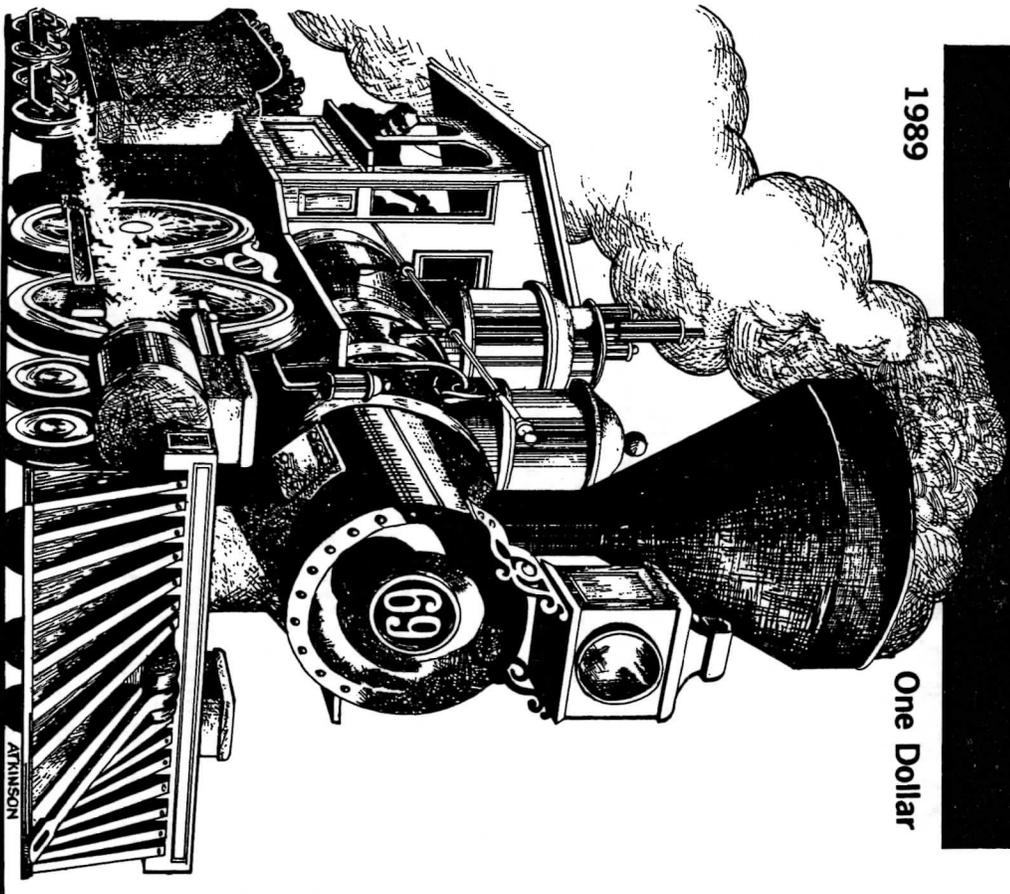


RAYLRODE DAZE

1989

One Dollar



Branchville Depot Celebrates 112th Birthday

TWENTY-FIRST ANNIVERSARY EDITION

BRANCHVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

Branchville IS A Railroad Town...

S C
**SOUTH CAROLINA CANAL
& RAIL ROAD COMPANY**
ORIGINAL TRACK LOCATION

Began first successful scheduled steam railroad service in America on December 25, 1830, and by 1833 its 136 miles from Charleston to Hamburg made it the world's longest railroad. Now a part of Southern Railway System.

(This article appeared in our first Raylrode Daze program book in September of 1969).

When two or more Branchvillians get together it's not too long before the conversation turns to railroading.

Many families still gear all their activities around the railroad schedules, for their menfolk run many of the trains through Branchville and the surrounding area.

They listen for the sound of the whistle and rush to the old depot to take meals, or, upon hearing the distant note, look at the clock and say, "He'll be home in three hours."

This railroading atmosphere that prevades the community is natural. Branchville was founded by the railroad, it's entire economy was based on railroading for nearly a century and a half, and there was during that time scarcely a family that didn't have most of the males in the group working along the iron trackway.

Even now there are few families that don't cherish moments of fathers, brothers, husbands or sons maimed or killed in their often dangerous occupations.

The railroad era for Branchville started at the beginning of railroad development in the United States.

It was in 1828 that the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company secured a charter, acquired a right-of-way, and formed plans for building

a railway from Charleston to the town of Hamburg across the river from Augusta, Georgia.

The new venture looked promising. Charleston's port was suffering because of the difficulty of bringing goods from the interior of the state. There were only a few crude stage roads reaching into the hinterland, and much of the commerce was dependant upon these rough roads, mulepack trains on the old Indian trails, or barges floating down the often hazardous coastal rivers.

Engineer Horatio Allen and E. L. Miller of Charleston, with the help of C. E. Detmold, designed the first steam locomotive to be built completely in this country. The construction contrast for the BEST FRIEND OF CHARLESTON was awarded to the West Point Foundry for the amount of \$4,000.

The little engine, weighing less than four tons, was delivered to Charleston by the ship NIAGARA on October 23, 1830. Tests were started almost immediately. Then on November 2, 1830, during a short trial run, the front drive wheels left the track and the wooden spokes collapsed. Almost a month was spent in replacing the spokes with steel ones.

On Christmas Day of 1830, the engine exerted all of its six horse-power to pull two cars of passengers over the six-mile track from what is now downtown Charleston to the fork of Dorchester and State Roads, thus becoming the first scheduled steam operated carrier in the United States. The BEST FRIEND was used for passenger excursions and for hauling supplies to the westward growing railroad.

On June 17, 1831 the BEST FRIEND suffered its second calamity. The fireman, according to legend, became annoyed at the hiss of steam from the safety valve and bound it shut. The result ... a boiler explosion that demolished the locomotive.

Allen was beset by shortages of time and money in his effort to complete the first track to Hamburg. The 136-mile route covered flat, marshy, and densely thicketed terrain. He had no time to move the large amounts of earth for a solid roadbed. Instead, he cut thousands of trees, drove them into the spongy earth for pilings, and on top of these laid wooden rails capped with iron straps.

Less that a dozen miles of the total length was on ground level. The remainder averaged four to five feet above the ground on those first 'trestles.'

Chaleston and Hamburg were linked by rail in 1833. By then the SCC&RR COMPANY had several more locomotives in operation, including the rebuilt BEST FRIEND, now called the PHOENIX, the WEST POINT, and the SOUTH CAROLINA.

Before the coming of the iron horse, stages carried only about fifty passengers each month between the two points. In 1835, during a six-month period, the new company carried 15,959 people.

The trip between the two terminals took about fifteen hours, so two stops were planned enroute. Engines had to be re-fueled with 'fat lightwood' and re-watered. Passengers required feeding. The railroad company asked Phillip Chartrand, operator of an inn at the fork of the merged Indian trail and stage road, to move his place of business to a trackside location on

a track of land purchased as the site of a new town.

Chartrand obliged, and almost immediately became famous for his fried chicken dinners as weary, hungry passengers debarked after five hours of smoky, rough travel. Chartrand called his establishment the BRANCH INN and it was at the insistence of the railroad company that the new village was named Branchville.

In 1838 track laying operations began from Branchville towards Orangeburg, Lewisburg (St. Matthews), and Columbia. This diverging track formed the first junction in the World.

Branchville prospered because of the railroad shops, the heavy passenger traffic, and the good paying jobs enjoyed by many Branchvillians working for the SCC&RR, later to become part of SOUTHERN RAILWAY SYSTEM. The town's population climbed to over 2,000. There were seventy-three flourishing businesses.

Then, with the advent of the automobile and the airplane, changing transportation patterns gradually reduced passenger traffic to a trickle, then completely erased it. Freight traffic was carried on longer but fewer trains. The shops were moved from town. Branchville began its decline to the status of a sleepy Southern town retelling memories of its hey-day when the railroad was king.

Let the diesel horn of a working way-freight blare, and the town pauses, if only momentarily, to pay homage to the department royalty and exclaim, "Branchville is a railroad town!"