

A Brief History of the Central of Georgia Railroad (John A. Caramia, Jr. – 2013)

Since the early 1800s commercial activity in Savannah centered on its port. Cotton was shipped down the Savannah River from Augusta for export to overseas markets. However, when the South Carolina Railroad, connecting Hamburg (directly across the Savannah River from Augusta) to Charleston (Savannah's rival port), was completed in 1830 the shipments of cotton through Savannah began to diminish. To combat this economic decline a group of Savannah officials obtained a state charter (December 20, 1833) for the Central Rail Road and Canal Company with the intent of building either a railroad or canal link to Macon, 190 miles inland from Savannah. It proved to be difficult to raise the money needed to build the railroad so the idea of a canal was soon abandoned and the company petitioned the state to change its charter and name. This was granted and in 1836 company changed its name to Central Railroad & Banking Company. Construction of a railroad line began in 1835 and by 1843, the line to Macon had been completed, a distance of 190 miles making it, at that time, the longest continuous railroad line under one management in the world. While the railroad was growing, so too were the new Savannah rail yards and shops. Construction of the first shops complex began in 1836.

The first President of the Central of Georgia was William Washington Gordon, who oversaw the building of the rail lines to Macon and the initial construction of a shop complex, and passenger station at Savannah. Before becoming President of the railroad he had served as the Mayor of Savannah. He was also the grandfather of Juliet Gordon Low, the founder of the Girl Scouts. With the death of William Washington Gordon in March 1842, Richard R. Cuyler became President. Beginning in 1851, he oversaw the construction of a larger facility at Savannah for the maintenance, repair and construction of locomotives and rail cars. The Superintendent of the Railroad, William Wadley, supervised the construction of the Savannah shops which included a roundhouse with 39 stalls, a turntable, machine shop, a blacksmith shop, carpentry shop, boiler/engine house, tender frame shop, smokestack, and other smaller shops and storage areas. The Central, like most railroads, was organized around four main departments: Maintenance of Way (building and repairing track, switches, bridges, turnouts, etc), Maintenance of Motive Power (purchasing, building and repair of locomotives and rail cars), Transportation/Operations (movement of freight and passengers), and Administration.

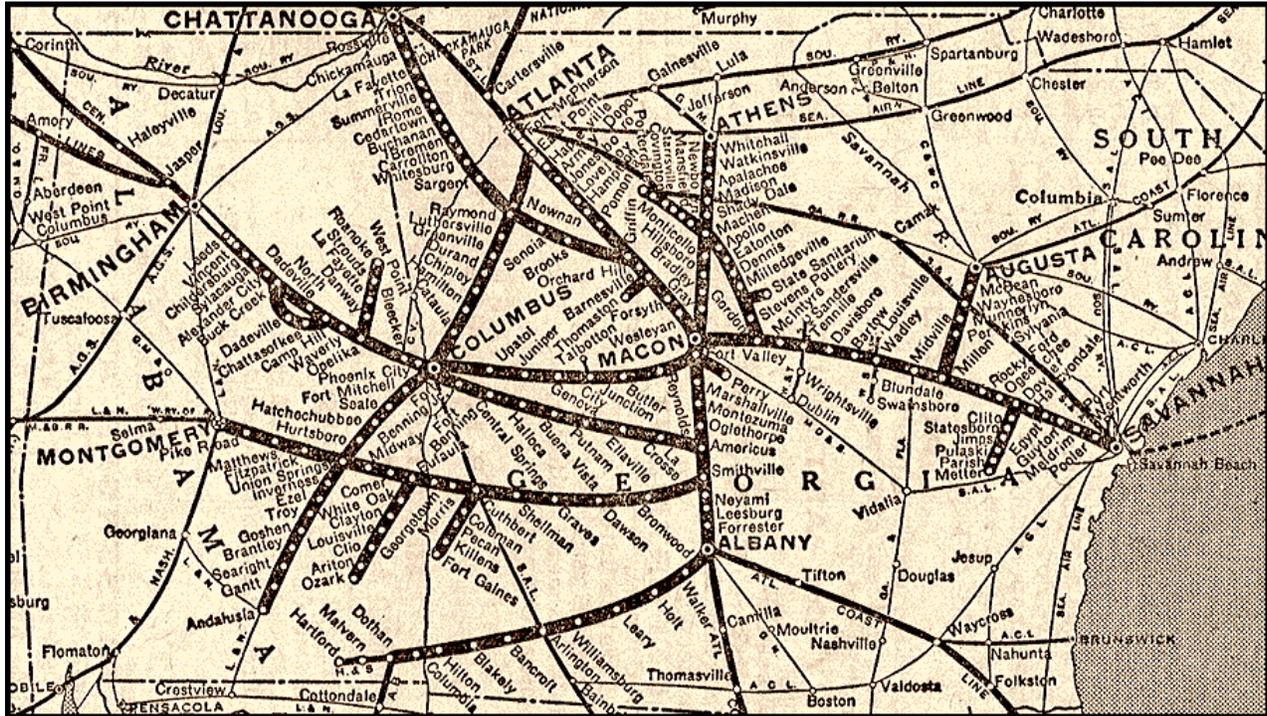
The first full year of operation for the Central was 1840. Revenues were generated by freight, passengers, and mail. The majority of revenue was generated from freight (70%) and most of that was from shipping cotton from the plantations in the interior to Savannah to be exported. Passenger revenues for that first year accounted for 27% and mail just 3% of the total revenues. In 1841 rail operations were greatly affected by a succession of freshets, which destroyed track and bridges, and a prevalence of fever among workers, which made it difficult to make the necessary repairs. By 1842 the Central had made the necessary repairs and was running full time. Between 1842 and the Civil War most of Central's business was transporting freight. The percent of freight

for this period ranged from a low of 68% to a high of 86%. Passenger revenues for this period ranged from a low of 11% to a high of 23%. Mail ranged from a high of 9% to a low of 2%. During each of the years leading up to the Civil War the Central was able to make a profit.

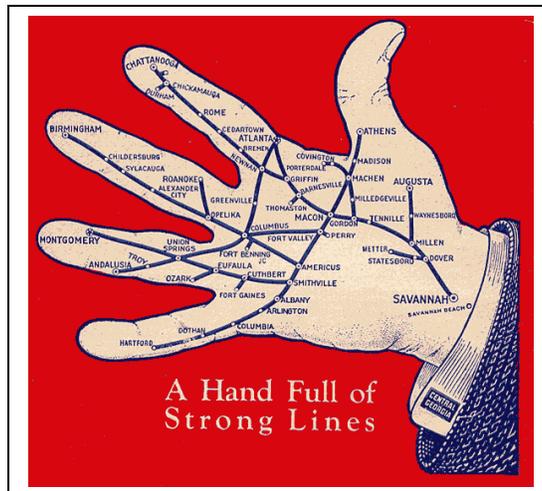
Although the Savannah Shops complex was spared during the Civil War, the war years were difficult for the Central. At the beginning of the Civil War, the Central controlled 229 miles of track out of the 1,420 miles of track throughout the state of Georgia. With 59 locomotives and 729 cars, the Central had the second largest holding of rolling stock in the South. This changed drastically however when the Confederate Government ordered railroads to release rolling stock to those railroads carrying the most military traffic. The Central's Savannah shops were also put to work producing gun carriages and other military equipment. Maintenance of locomotives was mostly shifted to Macon for the remainder of the war. Between 1861 and 1863 the Central was able to continue to make a profit but passenger service became more important than freight. In fact, in 1862 and 1863 the revenues from passenger service were more than from freight. Much of this was due to the difficulty of exporting cotton byway of Savannah due to the Union Blockade and the need for more civilian and military passenger service. During the war the Central could not do any repairs on its tracks which were being worn out due to heavy train traffic and a number of their locomotives and cars were being used by other railroad throughout the south. Another blow to the Central came from Sherman's March to the Sea in which Union troops destroyed track, bridges, and other railroad facilities. As a result of the Civil War and Sherman's March the Central lost 140 miles of track, 14 locomotives, and 97 cars.

At the close of the War, the Central had lost much of its greatness. William Wadley became President of the Central in January 1866 and continued as President until 1882. He built the company into a great railroad. By June 1866 rail service was restored to Macon from Savannah and by 1867 the Central was again making a profit with most of the revenue coming from their freight business. The Savannah complex continued to be the headquarters for the Central of Georgia throughout its expansion into Georgia. This post-war expansion saw the replacement of all destroyed rail connections and the addition of 1500 miles of new track. The company also diversified by purchasing, in 1872, the Savannah Steamship Line and forming the Ocean Steamship Company of Savannah, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Central. Two years earlier William Wadley had purchased the 273 acre Vale Royal Plantation which fronted the Savannah River. Here the Central built docks and warehouse facilities which they used until they sold the property to the State of Georgia in 1958.

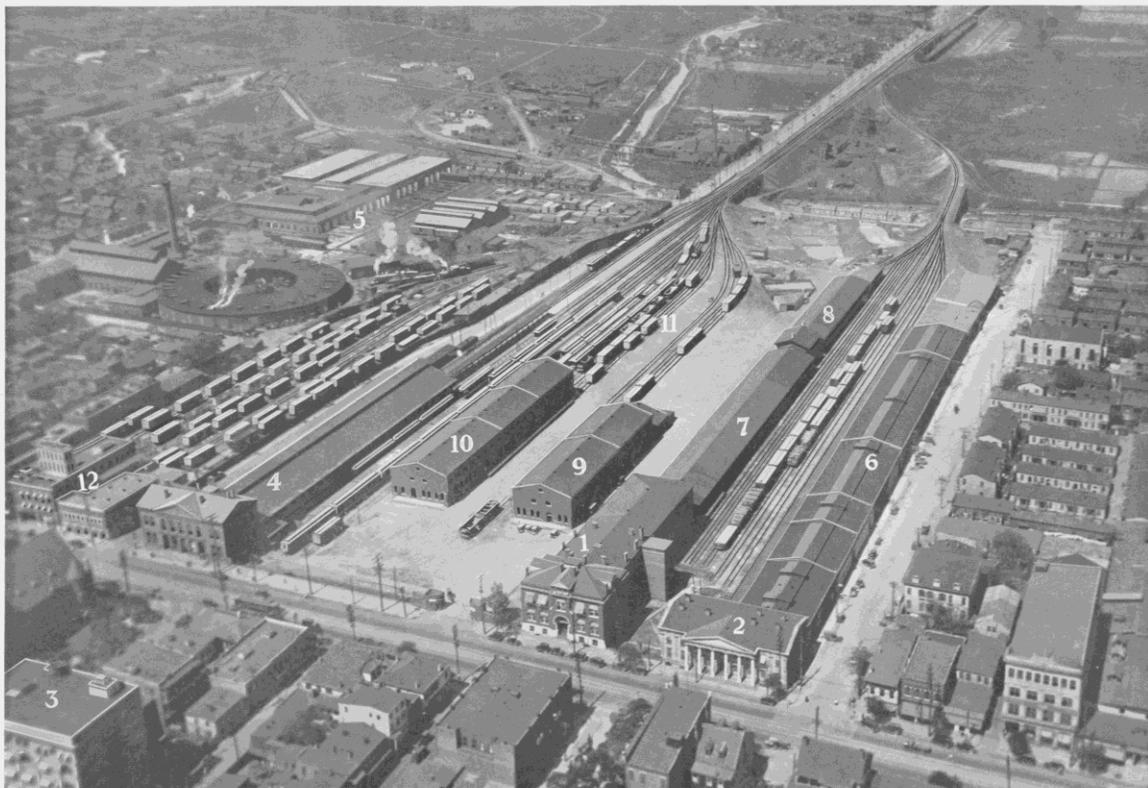
Below is a track map for the Central of Georgia.



In 1887 The Central of Georgia was purchased by the Richmond Terminal Company. The new company began issuing greatly over-valued bonds based on the good credit of the Central resulting in huge debts for the company. In 1890 the Central purchased the Tybee Railroad which had been built in 1887 by the Savannah and Atlantic Railroad. This 17.7 mile road from Savannah to Tybee Island was run by the Central until July 31, 1933 when it ceased operations. In 1892 the Central was put under receivership with Hugh Moss Comer named Receiver. At that time the Central had almost 2,700 miles of track. In October 1895 all the asset of the Central were sold to the New York City investment banking firm of Thomas & Ryan. By November 1st they created a new company: The Central of Georgia Railway with Hugh Moss Comer as President. This resulted in a new logo and advertising slogan: *A Handful of Strong Lines*.



The Central of Georgia Railway Company was purchased in 1907 by investment banker E. H. Harriman of New York City who two years later sold the company to the Illinois Central Railroad. They contained control of the Central of Georgia until the Great Depression in 1932. The Central reached its peak in the 1920s. For over 100 years it was the largest employer in Savannah. Below is a view of the Savannah complex in 1923.



VIEW OF CENTRAL OF GEORGIA RAILWAY GENERAL OFFICE BUILDINGS, PASSENGER STATION, SHOPS, WEST BROAD STREET YARDS AND WAREHOUSES: 1, 2 and 3—General Offices. 4—Passenger Station. 5—Shops. 6—New Street Warehouse occupied by Ballard & Ballard, J. G. Butler Builders Supply Company, Carlyle Provision Company, Haas-Guthman Company, M. S. Herman & Bro., S. A. Kantzper, W. L. Poythress, and Unity Grocery Company. 7—Central of Georgia Railway storage warehouse 12. 8—Warehouses of Burns & Harmon, W. F. Cardinal, I. D. Hirsch and Frank Palmer. 9—Warehouse of R. C. Williams Georgia Corporation. 10—Warehouse of Semmes Hardware Company. 11—West Broad Street Team Tracks. 12—Plants of Armour & Company, Cudahy Packing Company, Morris & Company, Swift & Company and Wilson & Company.

During the Great Depression, the Central went into bankruptcy, but continued operations. In the 1940s, the Central of Georgia began switching to diesel locomotives as steam locomotives were retired. Following World War II, the Central introduced new streamlined passenger trains, The Nancy Hanks II and the Man O' War that used diesel locomotives instead of steam locomotives. This signaled the beginning of the slow decline of the Savannah Shops. As diesel locomotives began to replace steam locomotives on American railroads, shop complexes designed to service steam locomotives were found to be ill-suited for the maintenance of diesel and were slowly phased out. For a period diesels were serviced at Savannah, but that work was soon shifted to the Macon shops reducing the number of employees needed at Savannah. The last railroad to be purchased by the Central was the Savannah & Atlanta Railway in 1951. The Southern Railway acquired the Central of Georgia in 1963 and closed down the Savannah shops, ending over 100 years of railroad activity at the site.