May of 1832 that construction actually began. It was completed on June 12, 1832.

Even before the Tuscumbia Railroad reached completion, a charter granted by the Alabama Legislature on January 13, 1832 provided for its extension and its incorporation as the Tuscumbia, Courtland, and Decatur Railroad (TC&D RR). It was decided that this extension was needed because of a rocky, nearly impassable stretch of the Tennessee River which lay between Tuscumbia and Decatur, known as Muscle Shoals. This area of the river required that boats loaded in Tuscumbia be unloaded above the Shoals, put aboard wagons, and transported around this area of the river before being reloaded onto boats and moved on down the river to their destination. An extension of the railroad would save not only time, but money as well. As a result, the original two miles of track now became just over forty-two. On July 4, 1834, the TC&D RR was officially opened between Tuscumbia and Courtland. Five months later, in December, the section between Courtland and Decatur was opened.

Even though the TC&D RR allowed cotton to be transported past the Shoals, there still remained the long trip down the Tennessee, the Ohio, and the Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans. North Alabama planters were still concerned because of the time it took to get their crops to market and because those crops could go only to New Orleans. They wanted the option of choosing whether to send their cotton to a Gulf coast or an eastern seaport. And, so, for the next thirteen years, plans were discussed regarding the ways in which the TC&D could be connected to a nationwide rail system.

Beginnings of the Memphis & Charleston Railroad

The State of Tennessee was the first to back the idea of a railroad that would run eastward through Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. Tennessee Governor James C. Jones insisted that development of this new railroad was a patriotic duty. With his backing, on February 2, 1846, the State of Tennessee provided a charter for the Memphis and Charleston Railroad Company. On October 27,

1846, representatives of the newly organized M&C RR advertised that a convention would be held nine days later on November 5. Delegates from the surrounding states and territories were invited to come to discuss development possibilities.

In 1847, a few months after the death of Ben Sherrod, the TC&D was sold at public auction. It was purchased by David Deshler, who reorganized it as the Tennessee Valley Railroad Company.

Area politicians and businessmen lobbied hard to have the railroad come through the city of Huntsville. On November 7, 1849, Mr. A. E. Mills of Huntsville was appointed agent for north Alabama. Tennessee Governor Jones and M&C RR Agent Mills immediately began the task of raising money through the sale of railroad stock. When the sales were totaled on December 2, 1849, Alabamians were the major stockholders.

On January 7, 1850, the State of Alabama provided a charter to the M&C RR for the right-of-way along the Tennessee Valley Railroad. For \$75,000, paid in stock, the M&C RR received not only the tracks and land of the Tennessee Valley Railroad, but also the warehouses, depots, shops, and tools. On April 30, 1850 Governor Jones was elected president of the M&CRR at the Huntsville stockholder's meeting. It was then decided that the railroad would definitely go through Huntsville, and that Huntsville would serve as the new railroad's Eastern Division Headquarters.

On April 23, 1851, the route was laid out. It was to begin in Memphis and run eastward on the track of the LaGrange and Memphis road to LaGrange; from there it would travel through Jacinto in Tishomingo County, Mississippi to Tuscumbia, Alabama.

From Tuscumbia, it would run on the tracks of the Tennessee Valley Railroad, to Decatur, from Decatur to Huntsville, and from Huntsville to Crow Creek, Jackson County, Alabama where it would intersect with the Nashville-Chattanooga Road. All totaled, this would include 271 miles of track.

Construction began in Madison County on May 21, 1851. The track was completed in sections, so that by 1855, one could travel from Memphis to Pocahontas, Mississippi, then take a stage line into Tuscumbia, transfer back to the train for the trip from Tuscumbia to Huntsville, and continue to Stevenson, again by stage, to connect with the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad.

By the summer of 1851 Madison County's governing body, then known as the Commissioners Court, had agreed to an initial investment of \$100,000 in the Memphis & Charleston Railroad and was authorized to invest another \$50,000. On June 6 of that same year, the county fathers decided to make the investment subject to the vote of the people. In August, by a vote of 1,195 to 726, the people of Madison County approved the investment. In 1852, the M&C RR began to buy land in Huntsville.

By 1855 all the lines which composed the Memphis and Charleston Railroad had been completed. On October 13 of that year the *General Garth* made its entrance into the city of Huntsville. Even though it had come only from Decatur (about twenty miles away), the huge crowd was nonetheless excited. One of the men present that historic day exclaimed excitedly that it was "the greatest day in the history of Huntsville since John Hunt!" Their dream of a north Alabama railroad had finally come true.

Having the first train chug into town was a monumental step, but the process was far from finished. In April of 1856, The M&C RR constructed a brick freight station here. During 1857, an engine house and a machine shop were completed. The passenger shed and ticket office were completed in July 1858, and a car shop was finished two years later. This was also the year that regular service with Tuscumbia began.

In 1856, the railroad concentrated on buying land adjacent to the depot and its tracks until they owned 150 acres. This land was divided into blocks and houses were built for the company's employees.



THE HUNTSVILLE DEPOT

Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library

In the spring of 1859, the line to Stevenson was completed. This is where the tracks owned by the M&C RR would end. The directors had decided the previous year not to extend beyond this point, since connections with other railroads provided service to the Atlantic coast. A 30-year lease had been signed for the tracks of the Chattanooga Railroad between Stevenson and Chattanooga.

To celebrate the completion of the eastern section of the road, the M&C RR provided a complimentary ride to Stevenson, and a return ride for the stockholders. The 300 passengers made the trip in four hours. In order to prevent an accident, a separate locomotive was run several hundred yards ahead in advance of the train, to signal any obstacles discovered on the tracks.

A State-of-the-Art Depot

Completed on July 1, 1860, the passenger shed was replaced with a new 70' x 58' passenger station. The civil engineer for the project was Gabriel Jordan, Jr. of Virginia. (He married the second daughter of John and Mary Lewis and stayed in Huntsville a few years before moving to Mobile.) The depot was built of brick on a stone foundation and contained every comfort, convenience, and necessity imaginable. On the first floor was the ticket office, Engineers' and Conductors' room, waiting and retiring rooms for both ladies and gentlemen, and a baggage room. On the second floor were the offices of the Superintendent, the Secretary, Treasurer, and other officers of the railroad. The third floor was reserved as a bunkroom for the employees of the railroad, and provided sleeping quarters for railroad officials.

By late 1860s, the M & C RR's Eastern Division Headquarters in Huntsville included a freight station, a 13-bay roundhouse with turntable, an engine house, a car shop, and a machine shop – all made of brick. Directly across the street from the depot the company also owned and operated a hotel known as either the “Venable” or “Ven-

erable.” In addition, the company encouraged businesses to relocate to the area around the depot with tempting real estate offers.

The Nation at War

In April 1861, Huntsville native Leroy Pope Walker, grandson of the “Father of Huntsville” LeRoy Pope, ordered the first shot fired at Ft. Sumter. As the Confederate Secretary of War, his order was carried out and a surprised nation braced for war. Residents of Huntsville prepared and the men left town to fight the enemy. In May, M&C RR Superintendent William Babb resigned and William Jordan, a northern clerk, left town in a hurry. The lines had been drawn.

On June 26, word came to town that Victor Venable, son of Venable Hotel clerk James Venable, had died of “bilious typhoid fever” while in training with the Madison Rifles. Soon, other bodies would be arriving by train.

On the cold foggy morning of April 11, 1862, Federal troops, under the command of General O. M. Mitchel, marched into Huntsville. Their prime objective had been to capture the Eastern Headquarters of the M&C RR and the telegraph office located in the depot building which would break the vital east-west artery of the Confederacy. On that day, Mitchel wired Captain J. B. Frye:

“We have captured about 200 prisoners, 5 locomotives, a large number of passenger, box, and platform cars, the telegraphic apparatus and offices, and two Southern mails. We have at length succeeded in cutting the great artery of railway inter-communication between the Southern States.”

Other documents, however, indicate that General Mitchel underestimated the extent of what was captured. According to these documents, a complete accounting included; the road with its office, books,

shop, tools, rolling stock, cross-ties, a large stockpile of wood, 18 engines, 100 freight cars, six passenger cars, two baggage cars, and a number of smaller cars. Also captured was an additional train carrying 159 Confederate soldiers who were just returning from the Battle of Shiloh.

The Yankee General

General Ormsby M. Mitchel had been born in Kentucky. While still a young child, his parents had moved across the river to Ohio where he grew up. With the help of family friends, Mitchel received an appointment to West Point, where he graduated last in his class in 1829, the same year as Confederate General Robert E. Lee.

After graduation, he remained at West Point where he taught mathematics, the subject in which he had majored. Once he completed his military obligation, Mitchel left the Army and returned to school where he received a law degree. He then practiced law in order to make enough money to support his first love – astronomy.

Mitchel helped establish the U.S. Naval Observatory and the Harvard Observatory. He also helped raise the money to build the Cincinnati Observatory, where he was the director when the war broke out. Like many of his fellow classmates at West Point, he re-enlisted. Mitchel was promoted to Brigadier General and placed in charge of the Fourth Ohio Army. “Old Stars,” as his men called him, was given orders to move south and capture the Eastern Headquarters of the M&C RR at Huntsville.

General Mitchel reached Fayetteville, Tennessee, where he encamped on Wednesday night, April 9. Here he waited until almost noon on Thursday, April 10, for news of the Battle of Shiloh, which had begun on the 6th of April. If the Confederates were to win this battle, General Mitchel believed, they would send reinforcements to Huntsville, and therefore make the capture of the depot more diffi-

cult. If the Federal troops were to win, taking the depot would be a much easier matter.

The next day General Mitchel received news that, although technically the battle had been a draw, General Grant had claimed victory.

In the meantime, it appears that a conspiracy was brewing in Huntsville. A man known to some as J. Howard Larcombe, and to others as Charles E. Larcombe, along with his wife, worked as substitute telegraphers. Martin Pride, the regular depot operator, had, on April 7, gone to Fayetteville, Tennessee on "personal business." He was replaced by John M. Webb, an assistant telegraph operator from Memphis. On the morning of April 10, assistant railroad superintendent J. M. Hopper unexpectedly sent Webb to Corinth. Larcombe, a clerk in the machine-shop and an experienced telegrapher, was assigned to take Webb's position inside the depot.

Larcombe's wife was the operator at the telegraph office near the courthouse. Before leaving for Memphis, Webb heard that northern troops had been seen near Meridianville, a small town just north of Huntsville. He had given Mrs. Larcombe a telegram to this effect, and told her to send it to General P.G.T. Beauregard at Corinth. Mrs. Larcombe neglected (or refused) to comply with Webb's request. The Larcombes, as it was learned later, were both "northern born Lincolmites."

The plan was coming together. Union General Mitchel ordered his men to sleep at about 6 p.m. on the evening of April 10. At 2:00 a.m. on the morning of April 11, his troops were awakened and marched quietly towards Huntsville. As dawn was breaking over Monte Sano, General Mitchel and 5,000 men - 4,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry - entered Huntsville, a Huntsville defended by approximately 350 infantry and 150 Confederate cavalry. As a result of these overwhelming odds, and because the attack had been a complete surprise, there was no resistance from Huntsville.

But shots were fired. A black man who worked as a fireman on one of the engines was the only casualty recorded. Two trains in the railyard tried to escape. One train succeeded, making it all the way to Chattanooga. The other, filled with soldiers just returning from the Battle of Shiloh, was stopped when the tracks in front of it were blown up by a Union cannon ball.

After the depot and the City of Huntsville had been secured, General Mitchel had to decide what to do with the 159 Confederates on the captured troop train, who were now prisoners-of-war.

Ironically, the only building in Huntsville large enough and secure enough for this job was the depot itself. Those prisoners who were wounded too severely to be moved were left in the box cars in the yard. The rest were taken to the third floor, where they were held for ten days before being transferred to Camp Chase, a prisoner-of-war camp in Ohio.

By the time Mitchel and his army had arrived, the Larcombes had a significant number of telegrams they had received, or been requested to send, concerning Confederate troop movements. It has been hinted that the M&C RR actually carefully arranged for the Larcombes to be in the positions they were in so that they might aid in Mitchel's capture of the depot. The board of directors of the M&C RR saw the War as a losing proposition and hoped that by cooperating with the Union, they could save the depot from complete destruction. If that indeed had been their thinking, it appears to have been correct, since the Huntsville Depot, unlike many of its contemporaries, did survive intact. However, the War would do much more damage to M&C RR in the long run.

As a result of his taking of the Huntsville Depot, General Mitchel received his second star. He was, only months later, accused of dealing in captured Southern cotton and allowing his troops to steal and plunder at will, especially during the Battle of Athens, a city some

twenty miles west of Huntsville. Locally, that incident would forever be known as the Sack of Athens.

Mitchel traveled to Washington, D.C., where his resignation was refused. He was, however, re-assigned to the Department of the South at Hilton Head, South Carolina, where he died of yellow fever on October 30, 1862.

The Union Army remained in Huntsville until late 1862, returned in July 1863, left again that same month, returned a third time in August, again in September, and finally returned in November to completely occupy the city, where they remained through the winter of 1864.

Following the Civil War, the United States government returned the line, which was in almost total ruin, to the Memphis & Charleston Railroad Company. The company never fully recovered, and after being operated by several other lines, it finally went bankrupt. On February 26, 1898, it was purchased by Southern Railway System.

A Rebirth

As far as is known, except for minor changes, the Huntsville Depot remained as originally constructed until 1912, when Southern Railway remodeled the interior first floor to better accommodate the traveling public. The addition of steam heat, electric lights, new “retiring” rooms, and elegant furniture made this one of the finest stations in the Southern Railway System. The second and third floors were modified slightly. It was probably during this renovation that the window shutters, two chimneys and slate roof were removed and the exterior painted. The baggage express building, concrete platform, and long train shed were constructed the following year.

The depot thus continued to service the City of Huntsville without major changes until the late 1960s when Southern Railway first cut back and then finally discontinued passenger service through Huntsville.

On September 10, 1971, the depot building became Madison County's first landmark to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. A month later, on October 28, 1971, after 111 years of use as a railroad facility, final approval was given by the City Council for its purchase. The purchase price of the building and surrounding 1.8 acres was \$37,750. The City Council decided in December of 1972 to preserve the structure by restoring it as nearly as practical to its original state.

Recognized for Historic Significance

Through the efforts of the Alabama Historic Commission in Montgomery, the depot was placed on the list of National Historic Landmarks. To deserve this rating the site must have historic relevance, not only to the surrounding locale, but to the entire nation as well.

The depot's prominence during the Civil War qualified it for inclusion. This is the only ante-bellum passenger depot surviving in Alabama and one of the few remaining in the United States. The discovery of the Civil War graffiti on the third floor, however, is what gives the depot its national importance.

The station was originally unpainted red brick when built in 1860. It was painted gold and green - the Southern Railway colors - in 1912. Although the date is uncertain, the building received its first coat of red paint probably sometime in the 1920s. The building was again painted green and gold during its present restoration in the 1970s. The platform shed was built in 1887, and replaced the original 1860 shed which was lower than the present shed and supported by posts. The posts were removed because they were in the way of



**WATERCRESS FOR THE
WALDORF-ASTORIA HOTEL**

Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library

passengers boarding the trains. The original platform was constructed of wood. A concrete platform was poured in 1913. At that time, the 435-foot platform was constructed adjacent to the tracks. The separate baggage building was built in 1912/1913 with additions for a railway express office in the 1920s.

The first floor of the station was always used for passengers and operation of the railroad. The second floor held the corporate offices of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. The third floor was originally used as bunkrooms for the train crews and railroad workers.

The depot was the first public building in Huntsville with indoor plumbing. The depot then became a great place for people to come to experience this modern convenience for the first time. Rather than restrooms, these rooms were called “retiring rooms.” They were located on the east side of the building – where the entrance is located today. The arch over this east side of the building supports the two vaults on the second floor. The south side of the first floor, where the theatre is located today, was where the operation of the railroad was located – the baggage office, the ticket office, the telegraph office, and business offices.

In 1898, Southern Railway purchased the Memphis and Charleston Railroad Company, and in 1912/1913, completed a renovation of the 1st floor. The 1st floor the guest sees today has been restored to that era. The only exception is the stairway. During the 1912/1913 renovation, that stairway had been removed to limit access to the 2nd and 3rd floors. The stairway now leading to the 2nd floor was reconstructed during the 1970s restoration. This stairway was modeled after the original 1860 stairway that leads from the 2nd to the 3rd floor.

Most of the windowpanes in the building are original wavy glass. There was a law at one time that one could not give testimony about a crime witnessed through this kind of glass because of the distortion.



BLOWING STEAM

Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library

On the front outside wall, located behind a window shutter, is a patched place where a cannonball narrowly missed going through the window. There are several stories to explain the scar, but one story that seems most plausible is that a foundry located across the street accidentally discharged a loaded cannon at the building. Another possibility is that it happened when a Union caisson crossing the tracks accidentally discharged their cannon, killing several soldiers.

The Huntsville Depot Today

As one enters the depot, the first two doors to the left offer access to the depot theatre. There is where the depot guests have the opportunity to view a 12 minute film on the history of Madison County and the Huntsville Depot. The first door on the right gives the guest entrance to a ticket office that looks pretty much the way it would have looked back in 1912. Here the visitor will meet three robots. Andy Barker, who sells tickets, handles the “funds by rail” and is an expert on the Southern Railway schedule. John Hamilton is the telegrapher. Even though there were telephones available during this period of time, the railroad did not believe the technology was reliable enough to be used in conducting business. Therefore, as in the decades previous, all railroad business was conducted by telegraph. Telegraph operators like John were nicknamed “Sparks” or referred to as “brass pounders.” Their telegraph key was known as a “clacker.” Once a man had been a telegrapher long enough, he could tell whether the message he was receiving was being sent by Jim, Joe, or Jane by the rhythm, or swing, of the key. Yes, there were Janes who worked as telegraphers. These, in fact, were the first jobs that women had on the railroad. The railroad decided early that women were indeed trainable and, as an added bonus, would work for half the salary of their male counterparts.

The third man in the depot office is Horatio Clark. Horatio’s job was to check the brakes and couplings and make certain that the

wheels were well oiled. Since the trains reached speeds of 80 to 100 miles an hour, there was lots of friction generated. If the wheels were not properly oiled, this friction could generate sparks which could catch the grass next to the tracks on fire, or had even been known to set fire to the wooden boxcars themselves.

From the depot office, guests step into the old waiting room. This room, however, did not always look the way it looks today. In 1860, the space leading from these north doors was a hallway to the ticket office which was opposite the north doors. The room that is now the ticket office was originally the Ladies' Waiting Room. The Men's Waiting Room was over in the northeast corner. Before the turn of the century and women's suffrage, the general feeling was that women and children should be protected from being exposed to the disgusting behavior of men – smoking cigars, chewing tobacco, talking rough. Chewing tobacco could actually have been reason enough to keep the women and children separated from the men. When a man chewed, he would eventually have to spit. Spittoons were provided for that function. When the time for spitting came, he might or might not aim at the spittoon.

There is a story of an old man who came in to take the train for the first time. He had chewed tobacco all his life. He saw the brass containers sitting on the floor here and there but had no idea what they were for. When the time came to spit, he spat, right onto the floor in front of him. The equally old cleaning man saw what the customer had done and quietly moved a spittoon to where the tobacco juice had splattered onto the floor. The customer spit again. Again the old cleaning man moved the spittoon to where the spit had hit the floor. This happened several more times before the customer addressed the cleaning man: "If you don't quit moving that thing," the customer finally said, "somebody's likely to spit right into it." While some men were not aware of spittoon etiquette, others were. Nevertheless, if they aimed and missed, they were not likely to clean up the results. If women, with their long dresses, walked across the floor where a man had spit, she might get the disgusting mess on the



THE TENNESSEAN

Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library

hem of her skirt. If children were in the same room with men, they might decide to get down on the floor to play. Once again there would be a mess some mother would have to clean up.

Against the ticket office wall are flat-topped trunks stacked on top of each other. Against the end of the bench is a trunk with a rounded top, often called a camel-backed trunk. Men usually used the trunks with flat tops. The railroad figured that once a man had packed for a trip, he would not need access to his trunk until he reached his destination. These trunks, then, could easily be stacked on top of each other and not moved again until the passenger had reached his destination. Women generally used the camel-back trunks. The railroad recognized that five minutes into a trip, a woman could think of something she might desperately need. If she used a flat-topped trunk there would have to be stacking and unstacking in order to meet her needs. The camel-backed trunks solved this problem, since stacking a trunk on top of the camel-backed trunk would be virtually impossible. The other reason women used the camel-backed trunks had to do with the large, elaborate hats women wore during this period of time. The rounded tops of the trunks gave those hats greater protection.

The bench was one which was used in the waiting room. Armrests have been built onto the bench at regular intervals. The railroad did not do this out of any desire to make a passenger's wait more comfortable. These were installed for a much different reason. The depot was warm in the winter and cool in the summer. If a passenger arrived at the station too early, he might be tempted to stretch out on the bench and take a nap before his train arrived. The railroad thought this unsightly behavior needed to be controlled. The armrests, then, were installed to force the waiting passenger to sit upright.

Installed in the outside sills of the depot windows are large spikes. These were called loafer spikes. This was to prevent people - who came to the depot to watch the trains come and go or to sight-see or gossip - from engaging in that activity while sitting in the comfort of the depot windows.

The Men's Waiting Room is enclosed on three sides by a model train system that has been some six years in the works. The display on the right gives one an idea of what a train depot would have looked like in the 1860s. The display on the left shows what a more modern depot might look like. The only thing that has any relationship to Huntsville at all is the copper-topped building in the center section of the display. This is the old Monte Sano Hotel, which existed from 1885 to 1946.

A Resort for the Wealthy

Even before north Alabama was settled and the mountain to the east of the city was named Monte Sano (Italian for "Mountain of Health"), the four civilized Indian nations – the Cherokees, Chickasaw, Creek, and Choctaw – knew of the curative properties of the mountain springs found there. In 1827, only eight years after Alabama became a state, a health colony had already been established on the mountain. People traveled from as far away as New York and Chicago to bathe in the mountain's natural springs and enjoy its cool, fresh air. In 1829, Rowe's Female College, or the Monte Sano Female Seminary, was constructed. Here young women received classes in language, music, science, and painting, and all for a tuition of \$120 per year, including room and board. In 1833 the town of Viduta was formed.

As early as 1878, the local newspaper had suggested that someone build a resort on the top of Monte Sano. In 1884, there was a promotional drive launched to attract investors. In 1886, two brothers from New York, Michael J. and James O'Shaughnessy, provided the capital for the North Alabama Improvement Company. One of their objectives was to build the Monte Sano Hotel. Construction began in February of that year. The site for the 308 x 200 foot foundation was selected by nationally renowned architect John Rhea. Major Schrimshaw, one of the most notable landscape artists in New York, was hired to lay out the grounds. He built most of the hotel's ornamental structures out of local cedar trees, and his designs be-

came so popular that the Monte Sano Rustic Furniture Company was begun.

After several delays, the hotel was completed on June 1, 1887. It was constructed roughly in the shape of a cross, had three stories, and 233 rooms, all of which opened to the outside. No two rooms were furnished the same. A porch surrounded all but a small portion of the hotel in the back. The south wing housed guests' baths, a billiard room, and bowling alleys. There was also a formal dining room, a ballroom, a ladies' parlor, and a men's smoking room.

At the time access to the mountain was limited to the Monte Sano Turnpike, which had been constructed in 1859. It began with what today is Tollgate Road and moved up the mountain parallel with what now is Bankhead Parkway. In 1887, hotel guests had to make the four-and-a-half hour coach ride from Huntsville to the front of the Monte Sano Hotel in a large carriage called the Tallyho. Once checked-in at what the World's Congress of Climatologists called "The Mecca for Sick Babies," management would advise guests which spring waters would best treat their ailments. This water was then taken to the bathhouse.

The first manager of the hotel, S.E. Bates, considered the kitchen to be the foundation of a good hotel. English-born Jessup Whitehead, who had worked in Chicago and New York, was immediately hired and placed in charge. Professor Abbott's orchestra was available on weekends for both afternoon matinees and evening meals.

By the end of the first season, the hotel reported that 1,000 guests had already stayed there. The management also declared its first profits.

However the Tallyho proved to be inefficient. More economical transportation was needed for the upcoming season. During the construction of the hotel, the idea of a railroad had been discussed. In early 1888 Arthur Wilson was hired as Chief Engineer for this project.



THE WAITING ROOM

Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library

He came up with a plan, and the North Alabama Improvement Company obtained the right-of-way on June 30, 1888. They created the Huntsville Belt Line and Monte Sano Railroad Company on August 2, and transferred all rights to the North Alabama Improvement Company.

The route chosen for the railway was one which offered the most scenic view. This route began at the Huntsville Depot, ran south along Jefferson Street, turned left on Clinton and wound through Fagan Hollow up the mountain to the backyard of the hotel.

From as early as June of 1888, this railway was referred to by the press as a “dummy line,” a term applied to a railroad which came off the mainline and extended to an end point usually belonging to a private company. The 26-ton Baldwin engine was disguised to look like a trolley in order to keep from frightening horses. The original intent had been for the railroad to encircle Huntsville before continuing up the mountain. The O’Shaughnessy Brothers intended to make this railroad the center of a future industrial park.

The completion of the track was delayed because Huntsville experienced its first labor strike when the workers on the Monte Sano Railway expressed their unhappiness with the wages they were receiving. An agreement was finally reached and the railroad was completed August 7, 1889, well into the hotel’s third season. The 8 ½-mile-trip from Huntsville to the Monte Sano Hotel took just thirty minutes. Points of interest were announced along the way. A pamphlet praising the railroad also advertised that the North Alabama Improvement Company owned some 200 choice building sites along the route, all of which were for sale

A ticket to ride on the railroad was 25 cents for adults and 15 cents for children, each way. Trunks were delivered for 50 cents each. The railroad ended approximately one block from the east side of the hotel. Carriages, for an extra fee, transported passengers from this station to the hotel’s front doors.

Unfortunately, an accident occurred the first season that would adversely affect the train's reputation for the rest of its short life. The engineer, as he started down the steep grade on the far side of the mountain, began applying the brakes. The brakes held, but the sand pipes, which provided extra traction, were clogged and the wheels slid along the rails, finally jumping the track. There was no damage done to either passengers or the train. The incident nevertheless frightened potential riders.

During the hotel's off-season, the railroad company tried to make a profit by hauling supplies up the mountain for the residents of Viduta. In addition, the company planned and promoted picnics and excursions on the mountain. Neither of these endeavors was successful.

The train continued to run in 1890, 1891, and 1892. On June 7, 1893 it was announced that, due to the World's Fair in Chicago, which was expected to attract a majority of the tourist trade that year, the railway would not operate. The train ran again in 1894, but not in 1895, when the hotel was not opened due to litigation among the stockholders. So few passengers had been riding the railroad, that its owners could not afford to make the necessary repairs. In 1896, the Monte Sano Railroad was sold to creditors under a court order. The ties and steel rails were sold in 1897, and the remainder of the equipment was scrapped.

Problems with the hotel had begun to surface in 1895. The closing of the railroad in 1896 did not help matters much at all. The next season, the hotel hosted a large number of Spanish-American War veterans. Electric lights were installed in 1898. This was also the year that the U.S. Surgeon General declared Monte Sano to be the second healthiest place in the United States. The end for the hotel came two years later in 1900. Because of a bad economy and the discovery of the causes of a variety of diseases, especially yellow fever, the mineral baths provided by the Monte Sano Hotel were no longer in vogue, and so the North Alabama Improvement Company was forced to sell the property.



BEFORE RENOVATION

Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library

For almost ten years, the hotel remained unused. During this period of time, there had been serious speculation concerning an electric railway that would go up the mountain. There had been even an auction of lots on the mountain to raise money for this purpose. In April of 1909, it was announced that Ed Pulley was about to reopen the old Monte Sano Hotel, and a railway would be ready by July. Mr. Pulley's plan was to turn the hotel into a state tuberculosis sanitarium. Unfortunately, he died unexpectedly, and the project died with him.

Abruptly and unexpectedly, the old hotel was purchased by Lena Garth, a wealthy Huntsvillian, as a summer home for her father. The New Yorker had been ill, and so he and his wife moved into the old hotel, hoping the climate would be good for his health. Unfortunately, he died within two years. In the late 1920s, the Monte Sano Hotel was opened once a year for gala balls. It remained in the Garth family until 1944 when the abandoned building was sold for salvage to the Mayer Lumber and Supply Company of Birmingham. Many Huntsville residents can boast that an item of furniture or a piece of architecture in their home had once been in the Monte Sano Hotel.

About fifty feet past the entrance to Monte Sano State Park stands an old chimney. Today, this is all that remains of the old Monte Sano Hotel.

Items of Every Day Life

The steamer trunk located against the south wall of the depot was used by a conductor who worked on for the Southern Railroad. Since those who worked on the trains would be away from home anywhere from ten days to two weeks at a time, these trunks made nice little portable closets. On the left side, the conductor could hang his uniforms, and on the right side were drawers in which he could keep his personal possessions. Before the lighting on trains became as efficient, trains would be required to stop at the nearest depot at dark where the passengers and crew would spend the night to begin their trip again at dawn.



1970s RENOVATION

Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library

The picture on the wall is that of George Bryant, one of the Huntsvillians responsible for helping to raise the \$10,500 it took to build the depot back in 1860. The depot building is made of brick on a stone foundation. The concrete floors were not installed until 1912. The ceiling on the first floor is 14 feet high. The ceiling of the second floor is 13 feet nine inches in height. The walls of the first floor are made of solid brick, and are 18 inches thick. The walls on the second floor are made of solid brick as well, but are only 15 inches thick. The walls on the third floor are 6 inch stud walls framed partitions.

To the right of the picture of Mr. Bryant is a water fountain called a bubbler. This is the kind of water fountain that would have been installed during the 1912 remodeling by Southern Railroad. When the handle is turned, the water bubbles up and falls back on itself. For sanitary reasons, it is only for display today. Near the top of the ceramic back on the left side there is a small spigot. A button at the top would produce running water. This was originally used to fill a cup with water. It was fashionable for men of this era to wear beards and of course many men chewed tobacco as well. When a man spit, some the tobacco juice inevitably dribbled down into his beard. If he leaned over to drink from the fountain part of the bubbler, water would get his beard wet and that would get the dried tobacco juice wet. When he stood up, the tobacco juice would stain his clothes. For that reason, most men who had beards and moustaches would carry with them a small collapsible metal cup. The cup could be extended and filled with water. Once an individual had drunk his fill, the cup would be collapsed back down and slipped into one's pocket.

The stairway that leads from the first floor to the second floor was removed during the Southern Railroad remodeling of 1912. The Southern wanted to limit access to the second and third floors. They felt the best way to do this was simply by removing the stairway and using the fire escape behind the door in the back of the room, which is now the depot office. The stairway was reinstalled during the remodeling of the 1970s.



Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library

The original color of the walls on the 2nd floor was white. The lighting was so poor that white paint was used to reflect the light and make it easier to see. Once electricity was installed, the white paint was covered with brown paint in 1912/1913 by the Southern Railway. The floors are the 1860 floors and are made of pine. All of the door-facings and windowsills on this floor are the original 1860 construction.

While some visitors admire the architecture of the depot, others appreciate the affiliation with trains. Still, many visitors come to examine the historic graffiti left by men who are long gone. The first of the Civil War graffiti is located at the top of the stairs on the second floor. This is a sketch of Major Stout, a Union officer who was involved in the capture of the depot in 1862.

All the rooms on this floor were the corporate offices for the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. After Southern Railway removed the staircase and sealed the opening, the rooms on the second floor were primarily used for storage.

The room located in the southeast corner of the building was the Secretary/Treasurer's office. Both of the main 2nd floor offices have their own vaults. The vault for this room is in the left corner of the room behind a small door. Another vault just like it is located on the other side of its far wall. Entrance to that second safe is from a room on the other side of the building. This safe did not have a combination lock but was made to look like a regular door with a regular keyhole. Even though it is made of steel filled with concrete, the door itself was painted in a style called "faux bois" or false wood. The enormous hinges on the heavy door is the only sign that it could not be a regular door. The door is four inches thick, and the walls of the safe are fifteen inches of solid brick. These vaults were used to store company payrolls and protect cash that was taken off the trains when they pulled into the station at night. Until the early 1870s, trains didn't run at night. It wasn't safe. The headlamps weren't very effec-



Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library

tive and there was little fencing to prevent cattle and horses from roaming wherever they wanted. As a result, trains remained in the station overnight.

The bricks in front of the fireplace, as well as those which make up the floor of the vaults, were made on site, using clay from the banks of the Tennessee River.

There are eleven fireplaces throughout the building. When the depot was first built, the mantels were made of brick. These brick mantels were eventually replaced by mantels made of cast iron. These functioned like the old cast iron wood stoves. The fire in the fireplace would heat up the metal and radiate out into the room to make for more efficient heating. These fireplaces originally used wood for fuel because the trains used wood. When trains converted to coal in the 1887, the fireplaces in the depot were converted to coal as well.

A metal pipe protrudes from the ceiling. At one time the depot was heated and lit by gas. In this room at one time a glass chandelier hung from the ceiling and was lighted by natural gas. When electricity came along, the depot makes the transition and now uses it for both heating and lighting.

The 1:12 scale model train which rests along the east wall was built by Mr. Yankovich of Fayetteville, Tennessee and was donated to the museum after his death. It is a working model that weighs about 300 pounds, operates with coal as its fuel, and can attain speeds of up to 15 miles per hour. It is an accurate reproduction of the steam engines of the 1880s. The cowcatcher, light, bell, and the chimney contribute to the authenticity.

On a typical engine, a straight chimney indicated that the fuel was either coal or diesel. A funnel shaped chimney indicates the fuel was wood; the funnel shape served as a spark resister to keep flying sparks of wood from flying out the chimney and catching the wooden cars or foliage near the track on fire. Behind the chimney there are three

domes. The two domes nearest the cab were steam domes. The dome between the chimney and the first steam dome was called a sander. This is where sand would have been stored and heated by the engine. A pipe ran from the sander down each side of the engine to just in front of the first large, driver wheel of the locomotive. Whenever the engineer needed a little extra traction, a rope that ran from the sander back into the cab would be pulled. This dumped sand onto the track in front of the driver wheel to give extra traction for inclines, icy tracks, or sudden stops.

Steam engines were designated by the types of wheels they had. The model engine in the display case has the three sets of wheels which were used in this designation. The small wheels in the very front were called pilot wheels. The large wheels behind them were called the driver wheels. Behind the driver wheels were a third set of wheels called the guide wheels. The display engine is a 4 x 4 x 2. That means there are four small pilot wheels, four large driver wheels, and two small guide wheels behind the driver wheels. The most common steam engine from 1845 through 1900 was the 4 x 4 x 0. That meant there were four pilot wheels, four driver wheels, and no guide wheels.

Outside the Secretary/Treasurer's room is a three-wheel velocipede. In the yard adjacent to the depot building, there is the better known four-wheel variety. The larger four-wheel velocipede was used to carry workers and equipment when there was a problem found with the track that would take more than one man to correct.

The three-wheeler was used by an inspector to ride up and down the tracks, making certain that the rails were clear, the spikes were holding tight and the crossties were all in good shape. If a train came along during his inspection, the driver could easily lift the third wheel and flip his velocipede off the track, wait until the train passed, return it to the track and continue on his way. The third wheel of the three-wheel velocipede was adjustable. This was due to the fact that until 1887, when the U.S. Government standardized all track throughout the country, there were as many as 23 different gage railroads

ranging anywhere from 3 feet to 7 feet the inside of one rail to the inside of the other. Some municipalities purposely made their tracks a different gauge than those which ran into the city. Having a different gauge track was a good way to generate business that otherwise might not be there. Passengers would have to get off the train, purchase a ticket, and pay to have their luggage transferred from one train to another. While waiting for their train the passenger might decide to spend money on food, drink, or other items. Occasionally the railroads would even go to the trouble of lifting freight and passenger cars with cranes and replacing the axles with those of the correct size. Amazingly the Memphis and Charleston Railroad made the standard gauge changed to Memphis and Stevenson in one day, May 3, 1886.

In 1887 the United States government standardized the gauge of the railroad tracks throughout the country. The standard gauge set then still exists to day – 4' 8 ½". While this number may sound somewhat unusual, there are a number of stories about how this width was decided. The one thing all these stories have in common is the fact that the standard gauge can be traced all the way back to the northern part of England where working railroads first came into being. The most interesting story begins with the way in which coal was initially taken from the mines. Two horses were harnessed together and hooked to wagon. As the horses made their trips, pulling the wagons out of the mines, they made ruts in the ground. When the mining companies first began to use rails they decided the simplest thing to do was lay the rails in the ruts the horses had made as they pulled the wagons from the mines. The distance between the inside of one horse-made rut and the other was 4' 8 ½". A second story is that this standard was set thousands of years ago by the Romans. The width of the axel for their chariots, it is said was 4' 8 ½" from the inside of one wheel to the inside of the other. Finally, there is the story that the tracks are actually five feet in width if one measures them from the outside of one rail to the outside of the other. If one then subtracts the width of the rails one comes up with the inside width of 4' 8 ½".



AFTER 1970s RENOVATION

Courtesy of Huntsville/Madison County Public Library

In addition to standardizing the width of the modern American railroad track, the railroad companies also standardized time. Before the railroads, every town operated on sun time. Those times could vary widely. It was vital to coordinate the running times of trains and so in mid-November 1883, "railroad time" was originated. Railroad time became the standard time we use today.

Against the wall opposite the door to the Secretary/Treasurer's Office is a train whistle from an old steam locomotive. Carlton E. Bauknight (1891 to 1973) was a steam locomotive engineer with 53 years of service on the Seaboard Airline Railway. Each engineer was identified by the sound of his steam whistle, and each railroad would purchase the type of whistle the engineer requested. The whistle was attached to the locomotive he operated. Engineer Bauknight's whistle was attached to a 4 x 6 x 4 steam locomotive. He was the engineer on the "Crescent City Limited," which ran between Jacksonville, Florida and New Orleans, Louisiana. His part of the run took him from Jacksonville to River Junction, Florida. Upon his retirement, the Seaboard removed this whistle and presented it to Mr. Bauknight. His initials were stamped on top of the whistle so the roundhouse workers would know which locomotive he operated. The whistle was donated to the Huntsville Depot by James E. Hill.

To the left of the velocipede a small hallway leads to a second hallway. To the right is an exhibit of what life would have been like around the turn of the century. There is a gasoline pump from the 1920s and early 1930s. The handle is used to pump gasoline from the storage tank in the ground beneath the pump to the ten-gallon tank on top where one can actually see what one is buying. The nozzle is then placed in a receptacle. A lever is moved to one side. Gravity does the rest. In addition to the gasoline pump is an old oil or kerosene pump from the same era.

Across from the oil pump is a general store from around the turn of the century. Inside one will see an old radio that required ear-phones and so only one person could listen to it at a time. There are

two irons, one black and one blue, which were heated by gasoline or kerosene. There is also a wooden washing machine to which a small gasoline powered engine would be attached. There is a churn with a crank attached. There is also the old cash register.

As one moves west along the hall there is a small niche which contains a variety of memorabilia from the railroad days.

This hallway ends in the Cotton Room. Cotton, for many years, was “king” in Alabama. That’s why Alabama came to be known as the Cotton State. It was discovered early that the cotton growing well along the Gulf coast did not grow quite as well in the north Alabama climate. The early planters found in Africa a cotton that would thrive in this climate. The one they found had a long, sticky seed which meant that in order to make it economically viable, there would have to be a way in which the seeds could be separated from the cotton. As a result, the cotton engine came into being. Of course the name cotton engine was soon shortened to cotton gin, and the process of separating the seeds from the cotton became known as the ginning process. In addition to the cotton seeds there were also a number of other by-products that resulted from the ginning process. One might have heard the expression “walking in high cotton.” This actually has reference to the fact that cotton, when first planted in this area, grew to be six feet in height. In order to make it easier to pick, it was hybridized to shorter stalks, and with the advent of mechanical pickers, hybridized once again.

On the right as one enters this room is an invincible seed sacker. Next to the seed sacker are a number of the by-products resulting from the ginning process. On the right side of the door that leads back out into the main hallway is a seed planter. On the scales above the seed planter hangs a pick sack. These sacks would vary in size and material. There were small sacks for children and others for adults that might be as long as twelve feet to be pulled on the ground behind the worker. Across from the seed planter, to the left of the

doorway leading into the main hallway, is a 500-pound bale of cotton. Cotton bales came in sizes of 250 pounds to 500 pounds to 750 pounds. To make a 500-pound bale of cotton it takes between 1,200 and 1,500 pounds of raw cotton.

The room located in the northwest corner of the building is called the Colonel Budd Room. Colonel Budd, who died in 1989, was a gentleman who upon his retirement from Redstone Arsenal spent more than 1,500 man-hours constructing the model seen here. This display shows what Huntsville would have looked like around 1862. In his reproduction, Col. Budd used old photographs, drawings, and insurance maps to help give him an idea of what Huntsville would have looked like then. The red brick building located to the left of the center of the display is the depot building itself. That is the way it would have originally looked when it was built in 1860. In 1912 when the depot was purchased by the Southern Railroad, it was painted green and gold – the Southern Railroad colors. Although there is no exact date, the building was painted red probably sometime in the 1920s. The building was again painted green and gold, its present colors, during the restoration of the 1970s.

The small gray building across the street at the western end of the depot building was the railroad hotel. Although the railroad crew bunked on the third floor, the passengers still needed a place to stay. There were two hotels in downtown Huntsville. Both were considered to be too far away to be of benefit to the railroad. Once again there are two stories about what happened next. One story goes that the M&C RR purchased the old Wortham Hotel across the street, remodeled it, and changed its name to the Railroad Hotel. It was also variously called the Venerable (Venable) Hotel and the Donegan Hotel. Another story is that it had been built from the ground up for the M&C RR for the convenience of its passengers and the profit of its shareholders. In either case, it was not rebuilt after it burned to the ground in 1890.

The long low building on the other side of the tracks east of the depot building was the old freight depot.

To the north of the depot was a thirteen bay roundhouse. This was also known as the Huntsville Shops. This is where the M&C RR did most of the maintenance, repairs, and storage of the locomotives used along its line. The smaller buildings at the eastern end of the roundhouse were where freight and passenger cars were built. Because the M&C RR never fully recovered after the Civil War, the excess tracks were taken up in 1875, and the roundhouse was taken down. The bricks from the roundhouse were sold to individuals who built private homes at the end of Clinton Street.

Nothing resembling the plantation at the northwest corner of the display was ever located near the depot. Colonel Budd decided to put it in to give the guests a flavor of the period.

Just outside the door of the Colonel Budd Room is a buggy which was used by a doctor when making house calls from the middle of the 19th century through the first decades of the 20th Century.

The banister leading from the second floor to the third floor is from the original 1860 construction. The banister which leads from the first floor to the second was modeled on the one seen here. The seam shows where the reproduced and the original banisters connect.

The room at the top of the stairs on the third floor is one of the three rooms in which nearly 200 Confederate prisoners-of-war were confined after General O.M. Mitchel captured the depot on the morning of April 11, 1862. While the prisoners were here, some wrote their names, regiments, hometowns, thoughts, stories, and prayers on the walls. It is this room, the largest room of the three rooms, that contains most of the historic graffiti found in the depot. The prisoners were held only ten days before being moved to a prisoner-of-war

camp in Ohio. Except for a few months in 1863, Federal troops occupied the depot for the remainder of the war and left their graffiti on the walls as well. After the War, these rooms were used as bunkrooms for train crews and workmen who left most of the graffiti from that time.

At some point in time, the walls were covered with a red plaster that remained in place for almost thirty years. During the renovation of the 1970s, one of the historic consultants began to pick at the plaster that had bubbled and peeled with age. It was then that the writing on the wall was discovered underneath. The plaster was carefully removed and the graffiti exposed. The combination of the removal of the stairway between the first and second floor in 1912 and the covering of the walls with plaster helped protect the graffiti from total destruction.

This graffiti includes the story of Grover Harris. He was one of the Federal troops stationed here during the Civil War and signed his name on the wall. He was later killed in the Battle of Atlanta. After his death someone who knew him was passing through the depot and wrote his obituary above his name. Other graffiti includes the outline of a very tall man, a rocking horse near the floor, "Happy New Year to all in the Year of Our Lord, 1864," the record of a crap game from 1906, and an officer's jacket from the Civil War - just to mention a few.

The largest piece of graffiti is the peace dove, which is on panels 28 and 29. It stands three feet in height and five feet in length. The artist was L. Pierce. The timeframe for this artwork is uncertain.

Panel #25 is the most important research date in the entire structure. When the building was being restored there was not much known about its history. This piece of graffiti told that the building was renovated by the Southern Railway in 1912 – 1913. Researchers then consulted newspapers of that time for more information.

The Depot Locomotive

Inside the cab the engineer sat on the right. Engineers worked first as brakemen, then as firemen, and finally as engineers. His, and later on her, first duty would be to operate a small switch engine like the one on the depot grounds. This engineer pulled and pushed cars in order to make up a train for the main line. Later, the engineer would be assigned to a local freight run which would require making each and every stop along the line. Finally, there would be along-distance freight run or a passenger run.

The horizontal level in front of the engineer was the throttle which could make the engine go faster or bring it to a stop. The large lever on the floor on the right was called the "Johnson Bar," which directed the engine to go forward or backward. As the engine gained speed this lever could be moved towards the center in order to use less steam and conserve fuel.

The valve at the engineer's left elbow is the brake handle. This engine had steam-powered brakes as opposed to the air-brakes which are used today.

On the left side of the cab sat the fireman. His job was to shovel coal from the tender and maintain the fire in the firebox. The short levers on the floor were used to shake the grate, causing the ashes to fall through to the ground. The fireman was responsible for maintaining steam pressure in the boiler. The large gauge in front of the cab indicates that pressure of up to 200 pounds per square inch were possible.

The valves on the fireman's side of the cab enabled him to direct water from the tender into the boiler. It was essential that the water level not be allowed to get too low.

Behind the engine is the passenger car. This car was built in the late 1930s. The windows could be raised by the passengers, indicating that the car was not air-conditioned.

When the depot was operational, there was no iron fence running beside the tracks. The train would stop and the passengers would walk under the covered walkway to and from the depot doors.

Behind the passenger car is the boxcar. It was built in 1937. It gets its name not from its shape but because it was used to carry boxes, large and small. This car is made of wood with extended metal bracing. During World War II, boxcars began to be built entirely of steel with internal metal bracing.

The last car in the train is, of course, the caboose. This caboose was built in 1953 and typical of the thousands which rode at the tail end of the freight train. Train crews rode inside. The principle crewman was the conductor, who was in charge of the “business” of the train, including delivering and picking up cars as the train proceeded along its route. The table at the back of this car was not only the place where the train crew ate, but where the conductor did his paperwork, maintaining records of all the shipments for which he was responsible.

Most trains also carried a flagman and up to three brakemen. The flagman’s job was to set flares well down the track behind and ahead of the train if it had to stop on the mainline. Before air-brakes were invented around 1900, the brakemen had to climb to the top of the train and crank down the brake wheel of each car individually before jumping to the next. It usually required a mile or more to stop an average train.

When the train was underway, at least one crewman sat in the high seat up in the cupola. From here, he could see along the length of the train over the tops of the cars, watching primarily for smoke

from overheated wheels, or “hot boxes.” Each wheel has a box covering the axle in the center. This cover can be snapped open to allow grease, originally tallow, to be applied to the bearing surface. The entire wheel assembly was known as a “truck.” This caboose has old-styled “Bettendorf” trucks. Modern railroads use roller bearing and axle ends that are exposed.

Couplings are what hook cars together. The automatic version used today was invented in 1873 to replace the old “link and pin” coupling. This kind of coupling was in general use until around 1900 when the courts forced the railroads to adopt the automatic version.

Caboosees are no longer used by railroads. Instead, at the rear of the train, on the very last coupling, is a computerized device with a radio inside. This “End-of-the-Train” unit provides information to the engineer and in effect replaces the caboose. Modern diesels provide an office for the conductor and brakeman inside the cab.

The turntable at southeast of the depot is a real, working turntable. It was built in 1937 and came to the depot from Oakdale, Tennessee. The rotating portion is about 80 feet long and is turned by electric motors located below the control booth. It can turn a locomotive completely around or turn it to go into any of the five bays of the roundhouse.

The engine on the turntable is a three-quarter replica of a typical 4 x 4 x 0 “American” class engine that was used during the Civil War. A famous engine of this type was the *General*. The *General* was involved in what came to be known as the “Great Civil War Train Chase.” The original *General* is in a museum in Kennasaw, Georgia.

The roundhouse is a replica. It is authentic in size, shape, and building materials. An actual roundhouse would have tracks leading to each bay. Beneath the tracks in that bay would be a pit which would enable mechanics to get beneath the locomotive and work on it.

The track that encircles the grounds is used by the museum's trolley car and can be used by guests to complete their depot experience.

Timeline of Important Events

1850 - Memphis & Charleston Railroad is chartered in Alabama.

1850 - 1855 - Huntsville businessmen buy stock in M&CRR

1855 - First track reaches Huntsville. First train, the *General Garth* arrives at the temporary station on October 13. Regular freight service between Decatur and Huntsville begins on October 22.

1856 - The brick freight house is built. (The cost is not given in the annual report). This was, until it burned in March 2004, the oldest railroad building still in existence in Alabama. As a railroad facility, the building had only two owners: the Memphis & Charleston Railroad Company, 1856 – 1898, and Southern Railway System, 1898 – 1981.

- The telegraph comes to Huntsville, giving Madison County contact with Memphis and Montgomery. The North Alabama Telegraph Company completes the lines. The first telegraph office is located at the land office on Eustis Street until it was moved in 1860 to the new Huntsville Depot.

- Venable Hotel is built at a cost of \$2,376. Additions were made after 1857 to enlarge the hotel. The hotel was gone by the late 1890s when it was replaced by a lumberyard.

1857 - A storehouse is built on depot grounds for \$3,000. The location is unknown.

- Large brick engine house and machine shop are built for \$19,466. (These structures are no longer standing.)

- Turntable and shop machinery is purchased and installed for a total of \$7,000.

1859 - A ticket office is built. No cost is given. It was a wooden, temporary structure.

1860 – The passenger house of brick is built for \$10,500. The ticket office at Huntsville was moved and a passenger shed built for \$430. The passenger depot was not completed until December, 1860, but was far enough along to have the ticket office and telegraph equipment moved into it by July 1860.

- A car shop of brick is completed in February for \$6,169.49.

1861 – A store house for railroad stores is built for \$1,500. This building, the last built before the Civil War, is located just east of the freight depot. It was brick and in the early 1900s was rented to the Cudahy Packing Company. It was torn down in 1910.

1862 - Union General Ormsby M. Mitchel captures Huntsville.

CIVIL WAR – There was no construction by the railroad company and no destruction by the Federal Army.

1868 – A new lumber shed is constructed.

1869 - A passenger car shed, 35' x 126' is built for sheltering coaches.

1870 - Platform scales are put in.

1875 - The Huntsville Shops are completely shut down and moved to Tusculumbia in 1876. All the shop buildings remained vacant until 1881 when they were rented to an oil company.

- The 13-bay roundhouse is dismantled and the bricks sold to homes being built on Clinton Street.

1883 - "Railroad Time" is established – time zones, standard times.

1886 - Trains are converted from wood to coal for the next several years.

1887 - American railroads adopt standard spacing or gauge of 4' 8 ½".

- Extensive repairs are made to the passenger station, including painting.

- This time the first "colored waiting room" is provided and major changes are made to the interior first floor of the passenger station. These changes are made in order to conform to the requirements of the Alabama Railroad Commission.

1888 - A new 50,000 gallon water tank is built for \$596.

1895 – The Station Buildings Report states that the Huntsville buildings are in "good condition."

1898 - Southern Railway purchases depot from M&C RR.

1912 - 1913 - Southern Railway renovates the building and removes stairs from first floor.

1968 – The last passenger train came through Huntsville.

1971 – The City of Huntsville purchases the building from Southern Railway. The building is placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

1972 – The Depot is placed on the list of National Historic Landmarks. Remodeling begins.

1978 - First floor stairway is restored.

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And special thanks to Roianne Little, without whose obsessive/compulsive tendencies to collect information, this task would have been a much more difficult.

The General

ROBERT REEVES

On April 11, 1862, the 3rd Division, Army of the Ohio, under the command of General Ormsby M. Mitchel, entered Huntsville during the early morning hours. The army had traveled from near Shelbyville, Tennessee at night to keep the element of surprise. The wheels of the wagons were wrapped in cloth to muffle the sounds. The city of Huntsville was taken by total surprise and about 200 Confederate soldiers were taken prisoner. Fifteen locomotives, a large amount of passenger, box, and platform cars, the telegraph apparatus and two Southern mail trains were also captured.

The taking of Huntsville and its depot was the first part of a two-fold plan. While Mitchel was settling into Huntsville, Union raider James Andrews was in Marietta, Georgia, carrying out the second half of the plan, which was to bring another Civil War chapter into the Huntsville Depot.

The “Great Locomotive Chase” or “Andrews’ Raid,” has been called the most exciting escapade of the American Civil War. It stands as a tribute to American courage and valor. The men who participated in the event were the first to be awarded our country’s highest military decoration – the Medal of Honor.

After one year of the War, there were two main Confederate armies, General Joseph E. Johnston’s in Richmond, Virginia and General P.G.T. Beauregard’s in Corinth, Mississippi. The line of railroads linking these armies ran from Memphis to Chattanooga via Knoxville to Richmond. The State of Georgia, with its troops, weapon factories, and food production, was counted on heavily by the Confederate Government to help supply both these armies. The Western & Atlantic Railroad that connected Atlanta with Chattanooga became a prime target for sabotage. Destruction of this critical link was the main objective of a Union spy by the name of James J. Andrews and a band of 22 Union soldiers disguised as civilians.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Andrews engaged in espionage in the guise of a merchant of contraband materials for the South. He was a spy for General Don Carlos Buell in the Fort Donelson Campaign. In March 1862, Andrews and eight trusted men left for Atlanta with the intention of burning bridges in North Georgia and in Bridgeport, Alabama. He planned to find an engineer sympathetic to the Union that would help steal a locomotive. He wasn't successful, so he headed back to Tennessee. In the meantime, General Buell and his army left for Shiloh and were replaced by General Ormsby Mitchel with 10,000 Ohio troops at Shelbyville, Tennessee.

Andrews met with Mitchel and convinced him that with more men and his own engineers, the Western & Atlantic RR could be put out of commission by destroying the bridges – thus isolating Chattanooga from Atlanta and the South. If the raid was successful, the War could be shortened by two years because there were only 1500 armed Confederate troops in Chattanooga. It seemed like a workable plan. Unknown to the planners, the bloody battle of Shiloh was raging.

On April 7, 24 volunteers from the Ohio army and a civilian named William Campbell went into Shelbyville to purchase civilian clothing. The men were warned that if caught they would be considered spies and most likely be hanged. That night, after arming themselves with revolvers, they met their leader, James L. Andrews for the first time. Andrews told them of the plan to be in Marietta, Georgia by midnight on April 10th. Early on April 11th, they would seize a train and head north, burning bridges, tearing up telegraph lines and railroad tracks along the way.

Their raid and Mitchel's assault on Huntsville were planned to occur simultaneously.

According to the plan, when Andrews and his men arrived in Huntsville with the captured locomotive and the news that the W&A RR was in ruins, Mitchel and his men would then safely move on to Chattanooga with ease.

Andrews had not taken into consideration that April in the South means rain. For the next ten days, heavy rains fell.

The Yankees traveling in twos and threes had only three days to travel over 100 miles. Mud and swollen streams made travel difficult. Andrews knew there were no soldiers from Fleming County, Kentucky, so he told the raiders if they were questioned by anyone, to say they were from Fleming County and were heading to Chattanooga with hopes of joining a Kentucky-raised Confederate regiment. This story would later become responsible for their downfall. Andrews made a crucial error in judgment on Wednesday, April 9th. He decided that the weather would delay Mitchel's attack and passed the word that they had an extra day to reach Marietta. This proved to have a disastrous effect in the raid's outcome. Two men were stopped near Jasper, Tennessee and impressed into a Confederate artillery unit. Two others managed to get to Marietta on April 10th, but Andrews and 21 of the raiders didn't make it until midnight Friday, the 11th of April.

At Marietta, Andrews learned that Mitchel had not been delayed, but had indeed taken Huntsville. Despite the raid's timing being thrown off, Andrews was determined to go on. He told the raiders, "Boys, I tried this once before and failed. Now I will succeed, or leave my bones in Dixie."

At 4:00 a.m., Saturday, April 12th, the locomotive named the *General*, pulling the regular mixed passenger and freight train, steamed out of the car shed in Atlanta. Engineer Jeff Cain gave her full throttle. Andrew J. Anderson was the Fireman and the Conductor was William A. Fuller. Fuller would figure very prominently in the chase. Also on board was Anthony Murphy, foreman of motive power and machinery for the W&A RR.

At about 5:15 a.m., Andrews and 19 men boarded the northbound train in Marietta. (Two of the raiders didn't wake up in time to catch the train.) The large group of men caught Conductor William Fuller's attention as he had been warned to watch for deserters, but they as-

sured him they were joining the army. Andrews had instructed his men to sit in the same car. In Andrews words, "When the train makes the Big Shanty breakfast stop, keep your places till I tell you to go. If anyone interferes, shoot him, but don't fire unless you have to." Andrews knew the crew would leave the train and take breakfast at the Lacy Hotel. He also knew that there was no telegraph key at Big Shanty, the closest being at Marietta. Across the tracks from the station stood the white tents, guard, and 3000 recruits of the newly established Camp McDonald, a Confederate training camp.

At 6:00 a.m. the train drew into the Big Shanty station. As the whistle blew, Conductor Fuller pulled out his watch and shouted "Twenty minutes for breakfast!"

The conductor, engineer, fireman, and most of the passengers quickly entered the Lacy Hotel for breakfast. Andrews and his engineers moved slowly alongside the train working their way to the locomotive. Nervously, they climbed into the cab and seized the throttle! Other raiders uncoupled the passenger cars from the last boxcar. A Confederate guard watched as the 16 raiders jumped into the empty boxcar. He apparently didn't realize what was happening as Andrews swung aboard the *General*, and the engineer yanked the throttle open. The big driver wheels spun on the track. Sparks flew, and "The Great Locomotive Chase" was on!

The *General* was a 4-4-0 locomotive built in 1855 by Rogers, Ketchum & Grosvenor and was one of the finest on the W&A RR line. Andrews chose the *General* because he knew it was pulling three empty boxcars to Chattanooga to bring back supplies. He also knew that the average train could only travel about 33 miles on a tank or tender of water, which meant several stops once he took over the train. Andrews concocted a story of an "emergency ammunition train" for General Beauregard and his troops at Corinth to tell anyone that questioned him. The average speed of locomotives in 1860 was 7 to 45 miles per hour, so it could take 12 hours to travel the 138 miles from Atlanta to Chattanooga. It has been estimated that during the chase, speeds of 65 miles per hour were reached.

The raiders ran into trouble almost immediately. About a mile down the track, the locomotive came to a stop. Unknown to the raiders, Engineer Cain had routinely closed the dampers at Big Shanty. The engine's fire had all but gone out. In a short time, the Yankees were able to rekindle the fire and were on their way. Later the raiders stopped to cut the telegraph wire and block the track. Andrews made sure his engineer held to the schedule so they wouldn't cause any suspicion by running too fast. He also knew that it was railroad custom to tie a red flag to the last car, indicating that another train was following, so he had one of the raiders tie a red bandana to the last boxcar. Andrews didn't want to raise any undue suspicions about his train having only an engine, tender, and just three boxcars.

The Yankee raiders cut the telegraph wire at Acworth and Allatoona stations. They also used a pry bar to remove a section of rail and piled some crossties on the tracks about four miles past Allatoona. The raiders took the rail and some crossties with them to use as more barriers. They now felt safe from pursuit. As the Yankees crossed the bridge over the Etowah River, they noticed a locomotive sitting on a spur. It was the *Yonah* with steam up and smoke rising from its stack. The Yankee engineer suggested to Andrews that they had better destroy the locomotive and the bridge too. Not wanting to tip his hand, Andrews said no, that it wouldn't matter anyway.

The Yankees took on water and wood at Cass Station. Andrews was dressed as a Confederate agent acting for General Beauregard. Andrews used the story about him running an extra powder and ammunition train for the Confederate army at Corinth. The railroad personnel knew that the Battle of Shiloh was going on in Tennessee and let him pass. He was so convincing, the wood tender even gave Andrews a train schedule.

The *General* made Kingston, but had to pull onto a siding to let the morning train from Rome pass. The station attendant was very suspicious of the unfamiliar crew and demanded to know what happened to the regular crew. Since Andrews knew there were no other

trains scheduled, he again used his powder/ammunition train story and asked why he could not proceed northward. That answer spelled bad news for the raiders. Because of General Mitchel's capture of Huntsville the day before, every train in Chattanooga that could gather steam was being loaded with supplies and sent south to Atlanta to avoid falling into the Yankees' hands. The extra day Andrews had taken to get to Marietta was coming back to haunt him.

The second train pulled in carrying a red flag. So did the third. Andrews knew another train was coming south and he had already lost an hour and five minutes in Kingston. He decided to try and beat the next train, but the elderly switch master didn't believe Andrews' story and refused to let the *General* back on the main line. Andrews overpowered the elderly man and threw open the switch himself. Now the raiders had to beat the southbound train.

Back at Big Shanty where the chase had started, the Confederate Conductor William Fuller was mad! After all, he was responsible for the *General*. At first Fuller thought deserters from the nearby training camp had taken the train. He figured they would abandon it down the line. Nearby spectators were greatly amused when Fuller, Engineer Cain, and Foreman Murphy set off in pursuit on foot. A rider was sent to Marietta to telegraph the news of the stolen train to the W&A RR. Fuller out-ran his coworkers to Moon Station, only to find that the *General* had passed through 30 minutes earlier, and the men on board had taken tools with them. Fuller now knew they weren't mere deserters. He found a pole car and backtracked to pick up Cain and Murphy before heading north.

Fuller found the telegraph lines cut at Acworth, and in his haste to get to the Etowah Station, failed to see where the raiders had removed a rail. Everyone was dumped headlong in the ditch. Angry, but unhurt, the men managed to put the car back on the track, and arrive at Etowah where the iron works engine the *Yonah* sat under steam. In no time, Fuller had the *Yonah* at full steam on the main line headed north toward Kingston in pursuit of the *General*. Fuller would later write that they made the 14 mile trip in an incredible 15 minutes.



**3/4 REPLICA OF THE *GENERAL*
AT THE
HISTORIC HUNTSVILLE DEPOT**

When the *Yonah* made Kingston, it was blocked by the same three trains that had delayed Andrews. Fuller was told he was only four minutes behind the *General*. Fuller commandeered the Rome Railroad's engine *William R. Smith*, which was clear of the mess. A group of Confederate militia jumped on board the train as he pulled it out of the station.

The raiders had actually stopped north of Kingston to cut the telegraph wire and pile cross-ties onto the track. Six miles later they cut another wire and tried to remove another rail. They weren't able to lift it and adding to their frustration was the sound of a distant train whistle coming from behind them. It was the whistle of the *William R. Smith*. Later, one of the raiders would remember it as "faint and far off, no sound more unwelcome ever fell on human ears." It was now apparent to the raiders that the Rebels were on to them and were in hot pursuit. The raiders worked to remove another piece of track before they climbed back on the *General* and steamed toward Adairsville, where they found the southbound freight train along with a storm of questions from its crew. Undaunted, Andrews continued his role of Confederate agent and ordered the freight's crew to move the train south. The raiders watched as the train moved past the *General*. The name on the boiler of the locomotive was the *Texas*, an engine that before the day was ended, would also take its place in history. Adding to the irony was that the *Texas* was the sister train to the *General*.

With the thought of failure beginning to creep into the raiders' minds, Andrews knew he had to do something. Despite the danger of the southbound trains, he told his engineer to let the *General* go full throttle. The *General* nearly collided head-on with the southbound *Catoosa* as it steamed into Calhoun. The crew of the *Catoosa* demanded an explanation, but let the *General* pass after Andrews told his powder train story again. There were no more southbound trains, so the raiders felt free to accomplish their mission of burning bridges. The Oostanaula Bridge at Resaca was just ahead!

Meanwhile, Fuller and his party on the *William R. Smith* had cleared Kingston. Fuller had climbed to the front of the engine to watch for any more obstructions or missing rails. He spotted the missing rail just in time, but again the men were on foot! The terrain was very muddy due to the continuing rain, and this time Engineer Jeff Cain dropped out of the chase. After about three miles of running, Fuller and Murphy met a southbound train. It was the *Texas*, the engine Andrews had waved on from Adairsville. The engineer, Pete Bracken, recognized Fuller and Murphy and stopped the train. They quickly climbed on board and told of the heist. Bracken reversed the *Texas* and moved back to Adairsville where he dropped the freight cars at a siding. Despite running backwards, the *Texas* had no boxcars which put The Great Locomotive Chase on more equal terms. The *Texas*, running wide open backwards, covered the ten miles to Calhoun in a little more than ten minutes, only to find that the *General* had passed just five minutes before. Fuller stopped in Calhoun just long enough to pick up two extra men and a young telegraph operator that had been sent down to find out what was wrong with the telegraph line.

Knowing he was being pursued, Andrews decided to try to take up another track, but shortly after stopping, a long clear whistle came from the south. The raiders then put the *General* in reverse, built up speed and uncoupled a boxcar sending it back at the *Texas*. At the Oostanaula trestle, the raiders tried to burn the covered bridge by setting a boxcar on fire inside the bridge. The wood wouldn't burn because it was too wet from all the rain. Andrews had the smoldering car uncoupled and left inside the bridge to slow the *Texas*, but Fuller had the *Texas* push the car out of the bridge and both boxcars were left on a siding at Resaca.

Next, the Yankees knocked out the back of the last box car and dropped crossties on the track hoping to derail or at least slow down the *Texas*. But the raiders had to stop at Green's wood yard because they were running low on fuel. The *Texas* pulled in before they could get very much water. The raiders had no better luck at Tifton. Sailing

through Dalton at full throttle, the raiders stopped just long enough to cut the telegraph wire one last time. When Fuller reached Dalton, he had the young telegraph operator he had picked up in Calhoun send a message warning the Confederate commander at Chattanooga of the raiders. Only about half of the message was received before Andrews' men cut the wire. Andrews, in his race with destiny, had no way of knowing that General Mitchel had failed to take Chattanooga; it was still in Confederate hands.

The *Texas* continued to close in on the *General* getting within seeing and hearing distance before they reached the long tunnel at Tunnel Hill. The tunnel would have been a great place for an ambush or obstruction, but Andrews decided against fighting the Rebels and continued to try to get away. When the *Texas* reached the smoke filled tunnel, Fuller felt the fear of eminent danger, but was relieved to find it clear. Having no water left, the *General* ran out of steam two miles north of Ringgold. As the train chugged to a stop, Andrews gave the order "every man for himself." The raiders ran for the woods, scattering to throw off their pursuers.

The Great Locomotive Chase had ended April 12, 1862, just 18 miles below Chattanooga. Unfortunately for the raiders, hundreds of mounted and well-armed men were training at Ringgold. It was a muster day and they were soon searching for the raiders. It only took a few days to capture and jail the fugitives, including the two who missed the train in Marietta. Ironically, the story the raiders used about being from Fleming County, Kentucky served to link them all together. James J. Andrews was tried as a spy and hanged almost immediately.

Seven more raiders were tried, found guilty, and on June 18th, they were hanged. In October, the remaining 14 raiders made a daring jail break. Eight of these raiders managed to reach Union lines, two even floated down the Chattahoochee River to the Gulf of Mexico to the Yankee blockade. The remaining six raiders were recaptured, but were exchanged for Confederate prisoners in March 1863. The men were considered heroes in the North, but thieves in the South.

Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton recognized their courage by awarding them the newly created Medals of Honor, making them the very first recipients. In addition, Medals of Honor were awarded posthumously to five of the eight who had been hanged. James J. Andrews, the leader of the raiders and the first man hanged, was a civilian and not eligible for the award. The Georgia legislature tendered a vote of thanks to William Fuller and his associates, but they received no medals. And so ended the Great Locomotive Chase, one of the most spectacular events in the War Between the States.

By the way, the raiders that were hanged are now buried in the Chattanooga National Cemetery. Originally they were buried in Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta near the site of their execution. A monument donated by the state of Ohio marks their graves. Three of the men who recaptured the *General*, William Fuller, Jeff Cain, and Anthony Murphy, are buried in Oakland. The two trains involved in the Great Locomotive Chase can also be seen in the Atlanta area. The *General* is in the Big Shanty Museum in Kennesaw, Georgia and the *Texas* is in the Cyclorama Museum in Atlanta, Georgia.

Interesting facts regarding the *General*: After it was repaired, it was used to haul Andrews and his raiders back to Atlanta on May 2. Later, when General Hood evacuated Atlanta, the *General* was one of five locomotives that were run into a munitions train and set on fire to keep General Sherman from capturing them. The *General* was badly damaged, but was later repaired and continued her service.

If you don't want to travel that far, you can always visit the Historic Huntsville Depot, the planned destination of James J. Andrews. The locomotive on the roundhouse wheel is a three quarter scale model of the *General*.

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Trouble with the Railroad

JACQUELYN PROCTER GRAY

James Webb Smith Donnell was a wealthy planter in North Alabama. He owned two plantations. One was inherited from his father in Athens and the other was acquired when he assumed the debts of his wife's aunt near Courtland. The Memphis & Charleston Railroad condemned part of his property in order to run the tracks through his plantation "Seclusion," but it also provided a way for him to make some serious money. Donnell had been one of the investors of the railroad and welcomed the progress it promised. His farmland was rough and rocky, and much of it was covered with trees. By having his slaves clear the land, they could sell the lumber to the railroad for cross-ties and then later for fuel. The following letters show that his relationship with the railroad was somewhat acrimonious. At times the complaints were that the wood was too close to the tracks, and at others, it was stacked too far away.

The following letter shows us the frustrations of both sides of a symbiotic relationship. On May 10, 1854, J. W. S. Donnell wrote to the M & C Railroad officials:

"There were 902 ties rejected by the inspector, many of which were subsequently used on the road....I have deducted from the Act 996 at 25 cents each. These are now lying along the road and used in the cistern at Jonesboro, good and rejected ties 1138. 400 supposed to have been washed away, having been used in constructing the Town Creek Bridge. A portion of the distribution was irregular, to fill spaces left by another contractor, beginning one mile east of Jonesboro, and which was more trouble than to have distributed...the whole amount myself, the wagons having to divert on the constructing force, and diverted from regular work through one only claim pay for those actually distributed, for which I refer Mr. Kendrick the superintendent, Mr. Denonda. I refer to Mr. Morse to verify

my distributing contract, having received it from him. The engineer Mr. Cooper having released the contractor from a portion of their contract to supply and distribute, the company undertook to do a portion....On the 1st June 1852 I proposed to Mr. Cooper to enter into a bond for the award to me to get 20,000 ties and he gave me verbally an unlimited contract, which Mr. B. F. Morse will probably remember, he being present, with Mr. Blount. I delivered in all upon the road 25398 ties of which 902 were rejected. I have allowed 996. My contract being to get the ties at 25 cents each delivered on the road. It was not my fault if they were not used and suffered to be undistributable and destroyed as many have been. My agreement to distribute a portion of them was with Mr. Moore after they were all delivered upon the road. I stopped to distribute and left in the mountains 500, perhaps 1000, which being very [much] longer were left by the teamsters and are still good. I will undertake to deliver a quantity on the road at 30 cents. I respectfully ask that the above may be audited and a certificate of stock be granted me for the amount paid. J. W. S. Donnell.”

Apparently there had already been legal problems very early, and although there are no specifics of the background of the following letter, it is interesting to note that the author of the letter was David P. Lewis, a future governor of Alabama who is now among the five governors buried in Huntsville’s Maple Hill Cemetery.

On August 18, 1855, Lewis wrote to Mr. Donnell:

“Dear Donnell, If I understand the cross tie branch of your Norwood case it is this (viz.) Norwood contracted with the railroad to furnish 500 cross ties, subject to inspection by the engineers and which contract you by agreement with Norwood superceded. You hired Norwood to get your cross ties, and the engineers refused to receive 125 of those that Norwood got for you. Norwood sued for the 125 cross ties, and after

suit the necessities of the road compelled them to use the 125 cross ties. Now on this state of facts you are bound to succeed with suit, or that part of it. Let me know if I have stated the case above as it is. If so, we must prove that the R.R. refused to receive the cross ties that Norwood got for you, and we must identify them. Where is Jordan? We may have to have his deposition. How are we to prove that Norwood's ties were rejected by the Engineer, and not used until after he had sued you? Then as to the other branch [of the suit]. Let me know the name of the justice who has the docket containing your judgment against Norwood. We must know that. And if you have any account which has not been sued on to judgment, send it over to me. If we do have to fight the cause of a little case, let us get ready. Do you know the name of any person who will do for a commission to take O'Neil's deposition, if it should be necessary? Write me what you can prove by O'Neil. It may be necessary for you to be over in person. If so, I will endeavor to set a day for the trial of that case and will let you know of it, to save you the vexation of dancing attendance upon court, to such sorry music as that case can afford. Write me soon. And I will then fill interrogatories to Norwood; and try and fish something like the truth out of him about it. We are not compelled to use his answers unless we like them. Yours very truly, David P. Lewis."

On November 14, 1859, D. Bryant, an official at the M & C Railroad office, wrote to J. W. S. Donnell:

"I notice the 4 foot wood your teams are now hauling and one or two stacks recently piled, are out of very bad wood, dead timber and a portion of it rotten. Our engineers are complaining also of the 2 foot wood in racks as too green and rotten. I trust you will attend to the matter as the wood now being brought in I cannot receive under our contract as it does not fill the bill. Keep a good supply under the shell of good, sound, dry cover and our locomotives will take from $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ more than they are now doing...."

On February 12, 1860, William Ross, Superintendent of Transportation of the Eastern Division wrote to Donnell:

“I wrote to you on yesterday about the wood you are furnishing at Jonesboro (now known as Town Creek). The Eastward Express train came up this morning 25 minutes behind time and the runner reports the cause of the delay to be the wood he got at Jonesboro, rough, not seasoned and some full of water, could not make steam with it. We expect you to furnish good steam wood and plenty of it and well seasoned, but from Mr. Weems’ indifference about it we expect nothing from him and look to you to fulfill your engagement...dislike to trouble but absolute necessity requires it. Bryant and myself have urged and spoken to Weems without effect. I do not expect to be dependent upon his management but upon yours....”

Mr. Weems, referred to in the above letter, was the overseer for the plantation. The community was known as Jonesborough/Jonesboro originally, but renamed Town Creek shortly after these letters were written. The railroad began to draw up new maps and there was already a Jonesboro on the line.

On February 14, 1860, D. Bryant wrote to Mr. Weems, J. W. S. Donnell’s overseer:

“There is great complaint among our runners as to your 2 ft. wood. They say there is too much round wood, the wood is too short a good deal of time and...the larger part is out of unsound trees, bad wood. I passed there on Saturday and found the wood in very bad condition, very much as I have described it. I hope you will see to it and instruct your force to put in good sound, dry wood and 2 ft. long. As the every day complaints I have to hear is anything but pleasant and the blame is attached to me for receiving such wood.”

J. W. S. Donnell had been very wealthy before the War broke out. He was a friend of George Washington Lane, and they both agreed that keeping the Union intact was best for the country. When the war started however, Donnell chose to back Alabama in Secession, and since his son enlisted, as well as several members of his wife's family, Donnell provided food and other provisions for the Confederacy.

His son, Robert Donnell, was with Liberty Independence Nixon, whose 1862 diary included disturbing descriptions of the horrors of the Battle of Shiloh. Nixon had promised Donnell's parents that he would keep them informed of his welfare, which he did.

Nixon described their camp in Corinth. It had been very cold that March, and they awoke one morning to find it snowing. Another Huntsville resident, Major Chadick (minister of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church in Huntsville), ordered the men to split timber and make bunks to sleep on, keeping them off of the cold ground. Several times over the next few days, the men were ordered to break up camp and board the trains on the M & C RR, which took them to various places on the line, always somewhat near Corinth.

At one point, they were ordered to take down tents and board the train – yet again. After a miserably cold and wet delay, they finally boarded at midnight, headed again toward Corinth. The train was very crowded, and stalled going up the grade. Another engine arrived to push them up the hill.

In the darkness, Nixon looked around to see if he could find his friend Robert Donnell. He wrote:

“At length, by means of a flash of lightning, I saw him seated on a large box. He looked like a statue. He is naturally an unassuming man and seemed to be indifferent about the scene that was going on around him.”

Nixon went on to say that it was 8 a.m. before they arrived at

Corinth and began the task of pitching their tents – at exactly the same place they had left!

On March 27th, Nixon wrote that J. W. S. Donnell had arrived at their camp in Corinth, Mississippi. He had come to lend moral support to his son Robert, and he brought lots of provisions with him for members of his son's troop.

Within a few days the Battle of Shiloh began. Liberty Independence Nixon described it in graphic detail. He came upon a mortally wounded Union soldier who had been shot through the hip.

“I asked him why he had left his home to come here to destroy people who had never harmed him. He replied that he was sorry for it, and if he was spared he would not do so anymore. I told him to look to a higher power, and left him.”

Because the rest of the diary was too faded to read, it is not known if Liberty Nixon was one of the Confederates who was captured when the troop train tried to outrun Mitchel's men in Huntsville on April 11. Nixon did survive however, to become the first superintendent of schools in Limestone County.

Back in North Alabama, J. W. S. Donnell became the victim of both armies. Fifteen bales of cotton were confiscated by Confederate soldiers, then left abandoned by the road. He had loaned 70 bales of cotton for fortifications, and then lost about 500 bales that were burned by Union soldiers during the course of the War. Horses, food, and over 40 mules were also taken by the Union army. He had written to his old friend, George Washington Lane, to help him secure a pass to leave Seclusion to return to his home in Athens. He was a wanted man by the Union army, and the letters written to him by his wife in Athens were full of desperation and fear.

The War was finally over, and his son, Major Robert Donnell, oversaw the surrender of Confederate forces near Bentonville, North

Carolina. He returned to a place he hardly recognized. His father, J. W. S. Donnell, signed an oath of loyalty on November 27, 1865.

J. W. S. Donnell had been a good businessman, but he could not foresee what the Civil War would do to him and the rest of the country. Because he took payment for his lumber in Memphis & Charleston RR stock, he lost his investment when the railroad went into bankruptcy. His property was auctioned to pay his debts, and he went into bankruptcy as well. At age 56, he was dead. His son Robert joined the many Southerners who migrated to Texas and they were soon followed by several siblings.

Today, the Donnell House in Athens is a museum, saved from demolition by members of the Limestone County Historic Society after it had been condemned. The Lawrence County plantation known as "Seclusion" was torn down after it had been converted to apartments and abandoned. All that remains is the plantation bell, once used to call the slaves in from the fields, and the nearby slave cemetery. With the family fortune gone, no money was left to mark the graves of the two children who died during the War, nor those of J.W.S. Donnell and his wife, who died later. Thanks to generous descendants, those graves were recently marked in the Athens City Cemetery.

Sources Used

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The Huntsville Depot – A Place Worth Remembering

JACQUELYN PROCTER GRAY

For over 100 years, the Huntsville Depot was an important means of travel. A spectator might witness the gamut of emotions of the passengers. College kids left home, some for the first time, to continue their education. Other travelers came home to welcome embraces from their families. Travel always has been, and always will be, an adventure.

In the early days, it was the place where families said good-bye to their sons and husbands who left to fight in the Civil War. Grand send-offs were held at the depot where hand-sewn battle flags were presented to departing soldiers by local girls. This scene was repeated in every subsequent war. The names changed, but the faces looked the same. The other difference was the enemy. Too many of those same soldiers returned on the railroad – in coffins.

For some people, the appeal of the museum is the obvious – railroad history. For others, the unique and quirky architecture calls them. For most people, it is the personalities of the past. As we Americans search the roads our ancestors once traveled, it is common for Northern visitors to come to the place where their great-great grandfather marched with General Mitchel to capture Huntsville. Other visitors look all around and remember the time they left from the depot to fight in the Vietnam War.

Tour guides at the Historic Huntsville Depot will point out that there were many famous visitors through the doors of the depot as well. Confederate President Jefferson Davis was a frequent visitor to Huntsville. Of course Huntsville-born Tallulah Bankhead, a famous movie actress of long ago, came through to visit her relatives. President Teddy Roosevelt visited, as well as President William McKinley, who was assassinated shortly after his stop here. President Franklin D. Roosevelt remained on the train as it stopped in Huntsville in 1936.

One of the most colorful early visitors was a Kansas woman named Carrie Nation. Carrie preached against the evils of alcohol, sometimes while dramatically waving a hatchet in her hand. She came to Huntsville in October 1902 to meet with ladies of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and harass the men at the local bars. Everyone came to the depot to see Carrie, who was already quite famous. The train platform was crowded with men, women, and children, but then Carrie turned on the crowd. She leaned into a carriage and shouted at the woman inside, "You ought to go home and tear off those plumes and gew gaws and make corns on your knees praying for your lost soul. You are lost, sister, lost! Pray to God for repentance!"

The most memorable time in the depot history would have been the occupation by Union soldiers who kept the Confederate prisoners-of-war on the third floor. One local legend says that a woman visited every day with a basket of food for the prisoners. Under the protective cloth covering the food was a set of clothing for a prisoner to change into and walk out of the depot to his freedom. After several days of losing a prisoner a day, the woman was barred from the depot.

Visitors can't help but imagine the soldiers of both armies marching up and down the stairs. In another era, David Overton, accused of murdering Judge Thomas Lawler of Huntsville, was physically helped onto the train that would take him to the Birmingham prison where he would await his execution for the crime. His dramatic escape from prison and death in a shootout wrote a different chapter. No doubt his body was brought back to Huntsville by train for his burial at Maple Hill Cemetery, within sight of Judge Lawler's grave.

Although the trains that pass by the depot today no longer stop for passengers or freight, somehow it serves to help us remember the purpose for which it was built. School children often come to see programs offered by depot staff on Civil War camp life, or attend easy to understand lessons on railroad history. Occasionally a child

comments that it wasn't very wise of us to build the depot so close to the noisy train tracks! But someday they will understand.

The Historic Huntsville Depot is open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, call (256) 535-6525, or EarlyWorks at (256) 564-8100.

Madison County Heritage Festival

The Madison County Heritage Festival will take place October 8-9, 2005, at the Hays Nature Preserve on the Flint River. Saturday the 8th will be a day of fun and education for those who would like to celebrate the Bicentennial by honoring the settlement of Madison County. The event is sponsored by the City of Huntsville, the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, the Flint River Conservation Association, and the Bicentennial Planning Committee.

October 8 promises to be a clear and crisp day on the scenic Flint River. The event will take place from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. that day, and will include storytellers, geneologists, music, dancing, exhibitors, and desired items such as books, souvenirs, and food for sale. On October 9th, there will be field trips to local historical sites: Blouchards Ford Mill, cemeteries, the old Cobb Bridge, and some historical homes will be featured on the field tours. Although there is no cost for the Saturday event, there will be a cost of \$5 per person for the Sunday tour, which will begin at 1 p.m. The tour includes transportation and will last approximately 4 hours. There is a limit of 30 people on the tour on a first come basis.

The Saturday event will be divided into three main areas: Exhibits, Speakers, and Performing Arts. The day will be filled with a rich compliment of speakers, who will entertain as well as enthrall participants about the stories that make Madison County great.

- Dr. John Hall of the Alabama Museum of Natural History will speak about “Alabama History: A Naturalist’s Perspective.” Dr. Hall will be bringing some of his friends who once frequented Madison County, for hunting, gambling, and horse racing—Andrew Jackson and David Crockett.
- Dr. Doug Phillips of *Discovering Alabama* will celebrate his 20th anniversary of the show’s beginnings on Alabama Public Television in a presentation entitled “Alabama’s Natural Wonders: Past, Present and Future”. Doug is the lanky natural historian that has shown us the incredible beauty of Alabama from the coast to the Mountains. Doug is also in the process of doing the research for a segment of *Discovering Alabama* on the Flint River and his crew will be filming this event as part of that film.
- Linda Wright Riley, Author of *Lost Writings of Howard Weeden as “Flake White”* will have a behind the scenes presentation on finding the lost writings of Maria Howard Weeden, locally renowned writer and artist. Linda will take on the persona of Howard Weeden, and will do readings from *Shadows on the Wall: The Life and Works of Howard Weeden*.
- Nancy Rohr will capture the spirit of a colorful local lady in the *Uncivil War in Madison County 1862-1865: The Lives and Times of Mary Jane Chadick*. Indeed she will be the feisty Lady Chadick herself. Nancy’s informative talk about the struggle between North and South in Madison County will be followed by a play entitled, “The Surrender of Bushwacker Johnston at Trough Springs” written by David Milam. Confederate and Union Soldiers will represent both sides of this historic event which took place on May 11th at Trough Springs on the Big Cove Road, 4 miles from the city of Huntsville. Colonel Given of the Ohio 102nd was a very gracious member of the Union Army, protecting the rag tag rebels during their parole process, from certain elements of the blue coats who might have done it less peaceably. But as the fates would have it, there was much trust and some

merriment in the surrender, which took place with a little help from apple brandy. The bands of the 102nd Ohio and the 18th Michigan played “Hail Columbia” and “The Star Spangled Banner.”

- A play about the Trail of Tears, will be enacted by native Americans from the Cherokee and Chickasaw tribes, and several drum sessions will take place, plus crafts inherited and passed down as part of their culture will be demonstrated.
- Black history and culture will be featured in exhibits by A&M University and Oakwood University. Also, the little known former tenant farmer community of Berkley will be honored in story and exhibit.
- Hands-on activities included for children and adults alike will be 19th century games and skills demonstrated by Burritt Museum, and Constitution Hall historians.

These are but a few of the events scheduled for October 8-9, 2005 for the Madison County Heritage Festival. Come witness historians strolling and divulging their stories in period costumes. For more information, contact the Hays Nature Preserve at 427-5116. A website is available where you can find more information at www.hsvcity.com and look under “Tourist Info” for the Hays Nature Preserve.

If you would like to be an exhibitor or vendor, there is a charge of \$15. Forms for vendors, genealogists, or exhibitors can be found on the website above. Checks can be made payable to FRCA (the Flint River Conservation Association) and sent to FRCA, POB 275 Brownsboro Alabama, 35741. Please note on it that it is for the “History Fest.”

See you on October 8th and 9th!

Susan “Soos” Weber, City Ecologist

Administration

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society and *The Huntsville Historical Review* is to provide an agency for expression for all those having a common interest in collecting, preserving, and recording the history of Huntsville and Madison County. Communications concerning the society should be addressed to the President, P.O. Box 666, Huntsville, Alabama 35804.

The Huntsville Historical Review is published twice a year, and is provided to all current members of the Society. Annual membership dues are \$10.00 for individuals and \$18.00 for families. Libraries and organizations may receive the *Review* on a subscription basis for \$10.00 per year. Single issues may be purchased for \$5.00 each.

Editorial Policy

The *Review* welcomes articles on all aspects of the history of Huntsville and Madison County. Articles concerning other sections of Alabama will be considered if they relate in some way to Madison County.

Statements of fact or opinion appearing in the *Review* solely those of the authors and not imply endorsement by the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, the Publications Committee, or the Editor. Questions or comments concerning articles appearing in the journal should be addressed to the Editor, P.O. Box 666, Huntsville, Alabama 35804

Notice to Contributors

Manuscripts, editorial comments, or book reviews should be directed to the Publications Committee, P.O. Box 666, Huntsville, Alabama 35804. All copy, including footnotes, should be double spaced. Authors should submit two copies of manuscripts, as well as a MS Word for Windows version of the article on disc. Manuscripts should clearly identify the author and provide contact details. The *Review* follows the style and format conventions of the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), and follows conventional American spelling. The Publications Committee and the Editor do not accept responsibility for any damage to or loss of manuscripts during shipping.

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