

A good and unique 'Family' member

In character, the Georgia Road was both a Class 1 hauler and a down-home short line

In its rich 150-year history, the Georgia Railroad was touched and torched by the rich and famous. During the process, the company morphed from a railroading pioneer and leader in the Peach State to an interesting combination of Class 1 and short-line operation.

Started as The Georgia Railroad in 1833, the ambitious company quickly hired one John Edgar Thomson as its chief engineer to design a railroad linking the navigable Savannah River at Augusta westward to the heart of the state at a point to be determined. Within a short time, the perennial clash of ambitious ideas and a paucity of money caused a significant rethinking. On January 12, 1836, the charter was amended to permit financial commerce as well as transportation by the Georgia Railroad & Banking Company. Banking proved just the ticket to financing the rail project, which by 1844 reached 171 miles across mid-Georgia to Marthasville or Terminus, later named Atlanta. Another railroad, the Western & Atlantic, later of Andrews Raiders fame, was already under construction from Terminus north toward the Tennessee River.

Political correctness entered into the enterprise, resulting in intermediate points being named for wealthy principals in the firm including Thomson, Dearing, and Camak. Engineer Thomson did an excellent job with his design. He managed to find a route that went west 80 miles to the Oconee River, west



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Mikado 321, one of seven mid-1920's Limas, storms out of Atlanta with train 2 in April 1950.

of Greensboro, without any type of bridging, even a culvert, being required. In a region laced by rivers and getting 47 inches of annual rainfall, that was quite an accomplishment. Thomson's later efforts in building and operating the mighty Pennsylvania Railroad across the Alleghenies, including Horse-shoe Curve, called on bridging and tunneling talents that were not called for in his first railroad endeavor.

Conceived to capture traffic on the Savannah River, to and from its namesake port, the Georgia Road, as the rail-

road came to be known, enhanced its franchise by a connection with the South Carolina Railroad at Augusta. This provided access to a second port at Charleston, S.C. The Western & Atlantic gave it access to the Tennessee River at Chattanooga, which commenced a century-long competition with the Central of Georgia Railroad, a firm which served most of the same key Peach State cities and also possessed a direct rail line to Savannah.

Cotton, along with other products of the plantations and forests, flowed



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In an everyday event, Atlanta-Augusta daytime passenger train 2, behind two F units, meets Geep-powered freight 209 on December 7, 1963.

toward Augusta and Savannah. Manufactured goods from the North and Europe moved inbound to partially balance tonnage flows. Early investments in the predecessors of the Atlanta & West Point Railway and its connection, the Western Railway of Alabama, soon provided an extended rail avenue via Atlanta into the heart of the South at Montgomery and Selma, Ala..

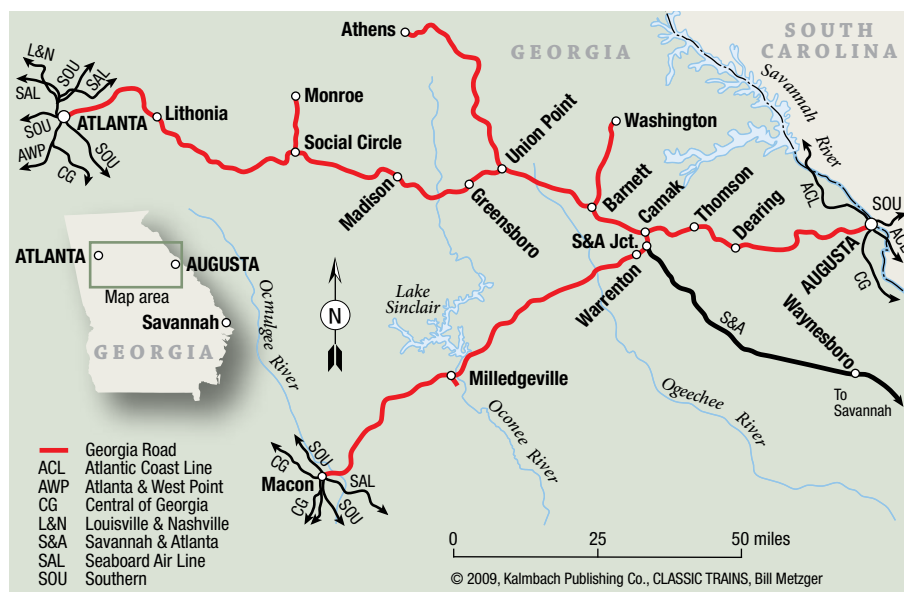
No sooner had the Georgia Road settled into a profitable and effective transportation link than the "Late Unpleasantness," *i.e.*, the Civil War or War Between the States, swept over the nation. The dramatic increase in traffic during the hostilities came to an abrupt halt when Gen. William T. Sherman captured Atlanta and destroyed all rail terminals there, plus more than 80 miles of Georgia Railroad main line. All the way past Madison, Sherman's "scorched earth" policy was manifest in flames and destruction of rail, ties, the few bridges, and every lineside structure. Only the right of way remained.

It took more than a dozen years to heal the physical and financial damage. During that time the owners found banking more to their liking . . . and much more profitable. In 1881 they leased the Georgia Railroad jointly to the Louisville & Nashville and rival Central of Georgia. The Central soon lost its financial interest through a reorganization, giving the L&N uncontested control. Thus the Georgia Railroad and its related interests joined "The Family Lines" in the late 19th century.

Expansion via short and branch lines

To build traffic, especially lumber and farm goods, the company nurtured a number of short lines. They included the Union Point & White Plains ("U Push & We Pull"), Washington & Lincoln, Elberton & Eastern, Lexington Terminal, Milstead, and Milledgeville Railway. All succumbed to abandonment during the Great Depression or in the years following World War II as cotton faded and the forests were cut out.

Over the years, the Georgia Road's 171-mile main line expanded to a network totaling more than 300 route-miles. Several branches reached regional communities, the longest being "The Macon Road," which stretched 78 miles



south from Camak to Macon. The branches are what gave the Georgia its short-line character. Most were served by ancient or rebuilt 4-6-0's hauling mixed trains with Jim Crow combination cars. These trains, with their leisurely pace, gave the company a unique flavor, even into the diesel era.

By 1914 the Georgia Road was powered by an assortment of 4-4-0's, 0-6-0's, Moguls, Ten-Wheelers, four modern Lima 2-8-2's, and a pair of light Pacifics. A handful of all-steel baggage cars, RPO's, and coaches shared the car roster with a fleet of steel-underframe wooden passenger and freight cars.

The Georgia Road emerged from the USRA period (1918–20) with a small fleet of standard 2-8-2 and 0-8-0 locomotives, power that lasted past the Korean War. In addition, during 1920–42 some of the larger Ten-Wheelers were rebuilt, modernized, and renumbered. They handled the branches and secondary mainline assignments. Much of the non-rebuilt small power was retired soon after World War I, and most of the remaining engines were scrapped in the 1930's.

Some USRA-designed freight cars served the road until well after World War II. A newer group of steel boxcars were painted silver rather than the traditional red in an effort to spare freight-

handlers the searing heat of southern sunshine beating down on dark metal surfaces. The acquisition of four heavy 2-8-2's from sibling Clinchfield and a single 0-8-0 from the Detroit Terminal, plus four more rebuilt 4-6-0's, provided additional power for the war years and rounded out the steam roster.

Traffic generated on-line consisted primarily of forest products, clay, and gravel, plus cotton and cottonseed products. Coal, flour, lumber, petroleum, sugar, textiles, and miscellaneous manufactured goods came from connections, much of it "bridged" to other roads at Atlanta or Augusta. In 1929,

just over 100,000 carloads moved over the Georgia, which offered good connections with parents Atlantic Coast Line and L&N (controlled by ACL), plus other Family members at both ends.

Through freights 209, 210, and 211, train numbers mirroring similar numbers on parent Coast Line, plied Georgia's main line. Supplemented by a regular eastbound extra to balance motive power, these trains provided service roughly every 12 hours in each direction. Except for pickups and setouts at Camak, the junction with the Macon branch and the Savannah & Atlanta Railway, these trains moved bridge traffic between connecting roads at Atlanta and Augusta. Four local freights worked





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Mixed train 31 (top) leaves Camak for Macon on December 12, 1968, behind WofA GP9 531. On October 23, 1975 (above), Georgia coach 106, Budd-built in 1949 for WofA for use on the *Crescent*, trails WofA and GA GP40's, two GA GP7's, and a GP9 on mainline train 103 near Lithonia.

the mainline customers and fed the branch-line mixed trains. The Macon Road had its own set of daytime mixed and nighttime local freights.

Pulpwood, lumber, brick, and aggregates were the principal on-line commodities until Georgia Power built its giant generating plant on Lake Sinclair near Milledgeville in the early 1960's. Eventually the only reason for retaining the line was for unit coal trains from Kentucky. The 28-mile portion of the Macon Road west of Milledgeville was

abandoned in 1985. Coal became a key revenue source in the latter days of the Georgia and caused the last pioneer construction on the property. A long-planned one-mile connecting track at Camak allowed continuous movements of trains from Atlanta to Milledgeville and vice versa.

Varnish, from vanilla to unique mixeds

Mainline passenger service after 1945 consisted of daylight trains 1 and 2 and nocturnal trains 3 and 4. East-



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In steam, Georgia had more 4-6-0's than any other type; 205 posed in Atlanta in March '52.

bound 2 and 4 departed Atlanta exactly 12 hours apart, at 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. Their westbound companions left Augusta at 1:50 a.m. and 12:15 p.m. The night trains offered Pullman sleeper service between Augusta and Atlanta, along with through cars between Atlanta and both Charleston, S.C., and Wilmington, N.C., via the ACL. All four trains did a substantial express and mail business, with Railway Post Offices serving many intermediate points across Georgia. After the night trains were discontinued, Nos. 1 and 2 offered some of the last regular heavyweight passenger service in the South. No stainless steel or fancy paint routinely graced these workaday runs.

The first internal combustion road locomotive, F3 No. 1001, arrived in 1948 to cover four daily trips over the Macon Road. With the exception of a sole Baldwin DS-44-1000 switcher, the company replaced its 50-engine steam roster with 45 EMD's of models NW2, SW9, FP7, and GP's from '7 and '9 to '40-2 and '38-2, often bought in concert with close affiliates A&WP and WofA, known as the "West Point Route." After 1954 the four daily mainline passenger trains generally drew a single or pair of F units, while yard assignments at Atlanta and Augusta went to eight switchers; the Geeps handled everything else. Business went on quietly for almost three more decades except for the latter-day mixed trains, whose longevity earned the Georgia a relative high profile among enthusiasts.

Until 1966, the Georgia generally operated independent of the A&WP and WofA, although Georgia and West Point Route road diesels began to move more freely on either side of Atlanta. The first of 22 second-generation GP40's arrived

in 1967, eventually 8 each for A&WP and WofA and 6 for the Georgia. They wore solid black, which had replaced the early dark blue-and-silver and a later solid blue.

Post-1966, the Georgia was steadily integrated into "The Family Lines," losing its unique characteristics. Railway Post Office service ended in 1967, after 120 years (broken only by the war years 1861–65). The night passenger trains were dropped, and soon the day trains were converted to mixeds, which lasted until 1983, a dozen years into the Amtrak era. (An exemption from *ad valorem* taxes in the Georgia's charter implied that it had to provide daily passenger service.)

Piggybacks, general freight, and even coal showed up on the "super mixeds," which would run 50 cars or more. The branch-line mixeds were curtailed, clearly signaling the beginning of the end. On November 4, 1982, the Georgia, oldest member of the Family Lines, was acquired by Seaboard Coast Line, which filed to end the mixeds. On January 1, 1983, SCL and other "Family" members became Seaboard System Railroad. The branch-line mixeds ended on April 29, 1983, and the mainline runs on May 6.

Only three years later, Seaboard joined Chessie System to become the CSX that blankets the nation east of the Mississippi. The old Georgia Road main line continues to connect segments of CSX, but little remains of the old down-home character and flavor. 📖

GEORGIA FACT FILE

(comparative figures are for 1928 and 1981)

Route-miles: 329; 329

Locomotives: 68; 31

Passenger cars: 72; 2

Freight cars: 1,512; 810

Headquarters city: Atlanta, Ga.

Special interest group: Atlantic Coast Line & Seaboard Air Line Railroads

Historical Society, P.O. Box 4141, Bay Pines, FL 33744-4141; www.aclsal.org

Recommended reading: *Steam Locomotives and History: Georgia Railroad and West Point Route*, by Richard E. Prince (Prince, 1962)

Source: *Historical Guide to North American Railroads* (Kalmbach, 2000)