



Rails through the Wiregrass: A History of the Georgia & Florida Railroad

H. Roger Grant

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The Georgia & Florida Railroad began with bright promise, but like many other enterprises in the early 20th-century South, it experienced hard times. The story begins in 1906, when—responding to a perceived need for better connections to northern markets—a group of entrepreneurs led by prominent Virginia banker John Skelton Williams began to cobble together logging short lines to create more than 350 miles of railroad connecting Augusta, Georgia, with Madison, Florida.

At first the G&F triggered growth in its region as several new towns sprang up or expanded along its lines. By 1915, however, the economic dislocations caused by World War I threw the G&F into receivership, and a few years later the G&F came close to dismemberment. Fortunately, shippers and investors rallied to the railroad's cause, and business conditions improved. In 1926 the road was reorganized and, under pressure to "expand or die," built to Greenwood, South Carolina.

The Great Depression forced the G&F into bankruptcy, and after its record-length receivership, it was acquired by the Southern Railway in 1963. When the Southern Railway dissolved the corporation and abandoned much of the former trackage, the G&F became the "Gone & Forgotten." Yet in its 57-year lifespan the G&F did much to bring about agricultural diversification and relative prosperity in the wiregrass region of southern Georgia and northern Florida.

Offering insights on social and economic conditions in the South from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century, Grant's study of this obscure yet noteworthy railroad will appeal to those interested in transportation, business, railroad, and Southern regional history.

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