

## **How the Railroads Came to Jackson**

By

Bill Smith

### **Mobile & Ohio Railroad**

The first was the Mobile & Ohio Railroad, started in October, 1849, in Mobile, AL. With plans to build to the Ohio River at Cairo, IL. The endeavor ran out of funds and was taken over by investors in Jackson, TN. Under the direction of Judge Milton Brown, who later became a U.S. Congressman from the Jackson District.

The line first entered Jackson in 1851 and was later opened between Jackson and Columbus, KY. in 1858. The first passenger train ran between Jackson and Columbus that same year and made its first passenger run to Cairo in 1874. These tracks were completely destroyed during the Civil War (1861-1865).

The Civil War battle at Shiloh ( which Southern troops called the Battle for Pittsburg Landing) sixty-five miles southeast of Jackson was fought for the North to take control of the railroad junction at Corinth, MS.. It would take away from the South its east-west as well as its north-south supply line railroad which was the Mobile & Ohio RR. that merged with the Gulf, Mobile & Northern RR. in 1940 to become the Gulf, Mobile, & Ohio RR.

### **Illinois Central Railroad**

The second railroad to enter Jackson was the Mississippi Central & Tennessee. A special charter was obtained by Jackson investors from the State of Tennessee on November 30, 1853 to extend the line from Grand Junction, TN. to Jackson. The line was built to Bolivar, then to Medon and on to Jackson in 1857 to link with the M&O RR in order to move freight north from Jackson. In 1873 the line was contracted and later absorbed by the Illinois Central RR. which then built its own line to Cairo, IL.

### **Nashville, Chattanooga & St. Louis Railroad**

The Tennessee Midland Railway Company line from Memphis to Jackson was the forerunner of the N.C. & St. L. RR. This line was often referred to as the "NC" by locals. Like all other railroads to enter Jackson, it was built with funds subscribed by citizens and investors of Jackson.

The first passenger train to enter Jackson from Memphis was on June 1, 1888. The train used the Illinois Central freight house as the Jackson Depot. Construction was then started on the line eastward to Paducah and Nashville.

In April of 1895, a new train called "The Jackson Bell" began operation between Jackson and Memphis. It made the trip in an unheard of speed at that time in Three hours and fifteen minutes.

In the same year, the line now named the Tennessee Midland and Paducah was sold to the Louisville & Nashville RR. The L & N RR immediately leased the line to the N.C. & St.L. RR for 99 years. The highly profitable railroad was merged into the L. & N. RR following WWII. After only a few years , the L. & N. was merged into and is now part of C.S.X. Transportation Corporation. C.S.X. Now reaches Jackson from Milan over the West Tennessee RR which leases the former Illinois Central main line from present owner, Norfolk Southern Railway.

## **Gulf, Mobile & Ohio Railroad**

In 1917, the citizens of Jackson voted to issue bonds worth \$100,000 to extend the Gulf, Mobile & Northern RR from Middleton to Jackson. This line was completed in September of 1919 and the Birmingham and Northwestern was merged into the G.M.&N. In 1927.

The M & O and the GM & N railroads each had branch lines with colorful nicknames. The Okalona, Houston and Calhoun City, westward out of Okalona, MS. was, in jest, often called the "Okalona Horse and Cow Company". The Birmingham and North Western, northeast out of Jackson was sometimes called "The Beer and No Whiskey". This branch became the cornerstone of a large national railway system from the Gulf of Mexico to the Great Lakes.

In 1912, a young Jackson banker, Isaac "Ike" B. Tigrett, was hired as president to run the forty-nine mile branch until a "more competent" person could be found. While waiting, he merged the parts of approximately fifty railroads under the entity (1940), Gulf Mobile and Ohio Railroad, that stretched from Mobile and New Orleans to St. Louis, Chicago and Kansas City, with Jackson TN. as its corporate headquarters and soul of the GM & O RR.

This company became the model of the modern railroad merger movement. In this year of 2006, there are only seven major railroads in the United States.

### **Casey Jones: The world's most Famous Locomotive Engineer**

John Luther "Casey" Jones, the world's most famous locomotive engineer was born in 1863 in Cayce KY. where he obtained his nickname, Casey.

He moved to Jackson, TN. at an early age and became a locomotive fireman for the Mobile & Ohio Railroad. He later transferred to the Illinois Central Railroad in Jackson where he had a quicker chance of promotion due to a shortage of engineers at that time. Casey was promoted and became one of Illinois Central's youngest and best engineers. He was an extraordinary engineer who ran the line's fastest passenger trains while in his thirties, which was most unusual for that period of time.

Contrary to popular lore and song, Casey Jones was not a "rounder". He was a devout Catholic and Family man. He did not smoke, drink liquor or carouse with other women.

Casey was thirty-seven years old when he was killed in the famous wreck in Vaughn, MS. on April 29, 1900. No passenger was killed in that wreck or on any other train operated by Casey Jones. Casey is buried in Jackson. TN.

### **Conclusion**

During the 1930s through the 1960s one could board fifteen regularly scheduled passenger trains at the two depots in Jackson. The names of some of those trains were "The Rebel", "The Gulf Coast Rebel", "The Sunchaser", "The Floridian", "The Seminole", "The City of Memphis", and "The City of Miami". With out change of train, one could travel to Memphis, Nashville, Meridian, Montgomery, Mobile, Birmingham, Jacksonville, Daytona, Orlando, Miami, Centralia, Champaign-Urbana, Springfield, Chicago, St. Louis, Jackson, MS. and New Orleans as well as other cities.

The GM&O and the Illinois Central used Union Station on North Royal and Deadrick Streets. The station has been demolished. The N.C. & St.L. Used the depot built on South Royal Street in 1907. This is the building and site of the N.C. & St.L. Railroad Station and Museum.