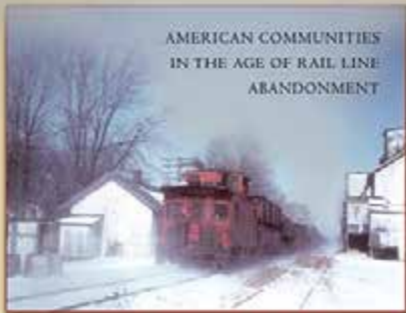


WHEN
THE
Railroad
LEAVES TOWN

AMERICAN COMMUNITIES
IN THE AGE OF RAIL LINE
ABANDONMENT



EASTERN UNITED STATES

JOSEPH P. SCHWIETERMAN

Foreword by Senator Dick Durbin

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FOREWORD

It's a sound as familiar as the beating of a mother's heart to a new infant: two longs, one short, one long. Late at night in my hometown of Springfield, Illinois, you can still hear those distant freights blowing the horn at each crossing: two longs, one short, one long.

I grew up in East St. Louis, Illinois, another Midwestern railroad town. In hardscrabble times before I was born, my immigrant grandmother would stand by the railroad tracks holding a coal bucket in one hand and waving at the steam locomotive crew as the engine passed by. The fireman would swing open the door and toss a shovelful of coal her way.

The Day Line tracks were fifty feet from my front porch; Dad, Mom, my two brothers, and I all worked at one time or another for the New York Central. There was hardly a family on the block that didn't have a railroad connection: the Terminal; Alton and Southern; the Wabash. I even had an uncle who worked for the hated New York Central rival, the Pennsylvania Railroad.

When I was ten years old, my father used his railroad pass and bought us a family ticket (a penny a mile) to travel from St. Louis to Los Angeles. A MoPac train took us to Kansas City where we boarded the Santa Fe's El Capitan and settled into our Pullman seats.

I can still remember climbing the small wooden ladder into that upper berth, sinking into the mattress, and drifting into a sound sleep with the swaying of the car and the clickety-clack of the rails as our engine's horn called into the night.

Railroads also helped me establish a career in public service. As an attorney in Springfield, I represented prominent railroads, including the Norfolk & Western, that served the Illinois heartland.

My work with railroads continues today in the United States Senate, where I have made it a priority to assure that citizens have access to a balanced transportation system. Having seen the effects of railroad investment and divestment on communities throughout my state, I

join my colleagues in working to improve the effectiveness of our nation's passenger and freight rail services.

As I look back on my childhood and early career, however, I am struck by how profoundly railroading has changed. Long-distance passenger trains no longer stop in East St. Louis. Many of the carriers I represented are gone now, merged into larger companies, sold, or abandoned. Today, I regularly take the train between Springfield and Chicago, but other rail lines I once rode have been completely or partially abandoned.

These thoughts and remembrances bring me to this book, *When the Railroad Leaves Town: American Communities in the Age of Rail Line Abandonment*. Here Professor Joseph Schwieterman offers a colorful portrait of the legacy of American railroads in American communities whose rail lines have fallen victim to abandonment. He provides us with dramatic evidence of how changes in our nation's railroad system have altered the character and composition of our towns and cities.

The communities described in Professor Schwieterman's book contain many examples of the efforts of citizens and organizations to commemorate the heritage of bygone rail providers. He demonstrates our common historical bond to an industry that is too often taken for granted by the general public. I commend his efforts to chronicle in rich detail the lessons of this distinctly American transportation saga.

In big ways and small ways, the railroads were a part of our lives and our heritage—two longs, one short, one long.

United States Senator Dick Durbin (D-Ill.)

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Any opinions expressed in this document, or any errors that remain, are solely the responsibility of the author.

INTRODUCTION

Railroads once spread across the American landscape, radiating from towns like spokes on a wheel. They were part of the skeleton of almost every community, the backbone of the municipal anatomy, and an essential element of commercial and civic life.

This remarkable era of transportation, however, has come to an end. With technological innovation, the changing needs of industry, and the ascendancy of the service economy, railroads have withdrawn from many places, leaving the challenge of moving passengers and freight to other transportation modes. No longer are freight and passenger trains the centerpieces of community life.

This volume examines the withdrawal of railroads from historic junctions, aging industrial centers, agricultural villages, and familiar tourist destinations of the eastern half of the United States. It considers the circumstances surrounding the rise and fall of rail service in sixty-four communities distinguished by their notable railroad histories or unusual experiences with rail line abandonment. It demonstrates that abandonment is often the culmination of a process of divestiture spanning a half century or more and routinely accompanied by controversial and unexpected developments—events affecting communities for years after the last train departed.

Readers of railroad history are undoubtedly familiar with many of the places and events described in this volume. Some are extensively chronicled and generously illustrated in works that are classics in their field. By considering these same historical occurrences against the backdrop of a community's economic and social development, *When the Railroad Leaves Town* attempts to offer a new perspective on the legacy left by abandoned railroads. Using an interdisciplinary approach that draws upon the fields of urban planning and community history, I have tried to illuminate in an informal way some of the dominant market forces that led to the development of steam railroads, streetcar lines, and interurbans, as well as the economic and political factors eventually attenuating their decline. This approach also allows the reader to discern

the notable similarities and differences affecting the railroad divestment process across the American landscape.

A crossbuck is covered with plant growth along an abandoned stretch of the Perry Cutoff (formerly part of the Atlantic Coast Line) near Metcalf, Georgia. (Author's collection.)



The present volume considers those places last served by carriers that have been described as “eastern” roads. These railroad companies served predominantly the Atlantic side of an imaginary line that once separated America’s eastern and western railroad systems. This line stretched from Chicago to Peoria and on south to St. Louis, following the Mississippi River to New Orleans. Along this imaginary line, one could find most of the significant interchange points between the carriers serving the East and West. (For reasons described on page xxi, three cities west of the line also appear in this volume.)

The towns and cities I describe here are enormously diverse, ranging from places as small as Thalmann, Georgia, which has a population of about fifty, to places as large as Miami Beach, Florida, and Troy, Michigan, whose populations are approaching 100,000. Several



A wooden caboose deteriorates on a dormant stretch of the Grafton & Upton Railway, Hopewell, Massachusetts. (Author’s collection.)

communities profited from multiple freight and passenger main lines, while others were merely served by branchlines little known outside of the region. In numerous cities, the heritage of railroads seems to be part of the essence of community life, while in others, this heritage seems to have been largely ignored or forgotten. Regardless, each community in this book deserves attention for its own unique and colorful story.

Most of these towns and cities earned distinction when I compiled a database with information about the three thousand most populous municipalities on the American main line currently inaccessible by rail. The original purpose of this database was for analytical

assessments of rail line abandonment (partial results of which appear in the Autumn 2001 issue of *Railroad History*). The process of collecting this information, however, revealed less measurable dimensions, such as the historical, political, and social implications of rail line abandonment.

Many municipal officials described lengthy legal battles and political initiatives involving abandoned or soon-to-be-abandoned routes. Others urged me to contact area business leaders, railroad enthusiasts, and members of historical societies, whom I found to be deeply affected by the closing of railroads. Such discussions revealed that to convey properly how significant the loss of rail service is to communities, I needed to take a more historical focus and concentrate on a select number of places. It also required an expansion of my research design to include using extensive bibliographic resources, visiting each the community, corresponding with hundreds of individuals, and preparing maps and illustrations.

Taken as a whole, this research experience led me to the unmistakable conclusion that the closing of rail lines has implications far beyond those discernible through quantitative means. Sadly, the details of many of these events may be lost as memories fade, records are destroyed, and individuals pass on or move away.

Need for the Volume

The need for this book rests on three issues that affect the accessibility and orientation of previous work on the topic.

1. Most works published by local historical societies, especially those in smaller communities, do not consider the evolving role of local rail services and all its colorful detail within the context of other social and economic developments. Many of these works cover only the rudimentary aspects of the railroad industry’s services and devote only a few paragraphs to the topic.

2. An impressive and expanding body of literature on railroad history often goes largely unrecognized by those exploring the evolution of communities. This outcome is partially attributable to the tendency for such works to use railroad companies or geographic regions—instead of particular communities—as the principal units of analysis. To help bridge this informational gap, I provide “suggested readings” for each town and city featured in this book.

3. Information about many significant events taking place in response to the abandonment of rail lines (such as the creation of recreational trails and promotion of historic preservation) is dispersed throughout a wide variety of sources. By summarizing in an informal way the experiences of communities with rail line abandonment, we can increase appreciation for the legacy of abandoned routes.

Aesthetic and Economic Implications

The closing of rail lines marks the end of one chapter in local history and the beginning of another. Although generations have passed since many rail lines were major contributors to municipal economies, the abandonment of rail lines can still affect patterns of economic development, job creation, and tax revenues. Without rail service, some communities are denied the opportunity to attract employers in the heavy-industry sector. Others find it necessary to relinquish their roles as centers for the shipment of lumber, agricultural products, and other commodities.

At the same time, municipal planners recognize that rail line abandonment can offer notable economic benefits. It can eliminate a source of noise and vibration as well as alleviate concerns about pedestrian and motorist safety. Abandonment can also open up immense parcels of land for commercial and residential use, facilitate street improvement, and clear the way for recreational trails and public utility corridors. For example, many communities are using discarded rights-of-way for office parks, residential subdivisions, or new retail strips—facilities to improve the lives of a new generation of townspeople.

While such benefits can be diverse and economically significant, the closing of rail lines can also leave an aesthetic void. For those living in small communities, few events provide such a visceral link between the past and the present as the ritualistic arrival and departure of local trains. Railroads bring familiar sounds, sights, and reverberations, such as the locomotive's horn, the engineer's wave, and the rumble of freight cars. When a railroad line disappears, it removes the last semblance of a familiar local institution and in some instances a prominent reminder of past transportation glory. In a subtle yet discernible way, it alters the rhythm of community life and affects a town's character. The sensory implications of rail line abandonment are particularly moving for many

older residents, for whom passing trains were an accepted part of daily life.

The symbolic importance of railroads is amplified by their tendency to instill a sense of place. Railroad routes are often juxtaposed with factories, streets, and the backyards of blue-collar neighborhoods, making cities feel like vibrant hubs of commerce and industry. Railroad tracks often bisect the hearts of cities, separating rich and poor neighborhoods, and offer a familiar backdrop to historic buildings, waterways, and parks.

Evolving Roles for Railroads

The withdrawal of railroads from thousands of American communities since World War II is an inevitable outcome of a profound shift in the nation's industrial orientation. Such a withdrawal is a manifestation of the country's growing emphasis on other transportation modes, such as trucks, pipelines, and air cargo services as well as the decline in heavy industry and the simultaneous expansion of the technology and service sectors. Considering the strength of these market forces, it was only a matter of time before many renowned rail lines of the past were unceremoniously swept away.

As commercial enterprises, privately owned railroads are in the business of serving shippers and (in some cases) passengers—not communities, counties, or states. When rail line abandonment is evaluated as a process brought about by industrial and technological changes, there can be little doubt that it is necessary and useful. Rail line abandonment has enhanced the efficiency of rail freight operations, reduced maintenance-of-way expenses, and improved cash flow. It has allowed carriers to concentrate on their core businesses and most profitable services.

One of the ironies of local rail service's diminished status, therefore, is its concurrence with the renewed prosperity of the railroad industry as a whole. America's railroads are shipping more ton-miles of freight than ever before, despite the fact that they operate less than half the track that they had during World War I. Although their share of transportation revenues is declining, Class I carriers, the largest railroad companies, have molded themselves into efficient and high-capacity conveyors of coal, grains, and merchandise. In many metropolitan areas, intermodal services (for example, truck trailers and ocean-going containers shipped on railroad flat cars) are the hallmark of the rejuvenation of America's railroads, bringing new types of time-sensitive traffic to the rails.

REFLECTIONS ON TWENTIETH-CENTURY RAILROAD HISTORY



America's experience with railroads during the twentieth century is a saga filled with unexpected problems, emerging opportunities, and the changing directions of public policy. Voluminously chronicled and vigorously debated by scholars and railroad enthusiasts, it is a story inseparable from other dimensions of American industrial and social history.

The following brief and informal sketch of America's evolving railroads offers a framework for understanding the disparate experiences of communities with rail line abandonment. It provides a glimpse of the industry's twentieth-century past, with particular attention to the manifold issues affecting rail line abandonment, and illuminates some of the events conspiring to undermine rail service to many towns and cities. Considering that this is only a partial and selective assessment, however, readers are encouraged to consult one of many readings listed in the bibliography at the end of this volume, such as the widely circulated reference works by George Drury, George Hilton, Albro Martin, and John Stover.



A rusting truck chassis on the abandoned former Pennsylvania Railroad mainline east of Xenia, Ohio, offers an ironic reminder of changing times. (Author's collection.)

Arriving at the Twentieth Century

At the beginning of the twentieth century, railroads were seemingly omnipresent in community life. Their routes stretched more than 197,000 miles and reached nearly every community with more than a few hundred residents. Virtually every town poised for even modest industrial development was the beneficiary of service by at least one carrier. Larger communities typically were served by several providers.

Nevertheless, the relationship between communities and railroad companies was often characterized by

suspicion and mistrust. By 1906 a handful of companies, led by luminaries such as E. H. Harriman, the Gould family, James Hill, J. P. Morgan, and the Vanderbilts, controlled roughly two-thirds of the nation's railroad routes. These entities each had several railroads, thousands of locomotives, and stations in hundreds of cities.

The business decisions of these sophisticated corporations profoundly affected the pulse of intercity trade and patterns of municipal growth. Although the largest



A dilapidated highway warning device peers through dense foliage along the former Reading Bethlehem Branch near Center Valley, Pennsylvania. (Author's collection.)

carriers competed vigorously in some markets, they held substantial market power in others, giving them considerable latitude to determine service levels and rates—despite growing state and federal regulation.

The early twentieth century is also remembered for bold railroad expansion. Construction crews were hard at work laying track to provide mobility to a restless and growing nation, especially in rapidly developing regions such as the Sunbelt, the Rockies, and the West Coast. In more established areas, a flurry of electric railroad construction was underway, providing thousands of towns and cities access to this promising new form of transportation. The coverage of electric carriers grew sevenfold between 1890 and 1912, from 5,783 to 41,065 route miles.

One of the most prominent types of electric railroads, the “interurban,” traversed city streets and mostly private rights-of-way in the countryside to provide an effective means of carrying passengers over relatively short distances. Interurbans could be built quickly, were relatively cheap to operate, and were free of smoke and soot. In contrast to steam railroads, which needed rather level roadbeds and wide rights-of-way, these operators could follow the hill-and-dale pattern of most rural landscapes. Interurbans could negotiate sharp curves and accelerate quickly.

Many interurbans operated over routes parallel to steam railroads, siphoning off much of the short-distance passenger business. By picking up passengers at farms, street corners, and tiny hamlets, they liberated millions of Americans from the isolation of rural life. They also introduced new bedroom communities to America—places for urban workers to escape the dirt, noise, and congestion of the inner city.

The United States rail system reached its maximum expanse in 1916 when steam and electric railroads encompassed 254,037 miles of right-of-way. This vast system included more than 33,000 miles of “second track” (that is, supplemental tracks running alongside the main track to increase capacity) and, according to federal estimates, 101,000 miles of freight yards and sidings. Virtually all freight and passenger traffic between cities moved by rail.

The Seeds of Decline

Even before the final wave of railroad construction had reached its conclusion, the seeds of the industry’s decline had already been sown. Particularly troublesome to the passenger business was the budding popularity of private automobiles, especially Henry Ford’s Model T, which was already leaving an indelible mark on the American way of life and undermining revenues from short-distance trips. Ford said in 1909, “I’m going to democratize the automobile. When I’m through everybody will be able to afford one, and about everyone will have one.” Soon, his prophecy was nearly fulfilled. Ford’s business sold more than 700,000 vehicles in 1916 at prices less than \$350. A decade later, the company’s factories were assembling a staggering 15 million vehicles annually at prices of \$290 or less. Adding to the rail industry’s woes was a tumultuous period of federal management of the rail system: a period which

began in 1917 (as the demands of World War I escalated) and did not end until 1920.

As many short-distance travelers and freight customers turned their allegiances toward automobiles and trucks, the foundation of the local rail network began to weaken. The interurbans, specialists of short-distance travel, were especially vulnerable. Their frequent service and fast speeds through rural areas were little match for the around-the-clock convenience of automobiles. To make matters worse, many interurbans faced stringent competition from steam railroad companies, which limited the interurban's role in the movement of freight.

Another prominent obstacle was government regulation, which tightly controlled the railroad industry's marketing and operational practices. With the Transportation Act of 1920, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) assumed the power to deny the abandonment of railroad routes. Although many major carriers remained profitable, investing heavily in their routes and rolling stock (e.g., freight and passenger cars), weaker carriers experienced a gradual erosion in revenue, causing the number of bankruptcies to rise. During 1922, railroads abandoned more than one thousand miles of routes for the first time.

The Great Depression accelerated the adjustment process already underway. Although the railroad industry had survived many damaging blows, this latest downturn proved especially severe. As the depression tightened its grip during the 1930s, freight tonnage dropped by almost half, and nearly 77,000 miles of railroad routes (about one-third of the United States rail system) fell into receivership. In a period of only ten years following the stock market crash, the number of route-miles operated by United States railroads dropped by more than 24,000. These were the autumnal years of many of America's best-known narrow-gauge lines as well as of the majority of surviving interurban and streetcar routes.

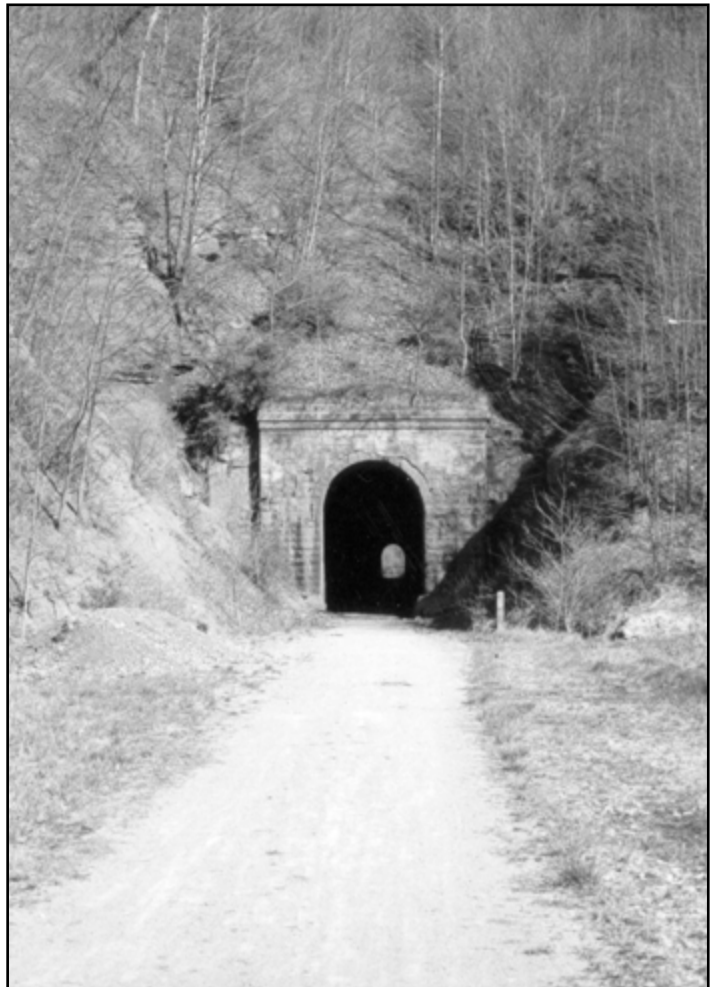
The gradual revival of the economy and the enormous industrial demands of World War II allowed for a general recovery in freight and passenger traffic. Freight tonnage in 1944 was 94 percent higher than a decade earlier, and passenger travel expanded (partially because of gasoline shortages) to levels reminiscent of earlier decades. After making an immeasurable contribution to the Allied campaign, America's railroad companies rolled into the postwar era with a sense of cautious optimism. They developed ambitious plans for modernizing equipment, improving services, and reducing costs.

Postwar Problems

Even the advantages of new management techniques, faster service, the widespread introduction of diesel locomotives, and major right-of-way improvements could not stop the precipitous fall in market share after the war. Measured as a percentage of total ton-miles, the railroad industry's share of freight shipments slipped from 57.4 percent in 1950 to 44.7 percent in 1960. Contributing to the erosion of the industry's marketplace niche was the interstate highway system, which was authorized by the federal government in 1956 and constructed with dispatch. This \$21.9 billion system slashed travel times between major American cities and lowered vehicular operating costs.

Attempts by the railroads to win back passengers with streamlined passenger equipment, while highly

Daylight is visible through the west portal of tunnel no. 2 along the former B&O Grafton-Parkersburg line—once the route of the National Limited—near Salem, West Virginia. (Author's collection.)



TUSKEGEE, ALABAMA (11,846)

Historic operators: Tuskegee Railroad; East Alabama Lumber Co.

Route abandoned: 1963

Notable reuse of right-of-way: None



Tuskegee is hallowed for its contribution to the vocational training of generations of African American men and women. The Tuskegee Institute's distinguished heritage as an educational center, however, extends beyond campus bricks and mortar to encompass both notable personages and a variety of transportation institutions, including the famed Tuskegee Airmen, the Booker T. Washington School on Wheels, and the Tuskegee Railroad, historic entities no longer part of its diverse cultural mosaic.

Historical Perspective

British immigrants established themselves in this eminently beautiful region in 1763, coexisting peacefully with the Creek tribe. The British named their settlement Tuskegee, a derivation of the Indian word used to identify the area. Located in the Black Belt, a fertile region that stretches several hundred miles across present-day central Alabama, this area remained a rural crossroad little known to most southerners during Alabama's ascent to statehood in 1819 and the decades to follow. Although Tuskegee stood in close proximity to a vast expanse of timber, its separation from the most significant trading routes of the antebellum South constrained its growth.

With the construction in 1860 of the Tuskegee Railroad, whose broad-gauge (five-foot) tracks stretched approximately five miles from Chehaw, Tuskegee's lumber industry appeared poised for progressive expansion. The Civil War, however, dashed the industry's hopes for a swift rise to

prominence. Salvage crews stripped away the carrier's tracks in 1861 and reportedly sent the rails to Selma to be melted into armaments for the Confederate Army. Even after Tuskegee's formal incorporation in 1863 and the cessation of hostilities between the North and South two years later, the Tuskegee Railroad remained absent from the village's commercial affairs. Following the sale of the right-of-way in 1871, however, construction workers rebuilt the line. This time the railroad operated with a three-foot track width, making it the first narrow-gauge common carrier in the South. Another unusual aspect of the Tuskegee Railroad is that it was set up as a partnership between three owners rather than as a corporation.

The same military conflict that brought about the destruction of the carrier's route made possible, through the elimination of slavery, the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, which contributed enormously to the

reconstituted carrier's success. Founded in 1881 by Booker T. Washington, a former slave, to provide training to Black men

TUSKEGEE

To view this image, please refer to the print version of this book.

A passenger detrains from a Tuskegee Railroad combination car while workers handle bags, possibly mail, September 9, 1940. (California State Railroad Museum.)

(and later, women), the school received financial support from some of America's leading industrial magnates, including railroad luminary Collis P. Huntington. In the process, those affiliated with the institute, including the eminent Washington, who served as president, and noted scientist George Washington Carver, who joined the faculty in 1896, became faithful customers of the railroad. The partnership between railroad and school continued after the carrier converted the tracks to standard gauge (4'8 $\frac{1}{2}$ " in 1898 and extended them directly to the campus in 1902, the same year the Tuskegee Railroad finally became an incorporated entity.

In his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, Washington fondly recalls the deeply moving events taking place in 1903, when General Samuel C. Armstrong arrived on a special Tuskegee Railroad train. Armstrong was an aging military hero who had nobly commanded a battalion of Black troops during the war and who recommended Washington for the Tuskegee position. More than a thousand students and teachers greeted the retired federal commander with a stirring torchlight reception. As educational opportunities for Black Americans grew, officials shortened the school's name to the Tuskegee Institute, and students as well as alumni assisted in the

design and construction of many stately campus buildings, including a large masonry structure erected in 1905 and named after Huntington.

The Tuskegee Railroad served rising numbers of passengers from depots near downtown Tuskegee, at the institute, within easy walking distance of The Oaks, Washington's stately campus home, and at Chehaw, the carrier's only interchange point. For many years, the railroad offered travelers the option of three daily departures in each direction. After arriving at Chehaw, many passengers made connections to the Western Railway of Alabama, whose notable long-distance trains, such as the Crescent Limited and Piedmont Limited, offered expedient service to Atlanta, Montgomery, and New Orleans, as well as cities along the eastern seaboard, such as Washington, D.C., in conjunction with other lines.

For former slaves and their descendents, including the institute's faculty, railroad travel generally meant accepting the austere accommodations of segregated coaches where they were denied conveniences routinely provided their White counterparts. For many of the poorest southerners, travel remained an unaffordable luxury. Nevertheless, a mobile classroom based out of Tuskegee under Washington's supervision, the School on Wheels, provided a measure of vocational hope. Initially drawn by horse and later motorized, the roving institution set a precedent for training in rural areas that contributed to the development of the United States Agricultural Extension Service.

During the 1920s voluminous lumber shipments as well as coal destined for the institute's power plant helped sustain the Tuskegee Railroad, and was a continuing source of revenue after the school became a degree-granting institution in 1927. Working in partnership with the carrier, the East Alabama Lumber Company began construction of a large sawmill northeast of Tuskegee the following year. To harvest the thick pine forests, the company built its own standard-gauge railroad, which stretched some twenty-five miles from Chehaw to Society Hill and the other lumber centers in Macon County. To reach its Tuskegee sawmill, the lumber company dispatched trains over the Tuskegee Railroad from an interchange point in Chehaw.

Changing Times

The Tuskegee Railroad remained instrumental to community life for several more generations. Nevertheless, it gradually diminished in significance in response to the depletion of timber deposits, heightened competition from trucks, and the Great Depression. Both the carrier and the lumber company suffered from declining timber shipments by the early 1930s. The lumber company completely suspended rail operations around 1936. As the Tuskegee Railroad struggled to survive, it reportedly turned down a request in 1939 by the White House to bring President Franklin D. Roosevelt's private railcar to town because of concern that the carrier's tracks could not support such a heavy piece of equipment. Consistent with its unassuming character, passenger service ended when the carrier's only passenger car wore out in 1941.

After America's entry into World War II, Tuskegee crossed another cultural and commercial milestone, gaining fame for the Tuskegee Airmen, a squadron of African American servicemen renowned for their aerial military exploits. The airmen received training from the institute's school of aviation and at several airstrips, including Moton Field, a primitive facility near the Tuskegee Railroad's tracks at Chehaw. The squadron's contributions to the Allied campaign permanently ended the United States Air Force's status as an exclusively White institution. As the squadron brought honor to its country, the institute mourned the loss of Washington, whose death in 1943 was a sad but seminal moment in campus life. As the war escalated, the railroad reaped the benefits of a modest revival. Still, the carrier generally operated only two freight trains per week during 1944, a rudimentary

service deemed sufficient to meet the need of its primary customers: pulpwood companies and the power plant at the line's terminus.

After the war, Tuskegee entered a period of rapid expansion. In only two decades, the community had more than doubled its population, growing to 6,700 by 1953, with about 80 percent being African American. It earned the reputation as a fountainhead for Alabama Black politics, a role galvanized by a landmark federal court case in 1957, which put an end to literacy requirements that limited minority participation in politics. That same year, racial tensions heightened as the community's Black citizens began a boycott of White-owned businesses.

Tuskegee's progressive politics did not sway public officials from embracing the national movement toward highway construction. In the early 1960s, public agencies allocated nearly \$9 million to build Interstate 85 along a route several miles north of town and to widen State Route 81, a highway joining the expressway to Tuskegee, the county seat. The expressway, completed between Montgomery and the Tuskegee vicinity in December 1962, towered above the carrier's deteriorating tracks at a newly constructed overpass in Chehaw.

It was largely coincidental, though in many respects emblematic of the Deep South's changing character, that the Tuskegee Railroad terminated operations almost simultaneously with the expressway's opening. The carrier, which relied on steam locomotives until the end, received approval from the Interstate Commerce Commission to abandon its services in January 1963. The

A stone abutment from the trestle at the Tuskegee Institute's power plant is visible near the former terminus of the Tuskegee Railroad. (Author's collection.)



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joseph P. Schwieterman, Ph.D., is associate professor of public services management and director of the Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development at De Paul University. He has published extensively on air, rail, and urban-planning issues and is a long-standing contributor to the Transportation Research Board, a unit of the National Academy of Sciences. He holds a master of science degree in transportation from Northwestern University and a doctoral degree in public policy studies from the University of Chicago. A native of Maria Stein, Ohio, Schwieterman is a member of the National Railway Historical Society and the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society.

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