



# *MIDDLE GEORGIA FLYER*

A PUBLICATION OF THE MIDDLE GEORGIA RAILROAD ASSOCIATION  
GORDON DEPOT – Gordon, GA  
MEETING THE THIRD MONDAY OF EACH MONTH 7:00 P.M.

Volume XVII, No. 5

May 2008



**NS #734 at Juliette, GA - Joe Hill Photo**

MIDDLE GEORGIA RAILROAD ASSOCIATION



Gordon Depot

The Middle Georgia Railroad Association is a non-profit organization designed to preserve and promote Railroad History in the Middle Georgia Area. We also promote railroad modeling and rail fanning. We welcome all members regardless of sex, religion or race. Railroads include the Central of Georgia Rwy, NS, CSX, Southern Rwy, Seaboard Coast Line, Atlantic Coast Line, Georgia Southern & Florida Rwy, Macon & Birmingham, H&FS, MD&S, Wrightsville & Tennille, LOP&G, SG, AV&W, L&N, NC&StL, TAG, AB&A, AB&C and many others.

The MGRA meets once a month on the third Monday evening at 7:00 P.M. at the Gordon Depot in Gordon, GA. Membership is \$20.00 annually. The depot is ideally located next to Norfolk Southern's (former CofGA) mainline to Savannah. As a member you receive a monthly Newsletter, special invitation to our popular annual Christmas Trade/Swap Cookout and to the annual Model Railroad and Trainshow held every April. We also hold field trips, and best of all fellowship! Each month there are a wide range of guest speakers on railroad history, and model clinics. For more information, please check the MGRA website at: [www.middlegeorgiarailroadassociation.com](http://www.middlegeorgiarailroadassociation.com)



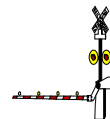
**Special Note from the MGRA Chairman**

Welcome all railroaders! This month, on May 19<sup>th</sup> we will have another special guest speaker, Joe Hill. I know that you will enjoy his presentation on slides taken at the infamous Austell area near Atlanta, so please welcome Joe. See you there!

I wish to thank Stephen Seyfrett for his SAM Shortline program last March. We really appreciate him coming down.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> MGRA Trainshow held at the Macon Coliseum on 19 April was a tremendous success! We had over 500 people to participate along with 40 plus vendors. The weather was picture perfect. Thanks to all of you for making this happen. More about the show will be discussed in detail at the MGRA Meeting. Plans for our 3<sup>rd</sup> MGRA Trainshow is tentatively set for 18 Apr 09. Make plans and will see you there....AGAIN! And that is ALL!

Your prez



**GEORGIA & FLORIDA RAILWAY COMPANY**

Part I  
*By Russell Tedder*

The Georgia & Florida Railway was very much a twentieth century railroad. While the century was in its infancy, rumors abounded around the small towns of South Georgia of new railroad construction, consolidations and extensions in the area. The most talked up plan was a through route from Augusta, Ga., to the Gulf. Much of the speculation centered around the town of Nashville, Ga., where the Nashville and Sparks Railroad Company had just been opened on March 30, 1901 to connect that town with the GS&F at Sparks, Ga., 12 miles to the west. By early 1904 the Ocilla, Pinebloom and Valdosta Railway Company, originally a logging railroad of the B. B. Gray Lumber Company, had extended its line from Pinebloom, Ga., on the Satilla River near Douglas, Ga., to Nashville, a distance of 27 miles. Further reports that the OP&V would extend its line to a connection with the South Georgia Railway Company at Adel, Ga., gave credence to speculation that Nashville was strategically located on a route that could be extended north to Augusta and south to the Gulf.

Much of the reasoning that led to this conclusion was related to actions of the SG which opened a line from Heartpine (near Adel), Ga., on the GS&F, to Greenville, Fla., in 1901. The owners of this company had formed the West Coast Railway on December 15, 1900 to extend from a connection with the SG at Greenville to the most practical point on the Gulf of Mexico at or near Tampa, Fla. On September 1, 1904, the WC completed its line from Greenville to Perry, Fla., and promptly leased it to the SG which operated the combined roads between Adel and Perry as the South Georgia & West Coast R. R. Also in 1904 the road changed its terminus from Heartpine to Adel. Only two miles of construction between Sparks and Adel would have been required to connect the N&S with the SG&WC to create a direct line from Douglas to Perry. It had been reported earlier that year that the SG would build from Adel to a connection with the N&S. These developments were perceived as a head start for an Augusta to the Gulf route through Nashville and Adel that would have been a strong competitor with a line through Valdosta and the VS.

Further fueling the speculation, a new company, the Douglas, Augusta & Gulf Railway, was formed in April 1905 as a combination of the OP&V and the Wadley & Mt. Vernon Extension R.R., with a determination to connect all the links between Augusta and the Gulf just as rapidly as the work could be done. The consolidation resulted in 55.5 miles of road from Barrows Bluff (Broxton) on the Ocmulgee River to Nashville. Failing to acquire the N&S, which would have been a logical link in a through route to the Gulf via Adel, the DA&G surveyed a direct line from Nashville to Adel. Also, less than 90 days before its absorption into the DA&G, the OP&V had applied for a charter to extend its road from Nashville to Adel for a connection with the SG&WC. These moves were seen as a bluff to scare the N&S into a consolidation or sale. In furtherance of its goal of connecting Augusta with the Gulf, the DA&G in 1906 also acquired 30 miles of another recently built road, the Ocilla & Valdosta, between Hazlehurst and Broxton, near Douglas, bringing the road to a total of 85.5 miles. Notwithstanding the actual acquisitions and consolidations that occurred and the rumors and speculation that prevailed, the connection of the SG&WC at Adel with the N&S at Nashville for a through route never materialized.

In early February 1906, the *Augusta Chronicle* reported that John Skelton Williams had purchased all of the short roads between Augusta and Douglas and would proceed at an early date to construct the necessary connecting links. The same dispatch stated that other roads between Douglas and Nashville would be acquired by the Williams syndicate, with a view of establishing a trunk line between Augusta and the Gulf. It was unclear at the time as to the probable outlet to the Gulf from Nashville. Some reports said that the road would go from Nashville to Valdosta, then to Madison on the VS, while others had it that the connection with the SG&WC route from Adel to Perry would be used.

Williams, son of a prominent Richmond, Va., banker, was no stranger to building railroad empires. Between 1900 and 1903 he was successful in consolidating several smaller railroads into the powerful Seaboard Air Line Railroad Company. Losing control of the Seaboard shortly thereafter in unsuccessful power plays with Wall Street financiers, Williams soon turned his attention to building an Augusta-Gulf Coast route that would culminate in the formation of the Georgia & Florida Railway Company.

The Valdosta route became a more promising prospect when six railway promoters representing Williams arrived in Nashville on February 17, 1906 on a special DA&G train. The promoters had arranged for two horse drawn buggies to drive them from Nashville to Valdosta on a two-day trip to look at the lay of the land with a view of building a railroad between the two cities. It was also stated at the time that Colonel Wilkinson, president of the VS, was interested in extending that road from Valdosta to Nashville.

Finally, on March 9, 1906, an official announcement was made that the Georgia & Florida Construction Company, Inc. had been organized at Richmond, Va., for the purpose of uniting and forming a trunk line out of the several Georgia railroads that had been purchased by the syndicate organized by John Skelton Williams of Richmond, J. William Middendorf of Baltimore and their associates. The report stated that six railroads had been purchased in Georgia, with a total length of 227 miles. They were the Augusta & Florida, 30 miles from Keysville to Midville; the Midville, Swainsboro and Red Buff, 20 miles from Midville to Swainsboro; the Millen and Southwestern, 53 miles from Millen via Stillmore to Vidalia; the Ocilla and Valdosta, 55 miles from Hazlehurst via Broxton and Ocilla to Irwinville; the Douglas, Augusta and Gulf, 57 miles from Barrows Bluff via Broxton, Douglas and Pinebloom to Nashville, and the Nashville and Sparks, 12 miles long, from Nashville to Sparks.

When it was announced on May 22, 1906 that Williams, Middendorf and Company had consummated the purchase of the six roads, it was also reported that the Valdosta Southern had been included in the transaction, thus signaling that it was to be a key link in the route from Augusta to the Gulf of Mexico. Connecting links were planned and when completed the road was to extend from Augusta to Madison. It was not clear at that point how serious Williams was in building on to the Gulf of Mexico although he did note in promotional material that Madison was only 40 miles from the Gulf.

Williams was attracted to the rich and productive territory which the proposed route would traverse. He planned to open up the City of Augusta, at the time the greatest cotton milling center in the South, to the rapidly growing country lying to the south between Augusta

and the Gulf of Mexico. The area was noted for its great success in the production of cotton. In particular, the southern half of the line, including VS territory, produced the long-staple or sea-island variety of cotton, which commanded about twice the price of ordinary short-staple cotton. Fruit and truck products were also plentiful. It was clear that the G&F would rely heavily on the products of milling and ginning for its revenue. Not to be overlooked were the excellent timberlands which later came to provide valuable revenue for the G&F. By 1950 forest products accounted for the highest percentage of freight revenue on the struggling road. Williams also planned to capitalize on the fact that there was no direct north-south line through Georgia and the advantage of the consolidated roads' shorter distance of 256 miles between Augusta and Madison compared to mileage on existing lines of 317 miles on the west and 336 miles on the east.

On July 7, 1906 Williams and his associates chartered the Georgia & Florida Railway Company for 101 years, under the laws of Georgia, for the purpose of purchasing, building and operating railroad lines in the states of Georgia and Florida. Colonel J. M. Wilkinson, president of the VS, became a vice president of the new company. The several disjointed roads that had been recently acquired, including the VS, were at first operated loosely as the Georgia and Florida Railway System. It was not until October 1, 1907, after the merger of the short roads into the new company on August 8, 1907, that the road began to operate as the G&F. The company proceeded at once to connect the several lines into one continuous system which was completed and put into operation between Augusta and Madison on July 1, 1910. The road promoted itself as "The Augusta—South Georgia Short Line."

In 1906, coincidentally with the acquisition of the VS by the G&F, a group of businessmen chartered the Madison Southern Railway Company to build a new road from Madison to Deadman's Bay on the Gulf of Mexico, the originally intended destination of the FM&G, a distance of 60 miles. For reasons now unknown, the new road was not immediately built. However, both before and after the turn of the century several roads were projected to Deadman's Bay with the idea of developing a deepwater port at that location. None of these efforts were fruitful because of offshore barrier reefs that rendered the establishment of a deepwater port cost prohibitive. It can only be speculated as to whether or not the MS was part of Williams' plan to extend the G&F to the Gulf of Mexico via the former VS track. The G&F did have a crossing diamond in place with the SAL at Madison as early as September 1908.

The MS was finally built in 1909 by the West Yellow Pine Lumber Company which needed a railroad to transport lumber from its newly constructed sawmill at Weston, Fla., four miles south of Madison, to the SAL and G&F tracks at Madison. It also needed to haul logs from its logging camp at Waco, three miles south of Weston, to the sawmill. By 1922 the West Yellow Pine Lumber Company had closed its sawmill at Weston. At the end of the year an application for abandonment of the MS was filed with the ICC and the line was dismantled in

early 1923 soon after ICC approval was granted. Nevertheless, the G&F left its crossing diamond in place with the SAL at Madison, perhaps in view of a future expansion to the south.

Despite John Skelton Williams' vision of a direct route from Augusta to the Gulf of Mexico, the G&F was always a weak road that never attained any consistent degree of prosperity. The probability of success with an outlet to a deepwater port on the Gulf of Mexico could be debated; however, without it, the G&F was just another railroad that went nowhere. Nearly every point of any significance reached by the road was also served by either the Southern Railway System, Seaboard Air Line or Atlantic Coast Line, the rail giants of the day in the southeastern U. S., or one of their connecting shortlines. Construction of 84 miles of connecting links, acquisition of additional lines and construction of an extension from Augusta to Greenwood, S. C., to complete Williams' expansive dream, all placed an unbearable strain on the already financially strapped company. Too large to enjoy the efficiencies of a shortline, the G&F was neither big enough nor strong enough to compete with the rail titans of the South.

The G&F lacked the resources to upgrade its roadbed, track and motive power to service levels that could take advantage of the shortest and most direct north-south line through middle Georgia. Although much of the track had been built with new 70- pound rail, a sizable amount of 40 and 60-pound relay, and a small quantity of 45, 50 and 56-pound relay rail was also used. As late as 1920 the heaviest weight rail on the road was still 70-pounds and it was not until the late 1920s that any 80-pound rail was installed. At its peak in 1930 the G&F operated 501.93 miles of track, including 37.48 miles of leased road and trackage rights of 6.27 miles, all with rail weights ranging from 40 to 80 pounds and with nearly 200 miles of track operated as branch lines. The last 40-pound rail was replaced sometime after 1930 and some 85-pound rail was added by the 1940s. A very small amount of the track was cinder ballasted, but the greater part of the lightly graded line was earth surfaced. By the early 1950s some 90-pound rail had been installed on the mainline. With the exception of eight Ten-Wheeler steam locomotives bought new in 1909-1910 and nine new diesels received in 1950, all motive power was acquired secondhand.

With proverbial 20/20 hindsight as to its strategic location and the advantage of its shorter route miles, it is clear that the G&F was never destined to achieve the status of a Clinchfield or Richmond, Fredericksburg & Potomac as a vital link in a through route. Suffering from floods, strikes and the attack of the boll weevil on the important cotton crops, the road admitted its insolvency in March 1915.

## **MGRA Calendar of Events**

19 May 08 - MGRA Meeting - Joe Hill on: "Fallen Flags and Rent-A-Wrecks" that Joe did for the Austell Railfest last year.

16 Jun 08 - MGRA Meeting - Model Clinic - Modeling Special Railroad Car-loads - Jerry Bass

21 Jul 08 - MGRA Meeting - TAG HS - Warren Stephens

9 Aug 08 - SE Railroadiana Show by Golden Spike - Atlanta Trade Center - Norcross, GA

18 Aug 08 - MGRA Meeting - Hartwell RR - Will Martin

15 Sept 08 - MGRA Meeting - STEAM NIGHT! Calling all steam locomotive lovers...come on down! This special meeting will be devoted and dedicated to locomotives of the steam era around the Middle Georgia Area. Presented by Fox Byington and Don Worthy. Get ready for a FUN night!

26-27 Sept 08 - GS&F 2008 Workshop - Lowndes County Historical Museum - Valdosta, GA - AV&W and VM&W Railroads

17-18 Oct 08 - Manchester Days - Manchester, GA

20 Oct 08 - MGRA Meeting - SALACL HS - Larry Goolsby on AB&C RR

17 Nov 08- MGRA Meeting - NMRA 2008 Convention Slideshow - Max Roesel

6 Dec 08 - MGRA Meeting - Annual Christmas Swap/Trade Event

19 Jan 09 - MGRA Meeting - Middle GA Railroads - Mark Mosely

18 Feb 09 - MGRA Meeting - *Modeling a Turpentine Still* - Dr Revis Butler

16 Mar 09 - MGRA Meeting - CSX Signaling

16-17 Apr 09 - MGRA 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Model and Train Show - Macon Coliseum