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Published in cooperation with the
ALABAMA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
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to Troy. When Woolfolk journeyed to New York to obtain financing, he found most doors closed to him. He blamed the Central for this fact and accused that company of hiring private detectives to follow him. However, through the influences of Henry Bradley Plant, owner of the Plant System of railroads and steamships, Woolfolk was able to secure the necessary funds.  

Sometime in 1888, a contract was signed with the Plant Investment Company whereby it would operate the Alabama Midland when completed. The interest on the bonds was to be paid from the earnings of the railroad, although the Alabama Terminal and Improvement Company, which owned a majority of common stock ($900,000 of the first preferred stock, and $800,000 of the bonds), guaranteed the interest to November 1, 1892.  

The Metropolitan Trust Company of New York was the trustee of the bonds. The Midland railroad also secured individual grants of $600,000 and a state grant of $24,000.  

Contracts for the survey of the route were awarded in early 1888. By March, 1889, the section from Bainbridge, Georgia to the Chattahoochee River was graded and laying of the track began. However, the company experienced difficulty with the federal government when it began constructing a bridge across the Chattahoochee River at Gordon, Alabama. The railroad engineers had selected a site where the river made a bend, and the bridge had to cross the stream at an angle. This plan violated government regulations, and the corps of engineers ordered construction halted. The plan was redrawn in order for the bridge to cross the river at right angles, and the work of construction recommenced.  

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1 Railroad Gazette, Jan. 28, 1887, 186; Apr. 1, 1887, 223; Sept. 23, 1887, 626; Troy (Ala.) Enquirer, July 15, 1889; H. V. and H. W. Poor, Manual of Railroads of the United States (1889), 655.


3 Poor's Manual of Railroads (1889), 655.

4 Railroad Gazette, Mar. 29, 1889, 218.

5 Ibid., Feb. 10, 1888, 96; Feb. 20, 1888, 114; Mar. 8, 1889, 170; Troy Enquirer, Mar. 6, 1889, quoting Columbia Enterprise; ibid., Mar. 23, 1889.
Many problems still faced the Alabama Midland. Harassment by the Central Railroad and Banking Company did not cease. The Midland purchased a number of flat and box cars to use in construction work. They shipped these to Bainbridge, Georgia, over the lines of the Georgia company. The Central appropriated the cars for their own use, loading some of them with lumber and shipping them to Michigan and Ohio. Others were used on the Central's construction trains. Two of the Alabama Midland engines while in transit on the Central's lines were seriously damaged in an accident and only partially repaired. Furthermore, the Alabama Midland's route crossed the Central's track at Troy and this led to a lawsuit, which delayed construction. Another conflict arose over a right of way along Utopia Ridge, north of Ozark, which the Alabama Midland obtained in 1887. The Central Railroad decided to construct a line from Clayton to Ozark and built along the ridge, where a right of way had been deeded to the Alabama Midland. Woolfolk stated that the Georgia concern not only seized the route but built “in a zigzag manner, more resembling the course of a worm fence, which completely covered the ridge from side to side at some points, excluding absolutely the occupancy of said ridge by any other road subsequent to themselves.” The Alabama Midland had to change the location of their route and cut through a hill in order to pass under the Central's track. The cost of construction was increased and the new route was more expensive to maintain.

There was much activity along the route of the Alabama Midland during the spring and summer of 1889. Grading of the roadbed was almost completed. The contract for the crossties for the section between Ozark and Troy was awarded, and the order for timbers to be used for the bridge over the Conecuh River was given to two sawmills. Soundings were taken on the river and preparations were made to commence work on the bridge as soon as the contractor received the timbers.

J. W. Woolfolk visited New York City in April, and when he returned he reported the company's financial backing sound. He announced in Troy that grading for the double track, from the land owned by W. W. Jones, one mile north of the city, to South Three Notch Street, would be completed within one week. “The houses on the right of way are being moved, and the mechanics are troubled about [contractor] Patterson building a railroad faster than they can move houses,” reported the Troy Enquirer.

The inhabitants of Troy were excited over the prospects of another railroad, especially one constructed and controlled, or so they thought, by local men. The city's press kept the public informed of the progress of the new railroad. In April, 1889, it was reported that 500,000 crossties were required on the route between Bainbridge and Montgomery, and the contractor had about one-half of them ready. The grading between Troy and Brundidge would be completed by May 1, the editor said, and the contractors would immediately begin work on the route north of Troy. It was also stated, with a great deal of satisfaction, that enough side track would be laid within the city limits to hold two hundred cars while other trains passed through.

Competition between towns for railroads was great in this period. The Troy newspaper warned the city officials not to become complacent. If Troy wanted the car shops of the Alabama Midland the officials had better work to get them, because railroads did not beg cities or towns to take them, the editor declared.

Competition was not slow in coming. In August, a mass
meeting was held in Ozark and a number of resolutions lauding the Alabama Midland were adopted. The railroad was recognized as the benefactor of Ozark and the adjoining area. Captain Joseph W. Woolfolk was praised as the prime mover behind the railroad. The town, the mass meeting resolved, was ready to offer every inducement to have the machine shops of the railroad located in Ozark. It was pointed out that from the taxation standpoint Ozark had many advantages over both Montgomery and Troy.12

A new railroad stimulated the economic life of all towns along its route. In Troy, the local editor recounted the following economic developments. By early April, 1889, a new laundry was almost ready for operation; the completion of water wells was all that was lacking. By the end of the month, a new ice company was ready to begin operation; it had a well forty feet deep and eighteen feet in diameter. Furthermore, the Troy Iron Works had obtained a contract for seven hundred double plow stocks of an improved pattern. It was also claimed that the railroad would enhance Troy's position as the livestock market of Southeast Alabama. During the season just ended, six hundred mules and one hundred and twenty-five buggy and saddle horses had been sold from Troy markets, declared the editor.13

The editor of the Troy Enquirer certainly did his part to promote a boom in the business of the city. In March, 1889, he urged the construction of a new $50,000 hotel to attract Northerners to the city. If the hotel were built, Troy would become a winter resort, he said. He urged the formation of a stock company to raise the money. “Entertaining tourists at six dollars a day is a fine business for the town, and the increase in demand and price for every kind of country produce is also very desirable for the country,” he declared. He admitted the increased cost of goods would bear heavily on the local inhabitants, but this hardship would be offset by the tourist money.14

At the close of 1889, the people of Troy were confident that the future held a bright promise for their city. They expected to be ranked as a large manufacturing center soon because their industries were prospering. The Troy Fertilizer Company declared a fifteen per cent dividend; the shoe factory was a success; the telegraph company paid a large dividend; the machine shops were unable to perform all the work requested; the cigar factory could not keep up with orders; and a knitting mill was scheduled for operation within a few weeks. In addition, the construction of a sash and blind factory, a cotton compress, a soap factory, and a harness making establishment was planned. The future did indeed appear bright for Troy, and much of the optimism stemmed from the construction of the Midland Railroad.15

The Alabama Midland not only stimulated business; it jolted the complacent attitude of the managers of the Mobile and Girard Railroad so that they began discussing plans to extend that line from Troy to Pensacola, Florida.16 Another new line was planned to pass through Elba, cross the Jackson lumber lands in Covington County, cross the L & N tracks thirty miles north of Pensacola and then parallel those tracks into the city. “The assurances had of the Jackson people and a contract involved with the Standard Oil Company brings to the scheme sufficient strength in its incipience to assure the necessary capital to construct the line,” the newspaper declared. The reporter refused to reveal the identity of those planning this road, but he assured his readers that they were competent.17

12 Ibid., Aug. 31, 1889.
13 Ibid., Mar. 25, Apr. 6, 20, 27, 1889.
14 Ibid., Mar. 25, May 18, 1889.
15 Ibid., Dec. 21, 1889.
16 Ibid., June 1, Sept. 28, 1889.
17 Ibid., Dec. 21, 1889.
As its lines progressed, the Alabama Midland experienced more difficulties with the Central Railroad. It sent an engine and twenty-four flat cars to Ozark to be used in track laying from that point to the east. The cars were loaded with four hundred tons of fifty-six-pound steel rails purchased from the Western Railway Company. The latter company hauled the cars over its own line to Eufaula and there turned them over to the Central Railroad for shipment to Ozark. The Central side tracked the train in Eufaula for two weeks, effectively preventing the Midland from commencing track laying eastward from Ozark. After a number of protests by Woolfolk to officials of the Georgia company the material was finally delivered to the Central's Ozark depot.\textsuperscript{18}

The Alabama Midland then began constructing a side track so the engine and cars could be moved from the depot to the place where they were needed. The side track had to cross the Central's track. The Central Railroad secured a temporary injunction to prevent construction across its track. But the judge also ruled that the Central would have to put up a $2,000 bond as security to insure that the delay would not damage the Alabama Midland. The injunction and the small bond angered the editor of the Troy Enquirer. He wrote, "If the Central is to be the 'petted darling' before whom judges, courts and everybody shall bow in humble obeisance, and have the rights and interests of the whole of southeast Alabama at its mercy, the state government had best issue an edict giving it kingly prerogatives." He declared that "there is not a citizen in southeast Alabama who did not expect just such management on the part of the Central with the purpose to delay, hinder and damage the Midland."\textsuperscript{19}

The officials of the Alabama Midland solved the problem by direct action. The court dissolved the injunction on Satur-

day, July 20, 1889. Early on Monday morning the Alabama Midland put one hundred men to work constructing the side track. The workers were guarded by two hundred men armed with Winchester rifles, who had been brought in from Dothan during the weekend. The officials of the Central Railroad were taken by surprise; they tried to telegraph their head-quarters for instructions but were unsuccessful. The Alabama Midland controlled the telegraph line from Ozark, and according to plan the operator was so rushed by business that day that he was unable to send the messages for the Central officials. By midafternoon all the Alabama Midland equipment had been carried across the Central's line and was on the side track of the Midland railroad. The editor of the Troy Enquirer was jubilant; the Midland was now ready to lay track from Ozark eastward toward Gordon.\textsuperscript{20}

Another railroad, the Northwest and Florida, had commenced constructing a narrow gauge line from Montgomery to Luverne, Alabama. The officials of the Alabama Midland purchased that company because it would compete with their line. The purchase price was $500,000; however, it was a fair price, or so the directors thought, because they received twenty miles of completed track and fourteen acres of terminal land in Montgomery.\textsuperscript{21}

At the annual meeting of the Alabama Midland stockholders in July, 1889, it was reported that by July 15, seventy miles of sixty-pound steel rail would be laid and that ninety-five miles of rails were on hand. At that time the company owned six locomotives, two hundred box cars, twenty stock cars, six caboose cars, and two cars that could be used for baggage, mail, or express.\textsuperscript{22}

In the fall of 1889, work continued at a rapid pace on the road. Colonel Bradford Dunham, one of Plant's men, was

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., Aug. 10, 1889.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., July 15, 20, 1889.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., July 20, 27, 1889.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., July 15, 1889; Railroad Gazette, Mar. 8, 1889, 170.
\textsuperscript{22} Troy Enquirer, July 13, 1889.
selected as superintendent in August. It was announced in late September that the bridge over the Chattahoochee River would be completed within twenty days, and by October 5 the grading was completed between Troy and Ozark. The timber for the Pea River bridge was on hand, and the bridge would be ready by the time the track layers reached it. Twenty-five miles of track extended from Montgomery towards Troy, and if all went well trains would run on schedule from Montgomery to Savannah by Christmas; in fact, the first grand excursion from all points on the line to Troy was planned to take place on Christmas Eve, 1889. But everything did not go according to plan. Accidents and weather served to push the timetable forward two months. Regular train service was in operation between Troy and Ozark in February, 1890, and track laying was completed on the entire route when the crew working north from Troy met the crew working south from Montgomery, twelve miles north of Troy, on February 26, 1890.

A reporter rode from Bainbridge to Ozark and wrote enthusiastically: "An new era and new hopes are opened to the people of Southwest Georgia and Southeast Alabama with the completion of this splendid railroad..." Observers generally agreed. It was pointed out that with the use of commercial fertilizers, which had made their advent after the Civil War, Southeast Alabama could be a fertile region. It was being held back only by the lack of railroads. Main items of freight to and from the region would be cotton, fertilizer, naval stores, lumber, and general freight items to the merchants. Traffic was expected to be great on the Midland because there was little competition.

The route of the Alabama Midland lay through a rich timber and turpentine region. Dothan was a small village with a post office and numerous grog shops catering to workers in the timber industry. Timber and cotton products were carried from the area around Dothan to Columbia, located on the Chattahoochee River, and shipped to market by river boat. The citizens of the region warmly welcomed the advent of the railroad; many invested in the enterprise and some pledged amounts they could never pay. The coming of the railroad coincided with the discovery that the Wiregrass country could grow almost any crop. Consequently, the population and prosperity of the region increased; Dothan became the market center for the area and Columbia, the old market town on the river, declined.

The Alabama Terminal and Improvement Company, the builder of the Alabama Midland, operated the road from its completion to May, 1890, when it was transferred to the railroad company itself. Trains began to operate on a regular schedule on May 21, 1890. Stockholders of the railroad company met in Troy on July 8 and 9, 1890, and authorized the sale of the stock of the railroad to Henry B. Plant’s Savannah, Florida and Western Railway. The board of directors met on July 10 and elected Walter S. Chisholm, a long time Plant associate and legal counsel, president of the company. Joseph W. Woolfolk was vice-president. J. Moultrie Lee and F. B. Smith were elected treasurer and secretary, respectively, positions they held in other companies owned by Plant. Henry S. Haines became general manager on August 1, 1890 and C. P. Atmore, Jr., was appointed traveling passenger agent in September. Henry Bradley Plant held no official position on the Alabama

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24 Troy (Ala.) Messenger, Jan. 23, 1890; Railroad Gazette, Feb. 14, 1890, 119; Mar. 7, 1890, 166.
25 Troy Messenger, Mar. 27, 1890.
26 Ibid., Apr. 17, 1890.

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Midland in 1890; he was not even a member of the board of directors. However, his associates on the board—Chisholm, Haines, Michael J. O’Brien, Henry M. Flagler, and Morton F. Plant—outnumbered the other members—Woolfolk, Wiley, J. D. Murphree, and W. F. VANDIVER, all Alabama men.30

Stockholders of the Alabama Midland met in Montgomery on March 7, 1891 and elected directors. The ratio of Plant men to those from Alabama remained the same, five to four. However, at this time Henry B. Plant was elected a member of the board and president of the company. Woolfolk continued as vice-president. The company’s financial report for the year ending June 30, 1891, the first full year of operation, showed a total earnings of $512,136.34. Operating expenses totaled $436,217.25, leaving net earnings of $75,919.09. This was not enough to pay taxes and interest and the railroad had a deficit of $193,471.72.31

In August, 1891, the Alabama Terminal and Improvement Company caused a sensation in Montgomery railroad circles. It asked the Chancery Court at Montgomery for a receiver for the Alabama Midland because the railroad had not paid the interest on its coupon bonds. The construction company claimed the road was prosperous, and that net income for expenses from August 1, 1890 to March 31, 1891 was $110,460. The interest guaranteed by the Alabama Terminal and Improvement Company totaled $112,000. Vice-President Woolfolk charged that the Plant group would not pay the interest because they wished to depreciate the value of the road’s securities, so that the owners would transfer them to Henry B. Plant.32 Although the truth of the matter is hard to ascertain, an agreement was reached between the two companies in late August and the suit was withdrawn.33 Joseph W. Woolfolk resigned his position as vice-president and director of the Alabama Midland in early 1892 and was replaced by Morton F. Plant. Plant’s Western Railway had won its fight for control. The only Alabama men remaining on the board were O. C. WILEY of Troy, Major Carroll of Ozark, and W. F. VANDIVER of Montgomery.34 The Alabama Midland continued to be operated as part of the Plant System until 1902, when it, along with most lines in that system, was consolidated into the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad.35

The history of the Alabama Midland Railroad is a typical example of how railroads were projected and financed locally in the beginning, only to be taken over by the big railroad companies as consolidation became the order of the day in the 1890’s. Nevertheless, the Wiregrass, an isolated area of Alabama, which had been held back because it lacked transportation facilities, was now opened up—first by small companies which fought among themselves, and then by consolidated lines.

30 Poor’s Manual of Railroads (1891), 597.
31 Ibid. (1892), 78.
32 Troy Messenger, Aug. 6, 1891, quoting the Montgomery Advertiser; Railroad Gazette, Aug. 7, 1891, 555.
33 Ibid., Aug. 23, 1891, 607; Jan. 8, 1892, 30-31.
34 Ibid., Mar. 18, 1892, 218; Dec. 8, 1893, 806; Poor’s Manual of Railroads (1894), 726.
35 Poor’s Manual of Railroads (1902), 199, 747.