



“Boogie time”: We look northwest at Bridgeboro (above) in 1955. Georgia Northern SW8 801, with train 20 from Albany, has arrived to exchange cars with GAS&C train 11 from Ashburn, which, with General Electric 70-tonner 71 (opposite page, lower left), has pulled through the north leg of the wye and uncoupled its caboose (lower right). The stock car on No. 20 may be destined for the Swift plant at Moultrie.

THE “BRIDGEBORO BOOGIE”

A shortline interchange in south Georgia’s
“Pidcock kingdom” had a brief life

By **Russell Tedder** • Photos from Sanborn Collection, Lakeland (Fla.) Public Library



Bridgeboro, a hamlet in Worth County, Ga., southeast of Albany, is about as far into the heart of the Deep South as you can get. Today it's situated on curves in both State Highway 112 (the road in the 1955 photo at top) and a lone railroad track operated by the Georgia & Florida, although when Bridgeboro had two railroads, neither was part the "classic era" Georgia & Florida (1906–1963) profiled in the Spring 2012 CLASSIC TRAINS "Fallen Flags Remembered." The closest the old G&F came to Bridgeboro was on a branch from

the east into Moultrie, Ga., 20 miles to the south. Moreover, Bridgeboro is unusual in that for more than 60 years, from the dawn of the 20th century into the mid-1960s, it was a shortline intersection, with neither line that crossed there being associated with a Class 1 until Southern Railway entered the picture in 1966.

Bridgeboro and its two short lines characterized the spirit of *Mixed Train Daily*, the classic book Lucius Beebe penned after visiting short lines across the United States at the end of World War II. Observed Beebe: "The Southern

Railway, traversing as it does a territory more opulent than any other in short lines, connects with no fewer than 57, all various, like the pickles, all operated independently and in patterns of their individual devising . . ."

As for Bridgeboro's railroads, Beebe noted that "the little kingdom of the Pidcock family of Georgia embraces three interlocking short lines of varying degrees of importance." Long-time readers of TRAINS magazine might remember the term "Pidcock lines," or that two of the three would wind up with hand-me-



Its interchange work done, GAS&C 11 has backed through the wye onto its line. After pausing at the joint (with Georgia Northern) fuel facility (top), it crosses the diamond, passes the depot (closed before 1951), and rolls south. Cars for Southern at Ashburn will be fetched on the return.

down Southern FT diesels [page 65], or possibly the article in *TRAINS'* April 1969 issue, "When It's Shortline Time Down South," by the late Jim Boyd.

The "Pidcock kingdom" included the Georgia, Ashburn, Sylvestor & Camilla Railway, which connected with the main line of Southern Railway subsidiary Georgia Southern & Florida at Ashburn, Ga. The GAS&C became known variously as the "Gas Line" or "the Camilla."

But GAS&C was a junior in the Pidcock family, joining the system in 1922. The Pidcocks' "flagship" was the 68-mile Georgia Northern Railway, acquired November 3, 1894. The family's third road was the Albany & Northern, running 35

miles northeast from Albany to Cordele. Completed in 1891, A&N went through several leases, names, and reorganizations before coming under Pidcock control in 1939 and resuming the A&N name in 1942. The Pidcocks abandoned a fourth line, the Flint River & Northeastern, not long before Beebe's odyssey.

THE B&A OF GEORGIA

James N. Pidcock Sr. was a former congressman and builder and owner of the Rockaway Valley Railroad in New Jersey. His railroad interests in Georgia began in 1892, when he visited his son Charles, who was working as a lumber mill clerk at Boston, Ga., near the Flori-

da state line. The elder Pidcock shared his son's enthusiasm for the business potential in the yellow pine forests and the rich sandy soil in the rolling hills of south Georgia. Searching for a promising local venture, the father and son found a dormant railroad charter for the Boston & Albany Railroad of Georgia, which they acquired from a group of Boston (Ga.) businessmen. Like its big namesake linking New England's hub city with New York's state capital, the B&A of Georgia was projected to run between the Peach State towns of Boston and Albany (the latter, though, pronounced locally as All-BINN-ee).

Charter in hand, James and Charles Pidcock set out to build a railroad. At first, the B&A wasn't much of a line, just a typical logging track deep in the heart of south Georgia's timberlands, going north 12 miles from Pidcock (4½ miles east of Boston), serving on-line sawmills and turpentine stills. By 1893 it was 30 miles long, having reached Moultrie. Soon, though, the infant pike was thrown into receivership during the Panic of 1893. Although it appeared the little railroad was doomed, circumstances dictated its survival.

Rather than accepting defeat, the elder Pidcock and son Charles persuaded Charles' two brothers, James N. Jr., and John F., who still lived in New Jersey, to join them in a venture to save the B&A. Together, the family bought all B&A property at a receiver's sale on October 3, 1894. Perhaps sensing the confusion that could result from keeping the same name as the big B&A up north, the Pidcocks on November 3, 1894, surrendered the old charter and got a new one in the name of Georgia Northern Railway Co.

Over the years, J. N. Pidcock and sons developed the Georgia Northern into a thriving line that served several towns up to Albany, reached on its own rails in 1905. (Georgia Northern had served Albany beginning in 1902 via 3 miles of trackage rights from Darrow on what became an Atlantic Coast Line route.) Also in 1905, the ACL connection at Pidcock was moved to Boston.

The Pidcocks soon established an industrial development program in Georgia Northern's rich timber and agricultural area, an integral part of which was the Whitehouse Land Co., which they formed in 1895 to buy, sell, and develop timberland as a traffic source for shipping on their railroad. As the timber was cut and the fertile land left idle, the Pidcocks joined with others in promoting

and developing agriculture and other industries. Georgia Northern continued industrial development until selling the railroad to Southern Railway in 1966.

James N. Pidcock Jr. took over the presidency from his father in 1897 and held it until 1906, when he stepped down in favor his co-founder brother Charles, who held the office for the next 30 years.

ADDING THE GAS&C

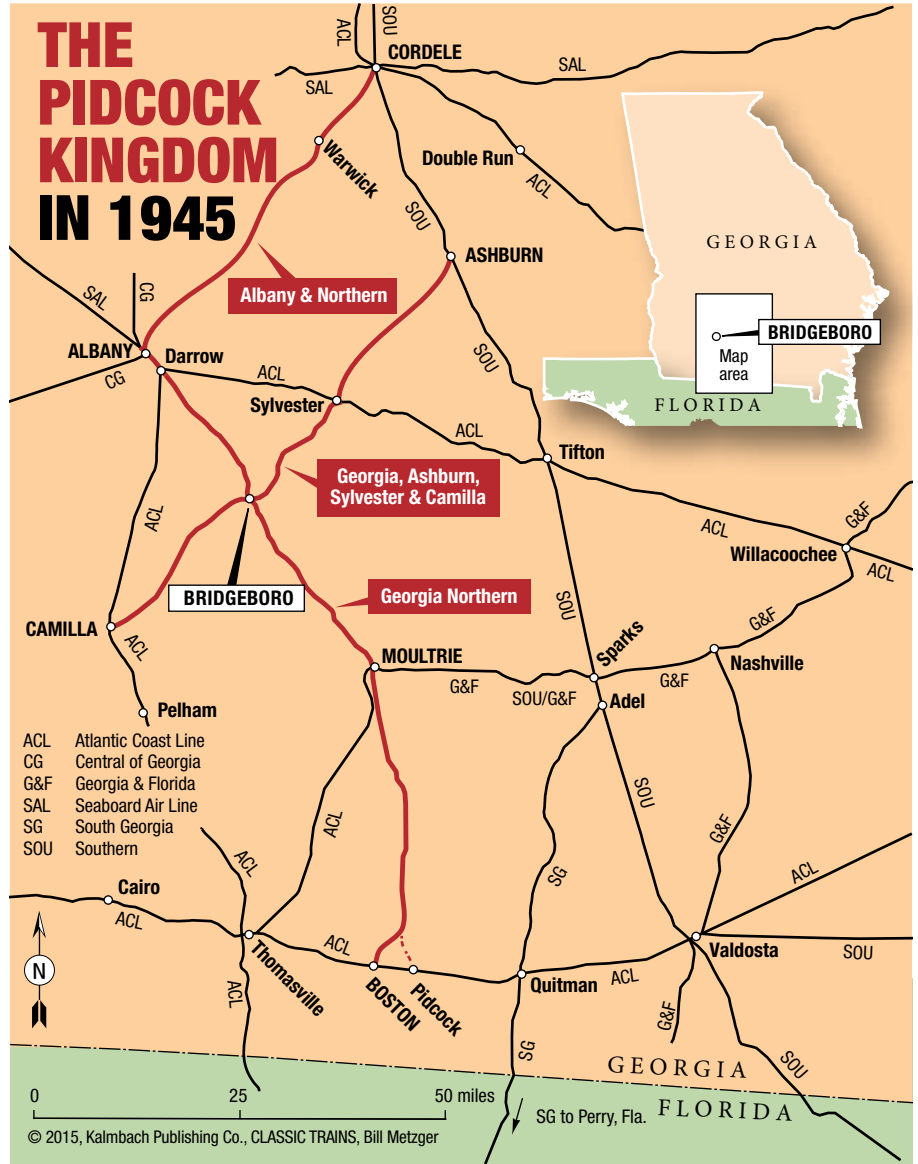
The Georgia, Ashburn, Sylvester & Camilla Railway Co. was born of the 96-mile Hawkinsville & Florida Southern, for which the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1922 authorized total abandonment. This anticipated loss was a matter of great concern to the Georgia Northern as well as to H&FS on-line business leaders and shippers. Together they and other citizens tried to persuade Charles Pidcock to buy and run the 51-mile H&FS segment between Ashburn and Camilla, which crossed the Georgia Northern at Bridgeboro.

Although sympathetic to their cause, President Pidcock believed that any investment he might make would need financial help and the full support of on-line interests, who formed a citizens committee. Accordingly, he asked them to put up one-half the necessary working capital as evidence of their support. Negotiations resulted in the organization of GAS&C, with more than 200 shippers and citizens owning half of the stock. The new road then bought the H&FS segment from its receiver, and GAS&C started operations in June 1922. Part of the purchase pact was that the Pidcocks would manage and run GAS&C. Other economies were realized from joint use with Georgia Northern of locomotives, cars, other equipment, and facilities.

In 1936, Charles W. Pidcock Jr., grandson of Georgia Northern founder James N. Pidcock Sr., succeeded his father as president of the three family short lines. He served in that capacity until his death in 1961, after which W. Leon Pippin Jr., his son-in-law, took over as president and general manager.

THE "BRIDGEBORO BOOGIE"

From its earliest days, the Georgia Northern had relied on its Class 1 connections — lines that became part of ACL at both Boston and Albany plus the Central of Georgia at Albany — for car supply as well as access to the national rail system. It was not until the 1950s, though, after Leon Pippin married into the family and became heir apparent to



All "boogied out," Georgia Northern 801 (built as EMD SW8 demonstrator 801) clears the GAS&C diamond and curves off into the piney woods, continuing on its way to Moultrie.



April 1956: The only Baldwin in the Pidcock kingdom, bought-new 660 h.p. No. 172, switches Swift Packing at Moultrie (top); GAS&C's little GE 70-tonner rambles along at Terrell (above).

Two photos, Jim Shaw

the Pidcocks, that management fully recognized the substantial benefits that could be derived from GAS&C's connection with the Georgia Southern & Florida (Southern Railway) at Ashburn.

Accordingly, Pippin started promoting routing to and from Georgia Northern points and GS&F via the familial GAS&C interchange at Bridgeboro. Not only did the Pidcock lines increase revenues, shippers at Albany and Moultrie benefitted from the additional outlet.

Soon the interchange at Bridgeboro — a tiny place described in print by Jim Boyd in 1969 as consisting of “a few houses, a combination gas station and general store, and one trackside industry” — became the focus of intense switching activity when the daily-except-Sunday locals on Georgia Northern and GAS&C would meet in the morning to exchange cars. The accompanying photos of that action, on pages 60–63, taken circa 1955 by the late Harold Sanborn of Lakeland, Fla., capture the drill.

The Pidcock Lines' 1950s strategy of promoting the Southern connection at Ashburn not only increased revenues for Georgia Northern and GAS&C, it also altered traffic patterns. One result was

the downgrading of the 28-mile Moultrie–Boston end of the Georgia Northern. While the ACL connection at Boston had been active in the past, after Georgia Northern discontinued the Moultrie–Boston passenger train in 1956 — employing self-propelled motor cars, which lingered on the property for years in typical shortline style — that 29-mile segment saw the Moultrie yard crew go down to Boston only when required.

ENTER THE SOUTHERN

In the early 1950s, Southern Railway Vice President, Operations, D. W. Brosnan, who later would become president, believed that some of his system's many shortline connections had value for industrial development purposes. Under this philosophy, Southern in 1954 purchased the Live Oak, Perry & Gulf and the South Georgia, two related Florida short lines that connected with each other at Perry, southeast of Tallahassee, and at Adel, Ga., with Southern's GS&F Macon–Jacksonville main line. Brosnan also had his eyes on the Pidcock Lines, particularly Georgia Northern, but the owners at that time had no interest in selling.

This changed in late 1963, when Leon

Pippin, the lines' president, approached the Southern about the possibility of selling out. This led to a series of negotiations and filings that culminated in the sale of Georgia Northern and GAS&C to Southern on July 1, 1966. (A&N had been sold in 1964.) Southern's policy was to have its shortline acquisitions operate independently, so although Brosnan was named chairman of the board of the Pidcock trio, the company continued local management by electing Pippin as president and general manager.

The acquisition negated the Pidcock lines' need for the Southern connection at Ashburn, so the “Bridgeboro Boogie” faded into history. Albany & Northern, by the late 1960s active only from Cordele 12 miles southwest to Warwick, was abandoned in 1977, and by 1990 Southern successor Norfolk Southern had abandoned all the former GAS&C plus the Georgia Northern south of Moultrie.

Conversely, after celebrating the 75th anniversary of rail service to Moultrie in February 1968 by steaming excursion 2-8-0 No. 630 on a three-day odyssey to Moultrie from Birmingham, Ala. — complete with GEORGIA NORTHERN and C. W. PIDCOCK lettering on her cab — Southern announced that the Albany–Moultrie line would be upgraded as part of a new through freight route.

EPILOGUE

Alas, the old Georgia Northern segment, from Albany through Bridgeboro to Moultrie (and extending east on the former G&F branch to Sparks), didn't last as a Class 1 freight route, although service has continued under a series of new shortline owners. In 1995 Norfolk Southern spun off the Albany–Moultrie–Sparks line, plus the old Georgia & Florida north from Valdosta, Ga., to Nashville, Ga., to shortline portfolio manager Gulf & Ohio, which began operations on April 14, 1995, using a name from yesteryear — Georgia & Florida.

On January 21, 1999, Gulf & Ohio consolidated its holdings in the region and sold them to another shortline company, North American RailNet, which renamed the carrier Georgia & Florida RailNet. Then in 2005, OmniTRAX acquired the operation from RailNet, renaming it Georgia & Florida Railway.

So some of the old “Pidcock kingdom” today remains as part of “what goes around comes around,” and if you happen by Bridgeboro, Ga., at the right time, you might see a train. But it won't stop to “boogie.” ■

PIDCOCK'S SHORTLINE TRIO IN FULL COLOR



Shortline style: Georgia Northern SW8 No. 13, ex-801, hauls a short freight at Albany, Ga., on May 28, 1967. Five photos this page, Keith E. Ardinger



Its paint scheme reflecting its Southern Railway origin, FT No. 14, renumbered from 4105, rests at Albany. GAS&C also had an ex-SOU FT.



Fairbanks-Morse motor car No. 2, built as one of Southern's six, at Moultrie in March 1957, was still there in 1965! Stanley H. Mailer collection



Georgia Northern Brill motor car 55, also at Moultrie on March 27, 1957, likewise was on hand in 1965, in the shop. Stan Mailer collection



Sporting six exhaust stacks, Baldwin DS-44-660 No. 172 burbles to itself at Moultrie on November 21, 1965. It would become No. 12.



Albany & Northern's only unit, GE 70-tonner No 70, halts for a portrait at Albany on May 31, 1965. By 1967 it would have a new number — 1.



Formerly No. 71, Georgia, Ashburn, Sylvester & Camilla 70-tonner No. 15 sports fresh-looking paint at "off-line" Moultrie on May 28, 1967.