

An Old Link With the Southern

Palmer's Gin-House Route

By Kathleen Lewis

THE NEW little railroad was born with a very dignified sounding name—the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad—but, like a lot of children's names, it got lost because a nickname suited it better.

"Palmer's Gin House Route" became a more apt name, because stopping at Ridgeway, South Carolina, Mr. E. G. Palmer's home, to load several hundred bales of cotton from his "cotton patch" and those of the neighboring planters, meant added revenue for the embryonic road which had yet to make a name for itself. The first shipment of freight and passengers which was transported over the road on December 17, 1850, helped to eliminate derisive criticism from those refusing to yield to progress.

Also, it was not uncommon for large landowners such as he to "pitch in" with the building of the road. Many slaves pushing wheelbarrows could move a lot of dirt in a few months' time. Timber to be used in the construction of the railroad was also a precious commodity, and Mr. Palmer had plenty of pines to offer.

Mr. Palmer was willing to give time to the original surveying of the road. Minutes in his own hand-writing showing the thought and preparation that went into early planning are preserved by his descendants in Ridgeway today. It was he, too, who felt that the road should touch as many of the large plantations as possible along the route to Charlotte.

When Subscription Day rolled around—as it was sure to come—he and other gentlemen interested in the venture could blacken up any red ink that might splash on the ledgers.

Mr. Palmer's enthusiasm for the new railroad had never

waned from the first mention, and after it became an actuality, he was named its first president.

The original idea for the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad came from Charleston, which desired to become the

greatest commercial mart, not only from portside but also from stateside.

It was only natural that after the Charleston to Hamburg, South Carolina, railroad was a going thing that the Charleston promoters should look to a link to the north. So, they were not averse to lending an ear to ideas and saw fruitful advantages in a meeting which was set for interested parties June 12, 1847, in Hibernian Hall, Charleston.

Attending from Columbia, were Robt. Latta, Col. Wade Hampton, Col. R. H. Goodwin, Dr. J. N. Parker, Dr. Edw. Sill, Jos. A. Black, James D. Tradewell, John Bryce, John S. Preston, James Martin, J. W. Bradley, B. Reilly and J. F. Marshall.

Camden men who wanted to by-pass Columbia and run the line from their town were six in number: W. E. Johnson, Col. W. J. Taylor, C. Matheson, J. R. Cureton, James R. McKain and C. J. Shannon.

Chester's representatives were John A. Bradley, Jas. Pagan and Samuel McAliley—the man who inquired, "who would be fool enough to try to build a railroad?"

Later, it turned out, that Fairfield county's representative that day would be E. G. Palmer, who at that time was fighting for the route to Charlotte via Columbia.

Camden and Columbia continued to vie for the route, and surveys revealed that the difference in the alternate route by way of the latter would be

seventeen miles, and that it would require \$375,000 more. Estimates per mile ranged around \$12,500.

These figures, however, did not frighten agriculture producers who claimed that cost of transportation ate up most of their profits.

On December 18, 1846, during the next session of the S. C. Legislature, an act was passed providing for the organization of the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad Company.

On January 2 the next year,

this was supplemented by a North Carolina franchise; and differences in the two original charters were reconciled in a S. C. Act. passed December 19, 1848.

The road was surveyed by a Colonel Garnett of Virginia and by the Rev. John Johnson, rector of St. Phillips Church, Charleston, S. C. (1873-1906) an engineer.

The road was designed to run as centrally as possible through Richland, Fairfield, Chester, York—all in South Carolina—on into North Carolina. It followed the Ridge (Ridgeway), the highest point along the way.

Capital stock of the railroad was \$840,000, according to one source, most of which was subscribed locally when the books were opened. "This sum together with bond issues of the road held by the State of South Carolina in the amount of \$272,000, a general issue of \$100,000, a presumable gift from the Town Council of Columbia in bonds for \$15,000, and earnings of the road would complete the building at a total cost slightly in excess of one million dollars."

At the time of the 4th annual report of the stockholders at Chesterville, S. C., November 19-20, 1851, the president and chief engineer said they had

seventy miles of working road and there remained but thirty-nine more before reaching the terminus. The last section of the contract had not been let because the site for the depot at Charlotte, N. C., had not been decided. The equipment at this time consisted of four engines, two passenger and baggage cars, twelve box and thirty-four dirt cars.

At this same meeting, the treasurer reported net earnings of the road from commencement were \$20,568.88, of which \$6,166 had been for hauling mail. Directors elected at the time for the next year were John Caldwell, Charleston; J. S. Boatright and Benj. F. Taylor, Richland County; E. G. Palmer and John Buchanan, Fairfield County; James A. Lewis and

James Pagan, Chester County; A. E. Hutchinson, York County; and C. J. Fox, A. B. Davidson, John A. Young and Wm. Phifer for North Carolina.

By this time, however, the peoples' fascination for the train was so complete that all former objections such as "sparks will set our houses on fire"; "the trains will run over and kill my little Negro slaves" were all forgotten, and they cared not whether the stockholders made money. The train was here to stay!

From the opening of the line until it was extended to Charlotte in 1856, the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad was carefully managed and apparently never ran into such financial difficulties as experienced by the Charleston-Hamburg line. During the years before the war, it laid a foundation for solvency which even the disaster of the South and the wrecking of the line by General Sherman, did not destroy.

The tracks of the Iron Horses of the beginning were quite different from those of today.

Cross ties were placed on bare red clay in Fairfield and on other types of earth afforded in the other counties. On this heavy stringers were laid, every few ties being raised and notched out to receive the stringer by which the track was held together. Small, flat "chunk" rails containing holes at intervals were spiked down on the sills over a ballasted roadbed. In some spots it was necessary to drive heavy pilings.

Riding the train was described by someone as "doing the turkey trot"—but ride it they did. It was a novelty that was more fascinating than medicine shows, the chatauqua or dancing the quadrille. It was a downright convenience and luxury, too; and anyone who could afford the price of a ticket had the "All Aboard" fever.

The coming of the train opened up a whole new world to the countryside through which it passed. It was a source of entertainment and gossip, accord-

ing to stories handed down; and the people turned out en masse to meet the Up Train or the Down Train. They learned the engines' names and spoke of them intimately. The engineers and conductors became their friends: Bill Sprinkle, Simons Clarkson, Archie Fetner, Fickling ("Cabbagehead"), Jim Alexander, McPearson, and Jaek Germany. Legend in Fairfield County says that the latter, with his two sisters, Henrietta and Fanny (later Mrs. Free), arrived too young in this country to remember their surnames and therefore adopted that of the country from which they had emigrated. Mr. Germany, who always carried his girl's picture in his cab—a beautiful painting of a young lady with grapes in her hair—was killed June 1893, along with his fireman, when a freshet washed out the bed near Ridgeway, S. C.

The puffing, wood-burning engines, making their way at night, were guided by burning, lightwood flaggots placed upright on a sand-box platform in front of the train. The engines presented a startling but beautiful picture as they shoved their twenty tons across the rails, and this was a welcome sight—and sound—which broke the stillness as for a brief period people gathered at their windows to watch ingenuity in motion.

Whenever the rain pulled in at its first appearance in any village or hamlet—no matter if a day or six months behind schedule—the grapevine had phoned the best cooks in the neighborhood who invited all their friends and enemies to a barbecue in celebration of the history-making and earth-shaking event. Chester and Fort Mill threw two of the largest barbecues on record—it is probably still a record—for several thousand people who stopped, listened and looked at the phenomena.

An "unprecedented" number of 27 boxes drawn on one run later by the Palmetto amazed the people who had heretofore seen loads no larger than that borne by a two-horse wagon. Like the Palmetto, all of the locomotives bore meaningful

names: the E. G. Palmer, the James Gadsden, James Garnet, F. H. Elmore, B. F. Taylor, the York, Chester, Fairfield and Richland.

Passengers in their rides were fully protected, with extra cars loaded with cotton bales or baggage placed between in case of an explosion in the engine from steam. The passenger car was thirty feet long with a portico at each end and there were 20 windows on each side, glazed, 15x30 inches, from which the passengers could gaze. Freights were first constructed twenty-one feet long but later became thirty feet long to hold about fifty bales of cotton and about 15,000 pounds of other goods.

Unlike the first trip in 1850 when a delay occurred at Winnsboro, S. C., causing the train not to reach White Oak, six miles away, until June 1 of the following year, (Youngsville—now Woodward—June 25, Blackstock, July 22, and Cornwell, the mid-point between Columbia and Charlotte where rest and eating facilities were established, August 13), ten years later there were fast, regular schedules. According to an announcement September 21, 1861 in **The Daily South Carolinian** by T. J. Sumner, Engineer and Superintendent, trains left Columbia at 8 a.m. and arrived at the Terminus, Charlotte, at 3:15 p.m. This Up Train arrived at Ridgeway at 9:40 a.m., Winnsboro—35 miles away—at 10:25; Blackstock, 11:40, Chester 12:35

p.m., Rock Hill, 1:45, and Fort Mill, 2:17. The Down Train left Charlotte at 6:20 a.m., arriving in Columbia at 1:30 p.m.

In the 70's, passenger trains were equipped with air brakes and after the line had become the Charlotte, Columbia and Augusta Railroad Company (1839), and later part of the Richmond and Danville system (1878), the old stringer track disappeared and was replaced with a light T rail spiked to the cross.

The railroad, which had been destroyed in Sherman's raid at least as far as Blackstock, S. C., had to be totally rebuilt after 1865. The tracks had been torn up and the ties used as fuel to melt the irons which

were twisted around trees and other objects into grotesque shapes. However, as much use as possible was made of these irons in the rebuilding program which enabled the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad to become a main link in the through line from North to South.

This line—a part of the giant

Southern Railway system since 1894—still follows the original route. Now deiselized, it speeds splendidly-built and equipped cars over continually-improved road-beds past mile-apart electric signals. The Railway furnishes the comfort and luxury of modern travel to its passengers; and safe delivery for their products to growers and manufacturers.

DECEMBER 7, 1958 *The State*



Edward Gendron Palmer of Ridgeway, South Carolina, was the first president of the Charlotte and South Carolina Railroad. He never accepted a penny for the presidency while the road was being built, and it is said that he probably never did receive any payment in this official capacity.

Mr. Palmer's home, "Valencia," in Ridgeway is still in use today by his descendants, and many mementoes of the first railroad in the section are to be found in his personal effects.

Both civic and religious minded, Mr. Palmer with the aid of friends and relatives in the low country and, with the Thomas and Davis families of Ridgeway established and built St. Stephens' Church. The memorial window over the altar is dedicated to him.

WORKTRAIN COLLIDES WITH LOCAL PASSENGER.

Worktrain Crew "Just Forgot"
About the Passenger Train.

TRAFFIC TIED UP NEAR CHESTER

Engineer George Fetner Probably Fatally Injured—Negro Laborer Killed.

Passengers Escape Serious Injury.

Wednesday Nov 14, 1958
A head-on collision yesterday morning at 7.30 three miles north of Chester on the old C. C. & A. line, of an extra worktrain in charge of Conductor J. E. Stewart and Engineer E. A. Wall with southbound passenger train No. 23 running strictly on time, resulted in the instant death of Gus Poston, a colored laborer on the work train, and probable fatal injuries to Engineer George W. Fetner of the passenger train.

The accident was due to a blunder, almost incomprehensible, on the part of the worktrain crew in overlooking the regular passenger train, although they say they had carefully "checked up" twice, once at Chester with the register and again in the mill siding with their time tables, this in concert a short time before the accident occurred. How the most important train on the line failed to enter their calculations none can explain. It is a mystery still, to each.

The worktrain consisted of an engine with a flatcar in front of it. That the casualties were as small as they were is due to the fact that the worktrain was light and was running at a speed of only about 10 miles an hour and because the flatcar served as a bumper to break the force of the collision.

Traffic was tied up, two passenger trains on each side, until 5 o'clock yesterday afternoon.

The dead:

George Poston, pierced through the brain with a steel rod.

The injured are:

Engineer George W. Fetner, Columbia, three left ribs broken and internal injuries.

Jesse Wilson, colored, Columbia, Mr. Fetner's fireman, cut in top of head, left hand, left thigh and right ankle badly scalded.

The Rev. Dr. James H. Thornwell, Fort Mill, passenger on No. 23, painfully bruised about the body but not seriously injured.

The colored laborers injured are:

Gabe Moore, contusion of left hip and right ankle broken.

Nick Collins, contusion of both hips and cut on back of right hand.

Frank Wylie, left knee wrenched.

David Taylor, left side and left leg contused.

Joe Code, right arm sprained.

Gilliam Pitts, right hip and right side contused.

Engineer Fetner is being cared for at the Columbia hospital, and the negroes, Jesse Wilson and Gabe Moore, are being attended at the colored hospital here. The other injured negroes are receiving attention in Chester, the wounds of none being of a serious nature.

How It Happened

The collision occurred in a little cut on an almost reverse, or S, curve near the 41 mile-post, between Chester and Lewis Turnout. There was rather a dense fog at the time, but the worktrain crew agree that that was in no way responsible for the accident, as they could not have seen the train ahead of them anyway, the trains coming to gether on the north tangent of the curve. None of the crew of either train saw the danger until the trains

were within about three car lengths of each other.

The white men on the worktrain were Conductor Stewart, Engineer Wall, Flagman J. O. Hathcock and Foreman Ed Ellison, the two latter being in the cab and the other two on the flatcar with some 15 colored laborers. The train was on a trip up the road after a load of dirt.

There was only a few seconds in which to act when the two trains came in sight of each other, but there was commendable courage and presence of mind displayed by the trainmen on both sides in that little time. The danger burst upon all simultaneously.

Engineer Wall first saw to his emergency brakes and then jumped from the cab with his flagman.

Conductor Stewart and Foreman Ellison were about the last to leave the flatcar. The negroes were panic-stricken and did not seem to know what to do, many of them. The white men shouted to them to jump for their lives, waiving them off at the same time. Conductor Stewart pushed one unwilling negro off head foremost and another he bodily picked up and hurled from the car.

The Horror of Facing Death.

As he jumped after this fellow he saw Poston lying face down near the front of the flat, grinding his teeth and crying out in terror. After the crash came Mr. Stewart found himself pinned down near the first passenger coach by a pilot bumper beam, which was lying across his legs. He was released by the negro whom he had slung from the car. This fellow had recovered his presence of mind and was going about helping the other negroes to their feet. Fast as they were lifted up they fled to the wood, following those who had not been injured.

Engineer Fetner stood gallantly to his engine through the crash. He barely had time to put on the emergency brakes when he was knocked unconscious up against the side of his cab. The last he saw of his fireman he was crawling out of the cab window through a dense and scalding volume of steam.

The body of the flatcar was lifted from its trucks by the passenger engine and thrown on top of the worktrain engine, battering in the cab of the latter. The flatcar trucks were wedged under the passenger engine, whose truck was driven under the engine driving wheels. The worktrain engine was pulled out to Chester with its flatcar load. When the passenger train was released from its engine, the big machine sank over on its right side with the wheels on the outer edge of the ties.

The task then was to swerve the track east sufficiently to allow trains to pass. This the wrecking crew accomplished after three hours of patient work.

On the Chester side were blocked train No. 30, due at that point from Columbia at about 8.30, and the Chester and Charlotte local, which was running as sections of No. 30 on account of the circus in Charlotte. On the other side was No. 23, which is the Columbia and Charlotte local, and the regular through passenger No. 33 carrying Pullmans. An extra, made up of Nos. 23 and 33, reached Columbia last night at 7.40 with Superintendent Welles, Assistant Superintendent Killebrew and the division surgeon, Dr. F. D. Kendall, aboard.

Dr. Thornwell Slightly Hurt.

Dr. Thornwell's wounding is due to his being in a standing position at the time of the collision. He was knocked forward against a seat and rendered

unconscious, but only for a short time. He was soon about among the other passengers and trainmen assisting the injured. He had underestimated his injuries, however, and soon had to retire. He was put to bed in the Nicholson hotel at Chester, where Mr. Fetner was also being attended, but went home on the first northbound train.

The only other passenger the least injured was Mr. Lloyd Osborne, who received a slight cut above the left eye while standing on a coach platform with some friends. He is the teller in the bank at Whitmire.

Among the injured Mr. Fetner is the only one whose wounds are considered dangerous. He was bleeding internally when brought in last night and it was feared he might not recover. At midnight his chances for life were considered about even. He has a family of a wife and eight children, is 48 years old and has been an engineer 22 years. He is regarded as a careful, reliable and efficient man, and the misfortune which has befallen him through no fault of his is regretted and deplored by both the officials and his many friends. Mr. Fetner's home is at 2029 east Blanding street.

Mr. Stewart has been in the employ of this road eight years and has been regarded as an exceptionally careful and reliable man. He had a remarkably clean record up to yesterday. He had been promoted to conductor only since last January. He formerly served the old Memphis and Charleston road. He is unmarried. His present home is at 1920 Blanding street. He came here from Charleston.

Mr. Wall has been with this road since 1898, serving two years as yard and mainline engineer. He, too, has been regarded as a reliable and efficient man. Mr. Wall is living at 1608 Bull street.

The travel on No. 23 was extremely light. Conductor Sprinkle, who was in charge, was bragging on the behavior of his passengers last night. Among his guests and patrons were Misses Masons Harris, Rena Caldwell and Isabella Grier and Thomas Spratt, all of Fort Mill, who were bound for Chester to attend the wedding of Miss Sledge to Mr. Hartwell Wood. These nuptials were celebrated last night. There was no excitement even among the. They were the only women on the train.

A wrecking special was sent out of Columbia at 12.15, making the run of 63 miles in one hour and 10 minutes, which is said to be the fastest time made on this line. This carried Superintendent Welles, Surgeon Kendall and a representative of The State. The conductor was F. B. Fishburne and the engineer H. R. Barbour. Their engine was No. 950, just out of the shop. Assistant Superintendent Killebrew happened to be a passenger on No. 30 so was the first official on the scene. Mr. King, the new trainmaster, was picked up by the special at Blythe-wood.

When the wrecking special reached the scene at 2 o'clock Assistant Superintendent Killebrew had the passenger trains cleared into sidings, those bound south at Lewis and the others at Chester. Only two engines remained and he was at work on these. The wrecking crew worked the remainder of the afternoon in a heavy rain with large crowds of spectators under umbrellas on either overlooking bluff.

Clearing the way was a "messy" task in the rain and wind, but all the hands seemed to work cheerfully and the hardships of the hour were borne in good humor.

It was a good natured crowd, laborers, passengers and sightseers. Even the ordinarily fussy Pullman passengers were philosophical and calm.