

# GEORGIA & FLORIDA RAILWAY

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## APPENDIX F

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# GEORGIA & FLORIDA RAILWAY (GAF)

## DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

The Georgia & Florida Railway (GAF) was organized in 1906 for the purpose of purchasing, building, and operating railroads in Georgia and Florida. Most of the GAF was assembled by John Skelton Williams, former president of the Seaboard Air Line Railway, between 1906 and 1911. Specifically, he conceived the idea to piece together already existing local short lines, in order to organize a north-south oriented rail thoroughfare across the eastern interior of Georgia, between Augusta and Valdosta. His assemblage continued south to Madison, Florida, where the route connected to the Seaboard Air Line's east-west oriented mainline that ran across northern Florida from Jacksonville to the Chattahoochee River.

Williams acquired and consolidated the operations of six lines: the 53-mile Millen & Southwestern Railroad (Millen-Pendleton-Vidalia); the 30-mile Augusta & Florida Railway (Keyville-Midville); the 20-mile Atlantic & Gulf Short Line Railroad (Midville-Swainsboro); the 87-mile Douglas, Augusta & Gulf Railway (Hazlehurst-Broxton-Nashville mainline and Barrows Bluff-Broxton branch line); the 12-mile Nashville & Sparks Railroad (Nashville-Sparks); and the 28-mile Valdosta Southern Railway (Valdosta-Madison, Florida).

In 1906, he obtained trackage rights on the Augusta Southern Railroad between Keyville and Augusta. Between 1906 and 1910, Williams' GAF

**Other Names:** Georgia & Florida Railway

**NR Recommendation:** Eligible

**Period of Significance:** 1884-1963

**Physical Status:** Mixed (Active, Inactive, or Abandoned; some sections adapted or planned for use as rail-trails; some sections of right-of-way have been repurposed as power line easements)

**Current Owner:** Norfolk Southern; Georgia Dept. of Transportation (most of the active sections are operated by Cater Parrott Railnet; Valdosta Railway; and Atlantic & Western/Heart of Georgia Railroad)

**Predecessors:** Augusta & Florida; Augusta Southern; Douglas, Augusta & Gulf; Midville, Swainsboro & Red Bluff; Millen & Southwestern; Nashville & Sparks; Sparks Western; Midland Railway/Statesboro Northern

**Successors:** Southern Railway (Central of Georgia division); Norfolk Southern

**Mainline:** Greenwood, South Carolina to Madison, Florida, via Augusta and Valdosta

**Broxton Branch Line (Douglas, Augusta & Gulf):** Douglas to the Ocmulgee River at Barrow's Bluff/Relee via Broxton

**Millen Branch Line (Millen & Southwestern):** Millen to Oak Park via Garfield and Twin City

**Moultrie Branch Line (Nashville & Sparks and Sparks Western Railway):** Nashville to Moultrie via Sparks/Adel

**Sandersville-Tennille Branch Line (Augusta Southern):** Keyville to Tennille via Sandersville

**Statesboro Branch Line (Midland Railway/Statesboro Northern):** Stevens Crossing (Midville vic.) to Statesboro via Garfield and Portal

Railway united his various acquisitions with three newly constructed lines to close the remaining gaps: from Swainsboro south to Pendleton (Oak Park vicinity), from Hazlehurst north to Vidalia, and from Nashville south to Valdosta. The end result of Williams' ventures was a north-south line across Georgia from Augusta to Madison, Florida.



*Mitchell depot, Glascock County*

To straighten an indirect jog in the line in Coffee County, he built a new shortcut from Douglas to Garrant (near West Green), abandoning the older tracks between Broxton and Garrant. The new route thus bypassed Broxton, but the former mainline from Broxton south to Douglas was left in operation as a branch line, which connected to the new main line at Douglas.

Through the purchase of the Sparks Western Railway, trackage rights agreements, and construction of short connectors to link the Sparks Western and the former Nashville & Sparks together in sequence to the mainline in Nashville, the GAF established a westward branch to Moultrie in 1911. The GAF also built a 2.2-mile branch from Sparks to Adel in 1911.

The railroad entered receivership in 1915 but remained intact and in service. In 1916, the GAF reported owning 318 miles of railroad consisting of the following: a 224-mile main line from Keysville (outside Augusta)



*Tennille, Washington County*

to Madison, Florida; a 44-mile branch from Pendleton (just north of Normantown) to Millen; a 17-mile branch from Douglas Junction to Barrows Bluff (on the Ocmulgee River); a 32-mile branch from Nashville to Kingwood (outside Moultrie); and a 2.2-mile line between Sparks and Adel. The company also had trackage rights of 2.2 miles from Kingwood into Moultrie on the Atlanta, Birmingham & Atlantic's Thomasville branch line and 26 miles from Keysville into Augusta on the Augusta Southern. The GAF's total inventory of rolling equipment owned in 1916 was reported as 30 locomotives, 24 passenger cars, 2 sleeping cars, 1 baggage and express car, 225 box cars, 292 flat cars, 6 stock cars, 11 cabooses, and 43 service cars.

In 1919, the GAF acquired out of receivership the Augusta Southern (Augusta-Sandersville-Tennille), over which it had previously obtained trackage rights between Keysville and Augusta.



*Alston, Montgomery County*

By leasing the Midland Railway in 1924, the GAF was also able to add a branch line to Statesboro. This branch, reorganized as the GAF's Statesboro Northern subsidiary, connected with the GAF mainline at Stevens Crossing, between Midville and Swainsboro.

After a reorganization in 1926, the same year as John Skelton Williams' death, the GAF was renamed the Georgia & Florida *Railroad*.

From 1927-1929, the GAF constructed an extension from Augusta north to Greenwood, South Carolina. This gave it a connection in South Carolina to the Seaboard Air Line's former Georgia, Carolina & Northern (through Athens) mainline and to the Piedmont & Northern. This northern extension meant that the GAF became a long bridge line between two east-west oriented SAL mainlines; this role was perhaps fitting, given J.S. Williams' former presidency of the SAL.

Most of the branch line from Millen to Pendleton (on the former Millen & Southwestern) was abandoned in 1930. The section from Garfield to Summit-Graymont remained open, but was only accessible by way of the Statesboro Northern branch, crossing in Garfield. The former Augusta Southern mainline between Sandersville and Keysville was abandoned in 1934, in the midst of the Depression. In 1950, the Statesboro Northern branch line between Stevens Crossing and Statesboro was abandoned. In 1954, the Valdosta-Madison line was sold to new owners, who renamed it the Valdosta Southern Railroad. In 1958, the last remaining operable section of the Broxton branch line was abandoned.



*Summit passenger and freight depots, Twin City, Emanuel County*

Southern Railway acquired the GAF in 1963, but did not stop the slow dismemberment. It abandoned the section of line between Hephzibah and Midville in 1966 (except for a short section near Gough) and the Nashville-Sparks section of the Moultrie branch in 1967-68. In 1971, Southern placed the remnants of the GAF under the operational control of its subsidiary Central of Georgia. In 1982, Southern Railway merged with Norfolk & Western to create the still extant Norfolk Southern Railway.

About six sections of the former GAF system are still in active use, but most of these lengths of former GAF track are now operated by small local or regional short lines. Cater Parrott Railnet operates the former mainline from the south side of Willacoochee to Valdosta; this span is now owned by the Georgia Department of Transportation. South of Valdosta, the Valdosta Railway operates trains over the former mainline down to Clyattville. The Atlantic & Western/Heart of Georgia Railroad operates the Georgia DOT-owned section between Vidalia, Swainsboro, and Midville. Segments



*Gully Creek trestle, Jeff Davis County*



*Vidalia junction along West Main Street*

between Vidalia and Swainsboro have been put back into service in the last few years, after having been mothballed for decades. The full extent of the former Sparks Western Railway component of the GAF's Moultrie Branch, spanning the distance from the GSF/Norfolk Southern mainline in Sparks to Moultrie, is still in operation by the Georgia & Florida *Railroad*. Last, Norfolk Southern still owns and operates a few miles of the GAF Mainline to the north and south of Hazlehurst, as well as the former Augusta Southern mainline from Augusta to Hephzibah.

#### **System Locations:**

##### **GAF Mainline**

At its fullest extent, before abandonments began to diminish the system's area of coverage, the GAF Mainline stretched from its interchange at its northern end with the Seaboard Air Line in Greenwood, South Carolina, to its interchange with another SAL mainline in Madison, Florida.

Along the length of this north-south oriented mainline, there were – at one time – five separate branch lines that were owned and or operated, over leased trackage, by the GAF. Some of these branches were retained, but otherwise bypassed, track sections derived from the process of formation of the GAF. Others were specifically pursued, through the GAF's typical method of taking over existing lines, as a means to open up new areas of customers and service to the railroad.

##### **Sandersville-Tennille Branch Line**

The Sandersville-Tennille Branch Line was purchased by the GAF as a complete, fully-fledged bridge route between the multiple railroads in Augusta, and the two existing railroads in Tennille, those being the Central of Georgia's antebellum, Savannah to Macon mainline, and its subsidiary, the Wrightsville & Tennille Railroad. Founded as the Augusta, Gibson & Sandersville Railroad in 1884 and renamed the Augusta Southern Railroad during an 1893 reorganization, it constitutes the earliest developed component of the GAF system. It was also a critical component, since the GAF leased trackage rights across the eastern part of the Augusta Southern, from Augusta to Keysville, to utilize as the northernmost leg of its mainline. Probably in part to protect the viability of this crucial section of the GAF mainline, the GAF purchased the Augusta Southern in 1919, after the smaller railroad had entered receivership. Thereafter, the route from Keysville to Tennille was kept open as a western branch line, until its final abandonment by the GAF in midst of the Depression, in 1934. The 10 mile distance from Keysville to Hephzibah, a fully integrated section of the GAF mainline since 1919, was closed in 1966.

### **Millen Branch Line**

The Millen Branch Line was purchased by the GAF as a complete, fully-fledged bridge route between Millen, on the Central of Georgia's antebellum, Savannah to Macon mainline, and Vidalia, on the Seaboard Air Line's former Georgia & Alabama Railway mainline. Along the way, it passed through the towns and communities of Twin City (formerly Summit and Graymont), Garfield, Stillmore, and Oak Park.

After purchasing this rail line in 1906, in the iteration known as the Millen & Southwestern Railroad, the GAF adopted the route's far southern end, from Pendleton (between Oak Park and Normantown) to Vidalia, as its own mainline. Perhaps consideration was once given to routing the GAF Mainline through Millen, but it was ultimately decided to move its path farther westward through Midville and Swainsboro, a choice supported by the available opportunities to purchase the existing Augusta & Florida Railway and the Atlantic & Gulf Short Line. However, the remainder of the Millen & Southwestern's course was maintained and operated by the GAF as its Millen branch, until the abandonment of most of it in 1930.

### **Broxton Branch Line**

The Broxton Branch Line was purchased, intact and already in operation, by the GAF as a part of its acquisition of the Douglas, Augusta & Gulf Railway. The DA&G had, in turn, acquired it from the Wadley & Mount Vernon, which initially developed the route from Douglas up through Broxton to Barrows Bluff on the Ocmulgee River. For a short time, the course of the DA&G from Hazlehurst through Broxton to Douglas was employed as the new GAF mainline. However, its route was indirect, and ran on a roundabout, out of the way course between Garrant/West Green and Broxton. The GAF soon straightened out the mainline route to increase and efficiency of the trains between Hazlehurst and Douglas. Most of the sections of the original mainline that were leftover were reorganized and reclassified as the Broxton Branch Line. After the closure and abandonment, between 1915 and 1917, of all remnants of the Fitzgerald, Ocilla & Broxton Railroad, which passed on an east-west alignment through Broxton, the Broxton Branch Line could offer no other rail connectivity at its northern end, only connections



*Hazlehurst*

to steamboats on the Ocmulgee River. The rail-to-steamboat transfers were soon to lose viability, as well, by 1920. Nevertheless, parts of the Broxton Branch was operated as a dead end feeder line or spur until 1958.

### **Moultrie Branch Line**

The Moultrie Branch Line was assembled by purchasing two separate, already finished short lines that were geographically linked end-to-end on along an east-west course, and by then connecting the joined route to the GAF Mainline with a wye junction at Nashville. The meeting point for the two railroads was the north-south oriented mainline of the Georgia Southern & Florida (GSF) in Sparks, which was likely the main impetus behind their original developments. Nevertheless, the GAF's linking of the two to its own mainline created numerous points of connection to other railroads and possible transfers not only at Sparks, but also at its eastern and western termini. The branch was kept open and in service until 1967-68; by that time, the Southern Railway had acquired and integrated not only the GAF, but also the GSF.

### **Statesboro Branch Line**

The Statesboro Branch Line was first leased and then purchased by the GAF as a part of the acquisition of the bankrupt Midland Railway, in 1923-1924. The Midland Railway had been formed in 1915-16 to develop a new line from Savannah to Milledgeville, but only reached Statesboro with its own newly laid track. Thereafter, it purchased the Savannah, Augusta & Northern Railway, a failed railroad venture that had once hoped to stretch from Savannah to Chattanooga. Between 1908 and 1910, the SA&N only completed the distance between Statesboro and an interchange with the GAF Mainline at Stevens Crossing, on the other side of the river from Midville. Thus, when the SA&N's successor operator, the Midland Railway, also found financial trouble, the line was already well placed to appeal to the GAF as a new branch line, and to integrate seamlessly into its system. However, the GAF failed to pursue or maintain operation of the Midland Railway's southern leg to Savannah, letting it go to abandonment. The GAF



*Hazlehurst*

established a subsidiary, the Statesboro Northern, to manage the Statesboro Branch, which they operated until its abandonment in 1950.

### **Abandonments:**

**Mainline (original route):** Broxton-to-Garrant/West Green abandoned around 1909.

**Broxton Branch:** Barrows Bluff-to-Relee (1.5 miles) abandoned in 1920.

**Millen Branch:** Millen-to-Pendleton abandoned in 1930. (The 7-mile Garfield-to-Summit-Graymont section remained open for approximately two more decades).

**Sandersville-Tennille Branch:** Tennille-Sandersville-Keysville abandoned in 1934.

**Statesboro Branch:** Stevens Crossing-to-Statesboro abandoned in 1950.

**Millen Branch:** Garfield-to-Summit-Graymont (Twin City) abandoned in 1950 or earlier.

**Broxton Branch:** Relee-to-Sapps Still (3 miles) abandoned in 1950.

**Broxton Branch:** Sapp's Still-to-Douglas (14 miles) abandoned in 1958.

**Mainline:** Blythe-to-Midville abandoned in 1966 (except for a short section between Torbit and Gough).

**Moultrie Branch:** Nashville to Sparks abandoned in 1967-68.

**Mainline:** Douglas-to-Hazlehurst abandoned in 1983.

**Mainline:** Midville-to-Swainsboro abandoned in 1983. (However, Georgia DOT purchased much of the old GAF mainline and leased the Midville-to-Swainsboro-to-Oak Park trackage, originally to the Ogeechee Railway, and later to the Georgia Southern Railway).

**Mainline:** Torbit-to-Gough abandoned in 1986.

**Mainline:** Kirby to north side of Vidalia has long been inactive.

**Mainline:** Vidalia to Hester (on US 221 north of Hazlehurst) has long been inactive.

## SYSTEM DESCRIPTION

Today, about half of the former total length of the GAF mainline is still in active use, but the vast majority of serviceable track mileage is operated by small local or regional short lines, namely the aforementioned Valdosta Railway, Cater Parrott Railnet, Georgia & Florida Railroad, and Atlantic & Western/Heart of Georgia Railroad. Norfolk Southern still maintains and uses the northern end of the mainline from Augusta (at the Tobacco Road crossing) southwest to Hephzibah. The retention of this track is noteworthy, as it constitutes perhaps the earliest section ever built within what would become the Georgia & Florida Railway system. It was part of the original stretch of track between Augusta and Stapleton, first laid by the Augusta Southern's predecessor, the Augusta, Gibson & Sandersville, in 1884 or 1885. At the other end of the GAF's Sandersville-Tennille Branch, constructed by the Augusta Southern, there is also a short spur in Tennille that once constituted the line's southernmost segment, where it connected to the Central of Georgia. This wye interchange and additional track, running along the east side of White Line Street, is now used by Norfolk Southern as a spur siding for storage of rolling stock.

Norfolk Southern still uses other short sections in Hazlehurst, running to the north and south of the GAF mainline's intersection with Norfolk Southern's active Macon & Brunswick/East Tennessee, Virginia & Georgia mainline. Additional segments of trackage, specifically from Hester (a few miles north of Hazlehurst) to Vidalia, are still largely in place, but are fully overgrown and out of service. These mothballed sections, now owned by the Georgia Department of Transportation, retain tracks and intact but deteriorated trestles, as well as the former GAF bridge over the Altamaha River. The rights-of-way for the rail corridor between Willacoochee and Hazlehurst are still owned by Norfolk Southern, but the tracks, ties, and ballast have been removed. Despite this, this section's contextually recent abandonment, in 1983, as well as a general lack of development in the vicinity, has enabled this section of railbed to continue to remain evident and easily discernable.

The same can be said for the other long stretch of the GAF mainline that has been abandoned, that from Midville north to Keysville and Keysville



*Swainsboro*

northeast to Hephzibah. This rail alignment was abandoned in 1966, but the grade mostly runs right alongside Georgia SR 305 between Midville and Keysville. Its built up embankments and cuts are almost fully intact and easily visible from passing automobiles throughout this route.

The majority of the GAF's miles of track traverse the state's lower half; moreover, since its northern terminus was historically Augusta (until the extension to Greenwood, South Carolina), its course stays south of the Fall-Line in Georgia. The railbed of the GAF mainline begins with the route of the former Augusta Southern, and travels through rolling terrain, like the Augusta Southern passes through almost all the way to Sandersville. Below Keysville, the terrain that the GAF mainline navigates become more gently undulating and, in general, gradually becomes more nearly level as it enters far southern Georgia and the region of the interior coastal plain. Throughout its course, much of the trackage proceeds through primarily rural corridors, wending through many square miles of forests and cultivated fields.

The various lines of the GAF system do cross numerous rivers and major creeks, but most of the river crossings were made along the path of the mainline. The Millen Branch traveled above the Canoochee River, to the north of Stillmore. The GAF mainline passed over Brier Creek at Keysville, over the Ogeechee River below Midville, the Satilla River below Douglas, the Ohoopsee River above Oak Park, the Alapaha River below Willacoochee, and over the Withlacoochee River just south of the Florida state line. However, most of these were narrow and shallow enough at the railroad's



*Modoc, Emanuel County*

point of crossing to be successfully spanned by wooden trestle bridges, and there were numerous other smaller such trestles over smaller creeks along the way. The Altamaha River, on the contrary, was wide and navigable at the GAF mainline's approaches between Hazlehurst and Uvalda. Thus, the Georgia & Florida was forced to build, in 1908-09, a multi-span, steel-framed, through-truss bridge that rests on five piers of poured concrete. The bridge's southernmost span is movable, able to be rolled back and up, under force of a counterweight, as a single-span, bascule-type draw bridge.

The former GAF rail corridor through the northern part of Douglas has been adapted for reuse as a paved Rail-Trail, and some proposals have been put forward to reutilize much longer sections of abandoned corridor for development of a cross-country rail-trail, tentatively referred to as the *Old Georgia & Florida Railway Trail*. In a similar vein, much of the GAF system's Broxton Branch Line corridor, at least from Douglas to Broxton, has been repurposed, and so maintained and kept clear, as a power line easement.

## NATIONAL REGISTER DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY

The Georgia & Florida Railway system, including acquisitions and subsidiaries, was evaluated in total for eligibility for listing in the National Register using the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, as outlined in 36 CFR Part 60.4.

The GAF was evaluated under Criterion A and appears to possess a state level of significance in the areas of Transportation and Commerce. Contemporary to but generally evolving just after the major expansion of the Atlantic, Birmingham & Atlantic/Atlanta, Birmingham & Coast (ABC) system that traversed much of the same area on a different axis, the GAF constitutes the last major railroad system to be successfully developed in Georgia. Implemented by sequential turns of acquisitions and new construction projects over the period from 1906 to 1911, the newly interconnected route of the GAF traveled diagonally, on a general northeast-to-southwest orientation, across the heart of the east central and south central regions of the state of Georgia. It thereby linked by rail the eastern and southern areas of the state, along with the Savannah River valley area around Augusta, and the areas of northern Florida to the east and west of Madison, Florida. Moreover, the GAF mainline was a north-south through route in a part of the state where the majority of the railroads were east-west oriented lines radiating across Georgia from its coastal ports in Savannah and Brunswick. As such, the GAF system's mainline and its five branches offered multiple connections with other railroads, both large and small; these transfer points occurred not only at the mainline's termini in Augusta and Madison, but at numerous cities in between, such as Valdosta, Nashville, Willacoochee, Douglas, Hazlehurst, Vidalia, Swainsboro, Midville, and others.

The GAF and its acquired branch lines also facilitated the growth of exports of agricultural products from all parts of Georgia, including not only lumber and pine products such as turpentine and other naval stores, but also cotton, fruits, and vegetables, including the Georgia produce staples of peaches, watermelons, peanuts, and pecans. It created and operated a faster, more efficient means for farmers, lumber companies, and other enterprises along the GAF system's line, as well as those linked to the systems by other connecting lines, to ship their products to other important railroad hub cities



Hazlehurst

such as Augusta, Statesboro, Valdosta, Madison, or any of the smaller hubs mentioned above. From these hubs, the products from the GAF's area of service could be sent on to points far away by rail, or on to the Atlantic coast port of Jacksonville or other ports along the Gulf coast. Conversely, it

allowed the easy importation of goods into Georgia and beyond from these same port cities. Therefore, the GAF is considered eligible for its historically significant contributions to the commercial development of Georgia and as a historically significant segment of Georgia's rail transportation network.

In the areas of Exploration/Settlement and Community Planning and Development under Criterion A, the GAF mainline and its branches led to the development of numerous small towns and smaller settlements in east central, southeast, and south central Georgia, for much of its path was plotted through an area of Georgia that was somewhat sparsely settled, even at the beginning of the twentieth century. Cities and towns such as Ray City, Vidette, and Gough on the GAF Mainline, or Mitchell and Twin City on the GAF's branches, were either entirely or largely the outgrowth of station stops on the GAF or its predecessors, and the linear layouts of their downtown commercial centers, which typically emerged alongside or perpendicular to the rail corridor, reflects the critical influence of the railroad's course on local settlement and community planning, at specific locations.

However, since almost all sections of the eventual GAF system were developed at a comparatively late stage within the greater context of the history of other major rail systems in Georgia, it could be argued that the GAF played an even greater role in stimulating and sustaining the growth of existing towns, although many of these towns were still in relative infancy or were small in size. Nashville, for example, had already been founded and settled, but began to thrive and grow into a local commercial center with the arrival of the GAF and the business activity that it generated. Others, such



Douglas depot (Douglas Heritage Station Museum)

as Douglas, Willacoochee, Hazlehurst, and Vidalia, were not only already settled, but were also already served by other railroads; however, the arrival of the crossing GAF Mainline in these towns turned them into local rail hubs within the region. Due to the impetus that the GAF provided, the railroad presents a local level of significance in the areas of Exploration/Settlement and Community Planning and Development.

The GAF system has been evaluated under Criterion B and been determined eligible for the National Register based on its historically significant association with John Skelton Williams. Almost all of the component rail lines of the GAF system in Georgia are directly reflective, and represent the tangible results, of his personal efforts and business ventures. He was one of the sons of John L. Williams, a financier from Richmond, Virginia. The Williams family banking firm, John L. Williams & Sons, first teamed with Middendorf, Oliver & Company, of Baltimore, Maryland to purchase the Savannah, Americus & Montgomery Railway in May 1895. The syndicate



*Douglas*

of these two firms established the Georgia & Alabama Railway to operate and manage its new railroad across the middle of Georgia, and it appointed J.S. Williams, then only 30 years of age, as the company's president. In 1900, the Georgia & Alabama was soon absorbed by and integrated into the newly consolidated Seaboard Air Line Railway system. J.S. Williams would go on to become the first president of the unified SAL, as well, after his family's syndicate purchased, in 1899, controlling interests in each of the railroad companies then comprising the SAL system. However, he was ousted from the SAL presidency by 1904, after another financial syndicate gained controlling interest.

Initiated almost immediately thereafter, the Georgia & Florida Railway was J.S. Williams' next endeavor as a railroad magnate, and, it might be argued, represented an opportunity for not only personal financial benefit, but also for restoring his reputation as a leader in the southern railroad industry. Although a Virginian, Williams was intimately familiar with the region of Georgia the GAF would traverse, for his GAF mainline would cross his former Georgia & Alabama Railway mainline at Vidalia, and would end in Madison, Florida, at a connection with the SAL's main east-west route across northern Florida.

His efforts were aimed at ongoing assemblage of a geographically and logistically advantageous main trunk line linking east central Georgia with south central Georgia and northern Florida, all areas where many natural resources remained untapped and there was much available land left to cultivate or develop. Williams successfully acquired and pieced together enough existing lines that only three short sections of track required new construction. Without J.S. Williams' vision for linking this set of extant but

previously ineffectual shortlines into a much longer and more purposeful trunk route, as well as his personal enthusiasm for plotting the line's route and negotiating deals with the prior railroad companies, the Georgia & Florida Railway would not have been initiated and certainly would not have come to fruition. The GAF system was a representation of J.S. Williams' capabilities, including his initiative, financial means, business acumen, and organizational strengths. Therefore, the lines now historically affiliated with the GAF system within Georgia, including the GAF-MAIN, offer significance and National Register eligibility under Criterion B, for their associations with the railroad industry pursuits and exploits of John Skelton Williams. Williams would later serve as the Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Treasury and then, under President Woodrow Wilson from 1914 to 1921, as the Comptroller of the Currency. Nonetheless, some of his specific and notable contributions to history, including facilitation of the further settlement and development of rural areas of east and south Georgia and north Florida, can be identified with or documented through his former railroad properties. Therefore, the GAF is considered eligible under Criterion B for its historically significant association with J.S. Williams.

The GAF also has been evaluated under Criterion C, and has been determined eligible for the National Register based on its significance and integrity in the areas of Engineering and Architecture. The trackage for the GAF Mainline between Clyattville and Willacoochee, from Vidalia to Midville, and then again from Hepzibah to Augusta is still fully intact and in use. Other sections, such as from Hazlehurst to Vidalia, are intact but out of service, with tracks, ties, ballast, trestles and bridges all still in place. The railbed of the other sections of abandoned corridor, namely between Willacoochee and Hazlehurst, and from Midville to Hepzibah, is still clearly evident within the landscapes through which it passes. The preservation of the uninterrupted linearity of the system's rail corridors has been helped by the fact that Norfolk Southern still owns great lengths of it, and even more so by the fact that these areas of the state are still very rural, with little development pressure in the vicinities of the former rail lines. The preponderance of the GAF Mainline is still intact, and many sections of the system's former branches are still clearly discernable. The essential linear quality and continuity of the majority of the historic length

of the GAF Railway system has been mostly preserved. In the area of engineering, the railroad thus remains a good and generally intact example of late nineteenth century and early-twentieth-century rail construction in Georgia, giving it significance at a statewide level.

Also, at least nine depots, freight rooms, or office buildings are still extant within the reaches of the full extent of the former GAF system. All are positioned either on or very nearby their original sites, adjacent to the rail lines that they once served. This intact collection includes the GAF depot in Douglas, the former Augusta Southern depots in Matthews, Stapleton, Mitchell, and Warthen, the Millen & Southwestern's former freight house in the Thrift community and former depots in Twin City (Summit) and Stillmore, and, last, the Midland Railway's former combination depot and office building in Savannah.

This complement of depots is remarkable and noteworthy for the variety of the railroad building types still extant along the length of what, in terms of distance covered, was a comparatively small regional system. These remaining depots/railroad buildings together allow the railroad system with which they were historically affiliated to present a state level of significance in the area of architecture, for these are fine, representative examples of railroad station and railroad building architecture in Georgia from the turn of the twentieth century.

There are no indications that any of the rail corridors of the GAF mainline or any of its active or abandoned former branch lines is likely to yield information on important research questions in history or prehistory. Likewise, the GAF rail system overall does not appear to have the potential to be the principal source of important information. Therefore, there was no basis for evaluating the property under Criterion D.

Because the GAF system remains substantially intact, it retains sufficient integrity in the areas of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association; see attached Feature Inventory Forms for further analyses of integrity. Therefore, the former Georgia & Florida Railway system is considered eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, for the reasons described above. Even though four of its five branches have

been completely abandoned and significant sections of its mainline have been abandoned or are out-of-service, the GAF system is eligible overall for the National Register under Criterion A, for its historic significance in the areas of Commerce, Community Planning and Development, Exploration/Settlement, and Transportation, under Criterion B for its historically significant association with J.S. Williams, and under Criterion C in the areas of Architecture and Engineering. Its period of significance is 1884 to 1963, including and spanning the time from the initial development of its earliest predecessor company, the Augusta, Gibson & Sandersville Railroad, through to its full absorption into the Southern Railway system.

### **PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARIES**

For the following component lines of the Georgia & Florida Railway system that are intact, and have sufficient significance and integrity to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the proposed National Register boundaries for listing correspond to the current and historic railroad corridor rights-of-way of all eligible and contributing sections.

Within Georgia, these sections consist, in part, of the full length of the GAF mainline from Augusta south to the Florida state line just south of Clyattville, and the one remaining section of the GAF's five former branch lines in service, corresponding to the entire length of the former Sparks Western Railway from Sparks to downtown Moultrie. As the former Nashville & Sparks Railroad corridor that connected the western leg of the GAF's Moultrie Branch to the GAF Mainline at Nashville no longer retains enough integrity to contribute to the eligibility of the GAF system, the two aforementioned eligible parts of the system are disconnected and separated. Regardless, the proposed boundaries of both correspond to the rights-of-way bounds of their original rail corridors.

At any locations along each of the corridors where there are intact depots located outside of rail rights-of-way, the proposed boundary projects from the rail right-of-way to include the footprint of the depot, as well as any intact platforms or docks, and any intact sidings or rail yards. At any locations where there are intact depots that either have been moved away

from their formerly affiliated rail corridor, or which are still sited alongside a rail corridor that no longer presents sufficient integrity to contribute to the National Register-eligibility of the Georgia & Florida Railway system, the depot is still to be considered contributing, despite its specific circumstance. The proposed boundaries for such depots, like those along the former Augusta Southern corridor in Matthews, Stapleton, Mitchell, and Warthen, are also to consist of the footprint of the depot.

### **CONTRIBUTING FEATURES**

Full length of the GAF mainline, including the section of the former Augusta Southern Railroad that was utilized for the GAF mainline from Keysville to Augusta; the route of the western half of the GAF's former Moultrie Branch Line, consisting of the length of the former Sparks Western Railway, which connected Sparks and Moultrie; nearly the full length of the Broxton Branch line from Douglas north to Relee, but excluding the former segment from Relee to Barrows Bluff. See attached System Feature Inventory Forms.

### **NON-CONTRIBUTING FEATURES**

The route of the GAF's former Broxton Branch Line, which connected Douglas and Barrows Bluff on the Ocmulgee River; the route of the GAF's former Millen Branch Line, consisting of the length of the former Millen & Southwestern Railroad, which connected Millen and Oak Park; the route of the eastern half of the GAF's former Moultrie Branch Line, consisting of the length of the former Nashville & Sparks Railroad; the route of the GAF's former Sandersville/Tennille Branch Line, consisting of the length of the Augusta Southern Railroad from the junction with the GAF mainline in Keysville to Tennille; the route of the GAF's former Statesboro (Statesboro Northern) Branch Line, consisting of the length of the Savannah, Augusta & Northern Railroad from the junction with the GAF mainline at Stevens Crossing to Statesboro. See attached System Feature Inventory Forms.

### **PREPARED BY**

Steve Storey, David Ray, Matt McDaniel, Erin Murphy, George Rounds, Chris Mroczka, and Mike Reynolds



# GEORGIA & FLORIDA RAILWAY MAINLINE (MAIN)

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**Other names:** Georgia & Florida Railroad

**System:** Georgia & Florida Railway

**NR Evaluation:** Eligible (Contributing)

**Physical Status:** Mixed (Active, Inactive & Abandoned sections, with some segments adapted to serve as recreational rail trails)

**Current owner:** Norfolk Southern (Augusta to Hephzibah); Valdosta Railway (Valdosta to Clyattville); Georgia Department of Transportation (most of the active, GDOT-owned sections are operated by Cater Parrott Railnet, from Valdosta to Willacoochee, or by Atlantic & Western/Heart of Georgia Railroad, from Vidalia to Midville)

**Predecessors:** Augusta & Florida Railroad (Keyville to Midville); Douglas, Augusta & Gulf

Railway (Hazlehurst to Garrant/West Green and Pinebloom/Willacoochee to Nashville); Midville, Swainsboro & Red Bluff Railroad (Midville to Swainsboro); Millen & Southwestern Railroad (Pendleton Springs/Penhoopee to Vidalia); Valdosta Southern Railway (Valdosta to Madison, Florida)

**Acquisitions of Lines:** Augusta Southern Railroad (Augusta to Keyville section only, the remainder becoming the GAF Sandersville-Tennille Branch)

**Successors:** Southern Railway (Central of Georgia Division); Valdosta Southern Railroad/Valdosta Railway; Norfolk Southern

**Location:** Madison, Florida, to Augusta by way of Valdosta, Nashville, Douglas, Hazlehurst, Vidalia, Swainsboro, Midville, and Keyville



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**GEORGIA & FLORIDA (GAF)**  
System Feature Inventory Form

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## DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

The Georgia & Florida Railway (GAF) was organized in 1906 for the purpose of purchasing, building, and operating railroads in Georgia and Florida. Most of the GAF was assembled by John Skelton Williams, former president of the Seaboard Air Line Railway (SAL) between 1906 and 1911. Specifically, he conceived the idea to piece together already existing local short lines in order to organize a north-south oriented rail thoroughfare across the eastern interior of Georgia, between Augusta and Valdosta. His assemblage continued south to Madison, Florida, where the route connected to the SAL's east-west oriented mainline that ran across northern Florida from Jacksonville to the Chattahoochee River.

Williams acquired and consolidated all or parts of six existing lines to create the GAF's mainline (MAIN) from Augusta to Valdosta: the 30-mile Augusta & Florida Railway (Keyville-Midville); the 20-mile Midville, Swainsboro & Red Bluff/Atlantic & Gulf Short Line Railroad

(Midville-Swainsboro); the southernmost 9 miles of the 53-mile Millen & Southwestern Railroad (Pendleton-Vidalia); the 87-mile Douglas, Augusta & Gulf Railway (Hazlehurst-Broxton-Nashville); and the 28-mile Valdosta Southern Railway (Valdosta-Madison, Florida).

Chartered in 1896, the Valdosta Southern Railway first opened its 28-mile line from Valdosta south to Madison, Florida, in 1901; Williams' GAF acquired the line in 1906 or 1907 and merged it into his newly assembled system.

In 1906, he had already purchased the newest of the above list of extant railroad projects, the Augusta & Florida Railway. Then of recent origin and organization, this railroad company had constructed, in 1905, a bridge route from the Augusta Southern Railroad at Keyville to the Central of Georgia (COG) mainline at Midville. As can be inferred from its name and undertakings, the Augusta & Florida apparently shared the same concept and aims as Williams himself.

The oldest of the six above component lines, the Midville, Swainsboro & Red Bluff Railroad Company, was initially incorporated in 1888 as the Midville, Swainsboro & Mount Vernon Railroad. Railroad historian H. Roger Grant notes that the railroad probably originated even earlier, sometime between the late 1870s and 1887, as a logging tram constructed from Midville, on the COG mainline, to Swainsboro. The railroad enterprise was intended to ultimately reach the lower Oconee River at either Mount Vernon or Red Bluff, but the renamed company, now a common carrier, opened operation of its Midville-Swainsboro line in 1889 and never progressed farther on its own. In the 1894 edition of *The Official Railway List*, the Midville, Swainsboro & Red Bluff reported operating 20 miles of railroad with 3 locomotives, 1 passenger car, and 20 freight and miscellaneous cars. This line became known as the Atlantic & Gulf Short Line Railroad around 1905; thereafter, it was briefly leased to the Augusta & Florida Railway before the new GAF bought it in 1906.

Also in 1906, the GAF obtained trackage rights on the Augusta Southern Railroad (AGSO) for the final, northernmost link between Keyville and Augusta (see GAF AGSO System Feature Inventory Form for its developmental history). Then, between 1906 and 1910, Williams' GAF united his various acquisitions with three newly constructed lines to close the remaining gaps: from Valdosta north to Nashville, from Hazlehurst north to Vidalia, and from Pendleton/Penhoopee north to Swainsboro. The end result of Williams' ventures was a north-south line across Georgia from Augusta to Madison, Florida.

To straighten an indirect jog in the line in Coffee County from Douglas to Broxton to Garrant (near West Green), he built a new shortcut from Douglas to Garrant, abandoning the older tracks between Broxton and Garrant. The new route thus bypassed Broxton, but the former mainline from Broxton south to Douglas was left in operation as a branch line, which connected to the new mainline at Douglas (see GAF DGAG System Feature Inventory Form for the developmental history of the Douglas, Augusta & Gulf Railway, as well as the GAF MLSW form for the developmental history of the Millen & Southwestern Railroad).

The GAF entered receivership in 1915 but remained intact and in service. In 1916, the GAF reported owning a total of 318 miles of railroad, which included the 224-mile MAIN from Keyville in Burke County to Madison, Florida. The company also had trackage rights of 26 miles from Keyville into Augusta on the AGSO. The GAF's total inventory of rolling equipment owned in 1916 was reported as 30 locomotives, 24 passenger cars, 2 sleeping cars, 1 baggage and express car, 225 box cars, 292 flat cars, 6 stock cars, 11 cabooses, and 43 service cars. In 1919, the GAF acquired out of receivership the AGSO (Augusta-Sandersville-Tennille), over which it had previously obtained trackage rights between Keyville and Augusta.

After a reorganization in 1926, the same year as John Skelton Williams' death, the GAF was renamed the Georgia & Florida *Railroad*.

From 1927-1929, the GAF constructed an extension from Augusta north to Greenwood, South Carolina. This gave it a connection in South Carolina to the SAL's former Georgia, Carolina & Northern (through Athens) mainline and to the Piedmont & Northern. This northern extension meant that the GAF MAIN became a long bridge line between two east-west oriented SAL mainlines; this role was perhaps fitting, given J.S. Williams' former presidency of the SAL.

In 1954, the MAIN's southernmost section, stretching from Valdosta to Madison, Florida, was sold to new owners, who renamed it the Valdosta Southern Railroad.

Southern Railway acquired the entirety of the GAF in 1963, but did not stop a slow, piecemeal process of dismemberment of the MAIN's continuity. It abandoned the segment between Hephzibah and Midville in 1966 (except for a short section near Gough). In 1971, Southern placed the remnants of the GAF under the operational control of its now subsidiary COG. In 1982, Southern Railway merged with Norfolk & Western to create the still extant Norfolk Southern Railway.

About six sections of the former GAF system are still in active use, but most of these lengths of former GAF track are now operated by small local or regional short lines. From Clyattville north to Valdosta, the Valdosta Railway

operates trains over the former GAF MAIN. Cater Parrott Railnet operates the former MAIN from Valdosta north to the south side of Willacoochee; this span is now owned by the Georgia Department of Transportation. The Atlantic & Western/Heart of Georgia Railroad operates the Georgia DOT-owned section between Vidalia, Swainsboro, and Midville; the segments between Vidalia and Swainsboro have been put back into service in the last few years, after having been mothballed for decades. Last, Norfolk Southern still owns and operates a few miles of the MAIN to the north and south of Hazlehurst, as well as the former MAIN and AGSO mainline from Hephzibah to Augusta.

## DESCRIPTION

At present, at least half of the former total length of the former GAF MAIN is still in active use, but the vast majority of serviceable track mileage is operated by small local or regional short lines companies, namely the aforementioned Valdosta Railway, Cater Parrott Railnet, and Atlantic & Western/Heart of Georgia Railroad. The line is fully intact and in regular, albeit limited service from Clyattville, just above the Florida state line in Lowndes County, to Valdosta, and then from Valdosta all the way north to Willacoochee. Along the way, it passes through Ray City and Nashville, along with other intermediate towns, communities, or former stations stops. Clyattville to Valdosta is owned, maintained, and operated by the Valdosta Railway, while the Cater Parrott Railnet operates the corridor, owned by the Georgia Department of Transportation, from Valdosta to Willacoochee.

The rights-of-way for the rail corridor between Willacoochee and Hazlehurst, passing through Mora, Douglas, West Green, Denton, and other communities, are still owned by Norfolk Southern, but the tracks, ties, and ballast have been removed. Despite this, this section's contextually recent abandonment, in 1983, as well as a general lack of development in the vicinity, has enabled this segment's railbed to remain evident and easily discernable.

Norfolk Southern still uses other short sections in Hazlehurst, running to the north and south of the MAIN's intersection with Norfolk Southern's active Macon & Brunswick/East Tennessee, Virginia & Georgia mainline. Additional segments of trackage, specifically from Hester (a few miles north of Hazlehurst) to Vidalia, are still almost entirely in place, but are fully overgrown and out of service. Although overgrown with saplings and shrubbery, these "mothballed" sections are now owned by Norfolk Southern from Hester to the Altamaha River and from that river to Vidalia by the Georgia Department of Transportation. They retain their tracks and intact but deteriorated trestles, as well as the GAF's movable bridge over the Altamaha River. Passing through Uvalda and Alston, these track sections and structures appear essentially frozen in time as intact rail artifacts.

From a three-way interchange along West Main Street in Vidalia, involving the GAF, the SAL's former Macon Branch (SAL MDSV) and the SAL's former Georgia & Alabama Railway (also now owned by the Georgia DOT), the GAF MAIN resumes active service. Owned by the Georgia DOT and currently operated by the Heart of Georgia Railroad, which also operates the Georgia & Alabama (SAL GAAL), the line is intact and in regular use from Vidalia to Norfolk Southern's former COG mainline in Midville. Along the way, the route proceeds through Swainsboro and Summertown, along with other small crossroads communities, such as Wesley, Modoc, Blun, and others.

Although it was closed down approximately 15 years before the section from Hazlehurst to Willacoochee, the other long stretch of the MAIN that has been abandoned, stretching from Midville north to Keysville and from there northeast to Hephzibah, is still similarly evident within its rural landscape and is readily discernable. This rail alignment was abandoned in 1966, but the grade mostly runs right alongside SR 305 between Midville and Keysville. In Midville, SR 17's bridge to carry vehicles over the MAIN is still in place and in use, despite the half century of abandonment of this section's line. From Midville northward to the southern outskirts of Rosier, it closely adheres to SR 305's west side 305, crossing to the east side at a bend in the highway just south of Rosier, and staying along the east side all the way to Keysville. Its built up embankments and cuts are almost fully

intact and are easily visible, even from passing automobiles throughout this route. Moreover, the wide, grassy rights-of-way of the railroad corridor are still intact and maintained as common space in both Vidette and Gough. Part of the trestle over Brier Creek entering Keysville is even still intact, albeit deteriorated.

From Keysville through Blythe to Hephzibah, the MAIN's former AGSO section of track is abandoned and mostly inaccessible, but it is clearly recognizable on current aerial imagery, usually marked by a distinctive curvilinear treeline through fields or managed forests. A looping eastern bypass of downtown Keysville was installed in the 1940s, and Perkins Mill Road now utilizes a short section of the rail right-of-way. Railroad Avenue runs on a southwest-northeast orientation through the center of Blythe and marks the rail corridor's alignment. On the east side of Blythe, CR 603/Railroad Avenue Extension appears to utilize the rail right-of-way. Between Keysville and the resumption of active usage of the rail corridor on the west side of Hephzibah, the railbed's primarily rural setting is only disturbed by new houses built along both sides of SR 58/Bath-Edie Road, near Hephzibah; a railroad cut on the SR 58 crossing's west side appears to now serve as the driveway for one of these houses.

As the direct successor of the Southern Railway, which purchased the GAF outright in 1963, Norfolk Southern still owns, maintains, and uses the MAIN's northern and eastern end from its rail yard in Augusta, sited east of the Bethlehem neighborhood, southwest to the western edge of Hephzibah. The retention of this track is noteworthy, as it constitutes perhaps the earliest intact section of track within what would eventually become the GAF system. It was part of the original stretch of track between Augusta and Stapleton, first laid by the AGSO's predecessor, the Augusta, Gibson & Sandersville, in 1884 or 1885.

The majority of the GAF MAIN's miles of track traverse the state's lower half; moreover, since its northern terminus was historically Augusta (until the extension to Greenwood, South Carolina), its course stays south of Georgia's Fall Line. The MAIN's railbed begins with the route of

the former AGSO, and travels through rolling terrain, as the remainder of the AGSO passes through almost all the way to Sandersville. Below Keysville, the MAIN navigates more gently undulating terrain which, in general, gradually becomes more nearly level as it enters far southern Georgia and the interior coastal plain. Throughout its course, much of the trackage proceeds through primarily rural corridors, wending through many square miles of forests and cultivated fields.

Most of the GAF system's numerous river crossings were made along the MAIN. It passed over Brier Creek at Keysville, over the Ogeechee River below Midville, the Satilla River below Douglas, the Ohoopsee River above Oak Park, the Alapaha River below Willacoochee, and over the Withlacoochee River just south of the Florida state line. However, most of these waterways were narrow and shallow enough at the railroad's point of crossing to be successfully spanned by wooden trestle bridges, and there were numerous other smaller such trestles over smaller creeks along the way. The Altamaha River, on the contrary, was wide and navigable at the MAIN's approaches between Hazlehurst and Uvalda. Thus, the GAF was forced to build, in 1908-09, a multi-span, steel-framed, through-truss bridge that rests on five piers of poured concrete. The bridge's southernmost span is movable, able to be rolled back and up, under force of a counterweight, as a single-span, bascule-type draw-bridge.

The former GAF MAIN rail corridor through the northern part of Douglas has been adapted for reuse as a paved rail trail, and some proposals have been put forward to reutilize much longer sections of abandoned corridor for development of a cross-country trail, tentatively referred to as the *Old Georgia & Florida Railway Trail*. One of the MAIN's two extant depots is located on its original site near the south end of the Douglas rail trail. Constructed with brick bearing walls, it stands between West Ward and West Irwin streets, and now houses Douglas' Heritage Station Museum. The line's only other extant depot, a smaller building also of masonry construction, is located in Hephzibah in Richmond County.

## NATIONAL REGISTER CONTRIBUTING STATUS

The Georgia & Florida (GAF) Railway system, including acquisitions and subsidiaries, was evaluated in total for eligibility for listing in the National Register using the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, as outlined in 36 CFR Part 60.4. The Georgia & Florida Railway's mainline (MAIN) is the primary and most critical component of the GAF system. Therefore, the MAIN's component lines were collectively evaluated for its unified and integral contribution to the historic significance and National Register-eligibility of its parent system, the GAF system. The GAF is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce, Transportation, Community Planning and Development, and Exploration/Settlement, under Criterion B for its association with John Skelton Williams, and under Criterion C in the areas of Architecture and Engineering.

The MAIN was evaluated for potential historically significant contributions under Criterion A. Due to its status as the GAF's mainline between Augusta and north Florida below Valdosta, the MAIN definitely has the potential to contribute to the significance of its parent GAF system in the areas of Transportation and Commerce. Contemporary to but generally evolving just after the major expansion of the Atlantic, Birmingham & Atlantic/Atlanta, Birmingham & Coast (ABC) system that traversed much of the same area on a different axis, the MAIN constitutes the principal alignment and rail corridor of the last major railroad system to be successfully developed in Georgia. Implemented by sequential turns of acquisitions and new construction projects over the period from 1906 to 1911, the newly interconnected route of the MAIN traveled diagonally, on a general northeast-to-southwest orientation, across the heart of the east central and south central Georgia. It thereby linked by rail the eastern and southern areas of the state, along with the Savannah River valley area around Augusta, and the areas of northern Florida to the east and west of Madison. Moreover, the MAIN was a north-south through route in a part of the state where the majority of the railroads were east-west oriented lines radiating from coastal ports at Savannah and Brunswick. As such, the MAIN offered multiple connections with other railroads, both large

and small; these transfer points occurred not only at the MAIN's termini in Augusta and Madison, Florida, but at numerous cities in between, such as Valdosta, Nashville, Willacoochee, Douglas, Hazlehurst, Vidalia, Swainsboro, Midville, and others.

The MAIN also facilitated the growth of exports of agricultural products from all parts of Georgia, including not only lumber and pine products such as turpentine and other naval stores, but also cotton, tobacco, fruits, and vegetables, including the Georgia produce staples of peaches, watermelons, peanuts, and pecans. It created and operated a faster, more efficient means for farmers, lumber companies, and other enterprises along the MAIN and the GAF system, as well as other systems linked by other connecting lines, to ship their products to other important railroad hub cities such as Augusta, Statesboro, Valdosta, Madison, or any of the smaller hubs mentioned above. From these hubs, the products from the MAIN's area of service could be sent on to points far away by rail, or on to the Atlantic coast port of Jacksonville or other ports along the Gulf coast. Conversely, it allowed the easy importation of goods into Georgia and beyond from these same port cities. Therefore, the MAIN made historically significant contributions to the GAF system and its associations with the commercial development of Georgia and the state's rail transportation network.

In the area of Community Planning and Development, the MAIN led to the development of numerous small towns and smaller settlements in east central, southeast, and south central Georgia, for much of its path was plotted through an area of Georgia that was somewhat sparsely settled, even at the beginning of the twentieth century. Cities and towns such as Ray City, Uvalda, Alston, Vidette, and Gough along the MAIN were either entirely or largely the outgrowth of station stops on the GAF or its predecessors, and the linear layouts of their downtown commercial centers, which typically emerged alongside or perpendicular to the rail corridor, reflects the critical influence of the railroad's course on local settlement and community planning, at specific locations.

However, since almost all of the MAIN was developed at a comparatively late stage within the greater context of the history of other major rail systems

in Georgia, it could be argued that the MAIN played an even greater role in stimulating and sustaining the growth of existing towns, although many of these towns were still in relative infancy or were small in size. Nashville, for example, had already been founded and settled, but began to thrive and grow into a local commercial center with the arrival of the MAIN and the business activity that it generated. Others, such as Douglas, Willacoochee, Hazlehurst, and Vidalia, were not only already settled, but were also already served by other railroads; however, the arrival of the crossing GAF mainline in these towns turned them into regional rail hubs. Due to this impetus that the MAIN provided, it contributes to the GAF's historic significance in the areas of Exploration/Settlement and Community Planning and Development.

The MAIN's component rail lines are directly reflective, and represent the tangible results, of the concepts, efforts, and business ventures of John Skelton Williams to assemble a geographically and logistically advantageous main trunk line linking east central Georgia with south central Georgia and northern Florida, where many natural resources remained untapped and land was available to cultivate or develop. Williams successfully acquired and pieced together enough existing lines that only three short sections of track required new construction. Without J.S. Williams' vision for linking this set of extant but previously ineffectual shortlines into a much longer and more purposeful trunk route, as well as his personal enthusiasm for plotting the line's route and negotiating deals with the prior railroad companies, the GAF MAIN would not have been initiated and certainly would not have come to fruition. The GAF MAIN is representative of J. S. Williams' capabilities, including his initiative, financial means, business acumen, and organizational strengths. Therefore, the GAF MAIN contributes to the GAF system's historic significance under Criterion B for its association with the railroad industry pursuits and exploits of John Skelton Williams.

The GAF MAIN has also been evaluated under Criterion C and contributes to the GAF's historic significance in the area of Engineering. The MAIN's trackage between Clyattville and Willacoochee, from Vidalia to Midville, and then again from Hephzibah to Augusta is still fully intact and in use.

Other sections, such as from Hazlehurst to Vidalia, are intact but currently out of service, with tracks, ties, ballast, trestles and bridges all still in place. The railbeds of abandoned segments, namely between Willacoochee and Hazlehurst, and from Midville to Hephzibah, are still clearly evident within the landscapes through which they pass. The preservation of the MAIN's uninterrupted linearity has been helped by the fact that Norfolk Southern and the Georgia Department of Transportation together still own great lengths of it, and even more so by the fact that these areas remain very rural, with little development pressure in the vicinities of the former rail lines. The preponderance of the MAIN is still intact, and most sections – or even almost all - of its abandoned lengths are still clearly discernable. The essential linear quality and continuity of the majority of the historic length of the GAF MAIN has been mostly preserved. In the area of Engineering, the railroad thus remains a good and generally intact example of late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century rail construction in Georgia and is significant at a statewide level. The MAIN's intact masonry depots at Hephzibah and Douglas are also good examples of their types and contribute to the GAF's significance in Architecture.

Components of the original rail infrastructure of rails, ties, trestles, and bridges may have been replaced over the years, in the course of regular operational and safety upgrades, repairs, and improvements, and of course the rails, ties, and ballast have been removed prior to rail-trail development. Although these general modifications may diminish the integrity and significance of the railroad's parts and components as physical artifacts, they in no way lessen the significance or integrity presented by the GAF MAIN's retained route alignment and intact corridor.

As described above, the former GAF MAIN corridor is able to contribute to the significance of the GAF system, and thus its National Register eligibility, under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce, Transportation, and Community Planning and Development, under Criterion B for its association with John Skelton Williams, and under Criterion C in the area of Engineering and Architecture.

## EVALUATION OF INTEGRITY

A ground-level field survey of the GAF MAIN corridor was conducted, as was a review of available historic and current aerial imagery. Along the abandoned rights-of-way that was accessible to the surveyors, most of the railway's former railbed or infrastructure, including raised embankments and cuts, was readily found and easily discernable, despite the abandonment of much of its lengths and the subsequent removal of rails and ties. Thus, the MAIN has been determined to possess a high level of integrity in the areas of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The railroad has not been relocated, and its alignment remains essentially unchanged since its construction; therefore, the resource retains integrity of location and setting.

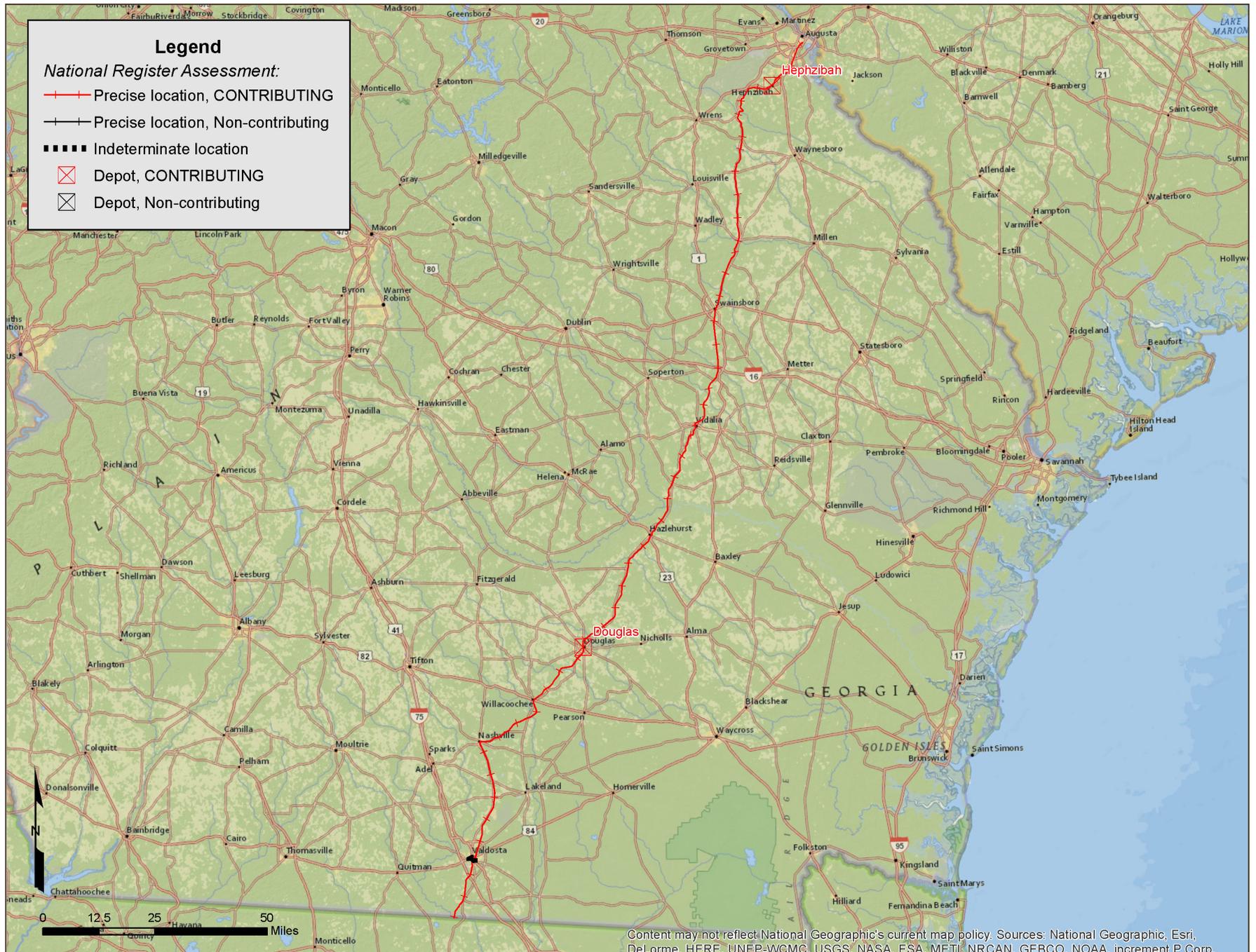
As the entirety of the fullest extent of the MAIN's alignment and roadbeds, including cuts and grades, remains intact and in place, despite the abandonment of approximately half of its total length and the subsequent removal of rails and ties, the resource also maintains a substantive level of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The railroad also retains integrity of feeling and association, as it conveys its physical characteristics as a historic railroad line.

## PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY

The proposed National Register boundary for the MAIN corresponds to the historic railroad rights-of-way, which date from origins between approximately 1884 and 1911. These rights-of-way include both the active and abandoned sections of the GAF MAIN. The proposed boundaries contain all National Register-qualifying characteristics and features of the resource and include the railroad's currently in service or abandoned sections of alignment, consisting, in both circumstances, of the railbed and other elements of the rail resource, such as any extant cuts and built-up grades. The proposed boundaries also project out from the rail right-of-way to include the only known extant railroad depots along the corridor, at Hephzibah and Douglas.

## PREPARED BY

Steve Storey, David Ray, Matt McDaniel, and Mike Reynolds



MAIN: Resource Location Map



MAIN: Cedar Street, Clyattville, Lowndes County



MAIN: Briggston Road crossing, Briggston, Lowndes County



MAIN: East Hill Avenue crossing, Valdosta



MAIN: Cypress Street crossing, Valdosta



MAIN: Old Bermiss Road crossing, Bemiss, Lowndes County



MAIN: SR 125 at Moody Air Force Base, Lowndes County



MAIN: New Bethel Road crossing, Barretts, Lowndes County



MAIN: SR 37 crossing, Ray City, Lowndes County



MAIN: Allenville Road/CR 55, Allenville, Berrien County



MAIN: North Mathis Avenue crossing, Nashville



MAIN: New Hope Church Road crossing, Weber vicinity, Berrien County



MAIN: SR 135 crossing, Bannockburn vicinity, Berrien County



MAIN: Wilson Street, Willacoochee, Atkinson County



MAIN: Wilson Street, Willacoochee



MAIN: Railbed, CR 112, Oberry, Atkinson County



MAIN: Approach to ABC mainline, Douglas



MAIN: Douglas depot



MAIN: Douglas Rail Trail, Jackson Street crossing, Douglas



MAIN: Railbed along US 221, Denton, Jeff Davis County



MAIN: Rail cut approaching Hurricane Creek, Jeff Davis County



MAIN: Railroad berm at Hurricane Creek, Jeff Davis County



MAIN: Old Douglas Road, Hazlehurst



MAIN: Wye junction with SOU ETVG, Hazlehurst



MAIN: Gully Creek trestle, Halls Spur, Jeff Davis County



MAIN: Towns Bluff Road/CR 185 crossing, Halls Spur, Jeff Davis County



MAIN: Bullard Creek Wildlife Management Area, Jeff Davis County



MAIN: Altamah River bridge, Jeff Davis-Montgomery county line



MAIN: Railroad Street, Uvalda, Montgomery County



MAIN: Railroad cut along SR 135, Alston, Montgomery County



MAIN: Petross Road/CR 166 crossing, Petross, Montgomery County



MAIN: Cobb Creek, Petross vicinity, Montgomery County



MAIN: Third Street crossing, Vidalia



MAIN: First Street crossing, Vidalia



MAIN: Wye junction with SAL GAAL, Vidalia



MAIN: Leman Road crossing, Pendelton vicinity, Emanuel County



MAIN: Nunez-Lexsy Road crossing, Wesley, Emanuel County



MAIN: South Coleman Street crossing, Swainsboro



MAIN: Modoc Lane crossing, Modoc, Emanuel County



MAIN: Blun Road crossing, Blun, Emanuel County



MAIN: Main Street, Summertown, Emanuel County



MAIN: Stevens Crossing Road, Stevens Crossing, Emanuel County



MAIN: Ogeechee River approach, Midville, Burke County



MAIN: Wye junction with COG MAIN, Midville



MAIN: SR 17 bridge over railbed, Midville



MAIN: Railbed at Apple Street, Midville



MAIN: Railbed along Bark Camp Church Rd, Magruder vicinity, Burke County



MAIN: Railbed along SR 305, Magruder vicinity, Burke County



MAIN: Rail cut along SR 305, Rosier vicinity, Burke County



MAIN: Railbed along SR 305, Vidette, Burke County



MAIN: Railbed at Fendig Street crossing, Gough, Burke County



MAIN: Railbed along SR 305, St. Clair, Burke County



MAIN: Railbed at Brushy Creek, Burke County



MAIN: Farmers Bridge Road, Keysville vicinity, Burke County



MAIN: SR 305 near CR 19, railcut in mid-distance, Keysville vicinity, Burke



MAIN: Perkins Mill Road/CR 10, also railbed, Keysville, Burke County



MAIN: Murrow Street crossing, Blythe, Richmond County



MAIN: Keysville Road, Elwood, Richmond County



MAIN: Chalk Bed Road, Hephzibah, Richmond County



MAIN: Hephzibah depot



MAIN: Tobacco Road crossing, Gracewood, Richmond County



MAIN: Lumpkin Road crossing, Neco vicinity, Richmond County



MAIN: Augusta Yard

# DOUGLAS, AUGUSTA & GULF RAILWAY (DGAG)

**Other names:** Broxton Branch Line

**System:** Georgia & Florida Railway

**NR Evaluation:** Mixed (both Contributing and Non-Contributing sections)

**Physical Status:** Mixed (Active, Inactive & Abandoned sections, with some segments adapted as power-transmission easement)

**Current owner:** N/A

**Predecessors:** N/A

**Acquisitions of Lines:** Wadley & Mount Vernon Railroad; Ocilla, Pinebloom & Valdosta Railway; Ocilla & Valdosta Railroad; Fitzgerald, Ocilla & Broxton Railroad

**Successors:** Georgia & Florida Railway; Southern Railway; Norfolk Southern; Georgia & Florida Railroad

**Location:** Douglas to the Ocmulgee River at Relee/Barrows Bluff, Coffee County



**GEORGIA & FLORIDA (GAF)**  
System Feature Inventory Form

## DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

The Georgia & Florida Railway's (GAF's) Broxton Branch Line was purchased intact and already in operation by the GAF as a part of its acquisition of the Douglas, Augusta & Gulf Railway (DGAG). Chartered in 1905, the DGAG was an interim, short-lived creation of the GAF, probably organized by John Skelton Williams to purchase and consolidate several small existing lines.

The DGAG's first acquisition was a line running from Barrows Bluff on the Ocmulgee River south by way of Broxton to Douglas. It was purchased in 1905 from the Wadley & Mount Vernon Railroad, which had initially developed this route as part of an ambitious but ultimately unfulfilled expansion plan; work on this finished section was accomplished between 1902 and 1904. The DGAG next added a Pinebloom-to-Nashville line, which was acquired from the Ocilla, Pinebloom, & Valdosta Railway in 1906, and a line from Broxton to Hazlehurst bought from the Ocilla & Valdosta Railroad in 1906 or 1907.

For a short time, the assembled course of the DGAG from Hazlehurst through Broxton to Douglas, consisting of the former sections of the Wadley & Mount Vernon and the Ocilla & Valdosta, was utilized as the new GAF mainline (MAIN). However, its route was indirect, as it followed a roundabout, out of the way course between Garrant/West Green and

Broxton that constituted an east-west jog in the line. The GAF soon straightened out the mainline route to increase the efficiency of the trains between Hazlehurst and Douglas, and that part of the DGAG's former Ocilla & Valdosta line from Broxton to Garrant/West Green was made surplus and abandoned in 1909.

The DGAG's former Wadley & Mount Vernon segment then left over was reorganized and reclassified as the GAF's Broxton Branch Line, which initially made the full run from Douglas through Broxton to Barrows Bluff. After the closure and abandonment between 1915 and 1917 of all remnants of the Ocilla & Valdosta's successor, the Fitzgerald, Ocilla & Broxton Railroad, which passed on an east-west alignment from Ocilla through to Broxton, the Broxton branch could offer no other rail connectivity at its northern end, only connections to steamboats on the Ocmulgee River. The rail-to-steamboat transfers were soon to lose viability, as well, by 1920, leading first to abandonment of the northernmost section from the Relee community to the river. Nevertheless, most of the Broxton branch was operated as a dead end feeder line or spur until 1958, when the 14 remaining miles of track from Sapps Still (near Pridgen) to Douglas was finally abandoned, and the rails, ties, and ballast were removed.

## DESCRIPTION

Until its abandonment in 1958, the DGAG, also the GAF's Broxton Branch Line, diverged from the GAF MAIN at Douglas' northern edge, just north of the Twenty-Mile Creek bridge crossing that both alignments shared. From there, the DGAG continued to the north/northwest, staying roughly parallel to but at some distance west and away from the current route of US 441/SR 31. The alignment crossed CR 168 at Lotts Crossing, and it finally aligns with US 441 on the southern outskirts of Broxton. In fact, the railroad crossed over US 441/Alabama Street and ran in the middle of the right-of-way of South Railroad Street, curving to the west and into downtown. From the intersection and crossing of SR 268/Ocmulgee Street, the street-running alignment continued down Railroad Avenue, passing through Broxton's northwestern corner. The rail corridor then resumes its parallel relationship to US 441, only it stays to the east side of the highway from Broxton to the river, and is generally in close proximity.

Just north of the Pridgen community, the former rail right-of-way was repurposed for use as the roadway of CR 174/Old Relee Road; this local road is unpaved to CR 498/Sapps Still Road, then paved the rest of the distance to Relee. No traces of railbed were identified north of Sapps Still, so it is presumed likely, though not confirmed, that the paved roadbed also includes part of the former railbed.

The DGAG passes a landscape of gently rolling terrain that is covered by many acres of cultivated agricultural fields, as well as extensive swaths of managed pine plantation. Along the route, there are seemingly few areas of uncut or natural forest stands. From Douglas to Broxton, almost the entire length of the former railbed has been adapted for use as a power line easement, and is therefore kept clear of obstructions. Some open farm fields are cultivated up to and even sometimes over the former rail corridor, but the easement and former rail corridor appear to stay generally intact and free of any obstructions. Throughout this stretch, the former railroad alignment is clearly identifiable on current aerial imagery as a continuous corridor, to the degree that no lengths are indeterminate or indistinguishable.

Beyond Broxton and its intact rail corridors that are maintained as Railroad Street and Railroad Avenue, the two city thoroughfares that hosted street-running for the DGAG, the power-line easement ceases, and the railbed in general loses some of its continuity. From Broxton to Pridgen, evidence of the extant railbed and rail corridor can be routinely located close along the east side of US 441, but almost as common are instances of the disturbance and/or eradication of the railbed. The gently rolling topography through which the former railroad passed is still rural and marked by numerous examples of the rail line's cuts or built-up embankments, but, as mentioned previously, it is also heavily cultivated, either for row crops or for pine plantations. In numerous places, the preparation for planting, or the repeated plowing of agricultural fields, has erased all remains of the railbed. The result of these factors is that there are now multiple gaps in the continuity of the northern half of the DGAG's former rail corridor, from Broxton to the Ocmulgee River. Certainly, traces along this stretch can be located, but the former alignment is now separated into non-contiguous sections.

Moreover, no traces of the DGAG's former and long-abandoned Ocilla & Valdosta Railroad section, once part of the former GAF MAIN between Broxton and West Green, were located either during ground-level field survey or by way of review of current aerial imagery. The course must have roughly followed the present path of CR 594/Broxton-West Green Highway, but the exact alignment is unknown, and no information was obtained to confirm a possibility that the county road now utilized parts or all of the former rail right-of-way.

## NATIONAL REGISTER CONTRIBUTING STATUS

The Douglas, Augusta & Gulf Railway (DGAG), which was owned and operated by the Georgia & Florida Railway (GAF) for most of its history of service, was evaluated for its possible contributions to the historic significance and potential National Register-eligibility of the GAF system. The GAF is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce, Transportation, Community Planning and Development, and Exploration/Settlement, under Criterion

B for its association with John Skelton Williams, and under Criterion C in the areas of Engineering and Architecture.

Due to its status as the GAF's Broxton branch between Douglas, Broxton, and the Ocmulgee River at Barrows Bluff, the DGAG has the potential to contribute to the significance of the GAF. For just over half a century (1905-1958), the Broxton Branch Line played a supportive role in the GAF system's overall state and local levels of significance in the areas of Commerce and Transportation. It benefited the Ocmulgee River region west of the GAF MAIN by giving farmers, merchants, shippers, and passengers located in the greater vicinities of Douglas and Broxton additional outlets and points of connection to other mainlines, and thus contributing to the overall prosperity of this rural area of northern Coffee County, nearby areas of Irwin and Ben Hill counties, and even southern Telfair County.

Many of the DGAG railcars undoubtedly carried cotton, once an agricultural staple of the region, but also peanuts, grains, hay, and other farm products grown in this part of Georgia. More common freight loads would have included felled timber, sawn lumber, or other timber products, for the DGAG opened up the lands of these four counties to expanded operations of local logging companies and saw mill operations. In fact, discussions with longtime local residents indicate that the northern end of the line between Sapps Still and Relee long served a large sawmill, which processed logs taken from the Ocmulgee River basin or even floated down the river, and then exported the sawn lumber by way of GAF trains.

For a period of approximately 15 years, the DGAG Broxton branch also operated as an overland connection between the flatboats, barges, and steamers on the Ocmulgee River and the new mainline railroads of the GAF and the ABC in Douglas. Therefore, for a time, the line achieved significance in the areas of Commerce and Transportation as a productive GAF component and branch line, as a part of the interconnected web that provided thorough rail coverage of southeast central Georgia through the first quarter of the twentieth century, and as a part of the collaborative distribution system developed between railroads and steamboats around the turn of the century.

The DGAG was also evaluated for its potential to contribute to the significance of the GAF system under Criterion C in the area of Engineering. The DGAG's former right-of-way that has been adapted as a power transmission easement, from the Broxton branch's junction with the GAF MAIN at Douglas northward through Lotts Crossing to Broxton, is substantially intact. Although the rails and ties were removed from this length of the DGAG at some point following the line's 1958 abandonment, the former rail right-of-way is here intact, cleared, and unbroken. This section of the DGAG's alignment is physically represented by the intact form of the railroad's remnant sections of built-up rail embankments, and/or by its long maintained right-of-way clearing. Most of this former DGAG railbed is physically and visually present in the landscape and still conveys its historically significant design characteristics. Due primarily to the ongoing, uninterrupted, and adapted use of the railroad's right-of-way for a power transmission easement, but also to other instances of utilization by roadways within the city limits of Broxton, the essential linear quality and continuity of the Broxton branch component of the former DGAG has been mostly preserved. This section of the DGAG and thus the GAF system remains a good and generally intact example of turn of the twentieth-century rail engineering and construction within southeast central Georgia's nearly level to gently rolling topography and rural landscape and so contributes to the GAF in the area of Engineering.

However, because the northernmost and easternmost sections of the DGAG's rail corridor have been disrupted or otherwise disturbed at numerous places along their courses since their respective abandonments in 1909 and 1950, these segments of the DGAG no longer convey significance in the area of Engineering. Although portions of these railbeds are in place and evident in the landscape at certain specific points, the essential linearity of these two segments of the DGAG are no longer fully intact or visible. As a consequence, the former lengths of the DGAG, from the northern outskirts of Broxton to the Ocmulgee River, and from the eastern edge of Broxton to West Green, no longer readily convey their historically significant design characteristics and do not represent good examples of rural railroads from the early twentieth century.

Further, since no former DGAG or GAF system depots are still extant at Broxton or at any other former station stops, the DGAG does not contribute to the significance of the GAF system in the area of Architecture.

As described above, the DGAG has the potential to convey significance under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Transportation, as well as under Criterion C in the area of Engineering, but the current, largely disturbed physical condition and disrupted, disjointed state of parts of its former mileage total does not allow all of it to convey this significance, as approximately half of the line now lacks sufficient integrity, as is described above and hereafter. Due to the diminished integrity of this half of the former DGAG, only its southernmost section, that which once operated most directly as the Broxton branch, from Douglas to Broxton, can contribute in its present state to the GAF system's eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

## EVALUATION OF INTEGRITY

A ground-level field survey of the area of the DGAG corridor was conducted, as was a review of available historic and current aerial imagery. Along the abandoned rights-of-way that were accessible to the surveyors, some remaining evidence of the railway's former railbed or infrastructure, including raised embankments and cuts, was found, despite the abandonment of much of its lengths and the subsequent removal of rails and ties. However, this same review indicated that numerous other sections of the railroad line have been disturbed and disrupted by active and ongoing cultivation of fields through which the alignment passed. In many such cases, the repeated plowing for the preparation and practice of agriculture has erased or diminished the remains of the railbed. Hence, there are now numerous gaps in the continuity of two of the three parts of the former DGAG holdings. Although some traces of the northern (Broxton to Ocmulgee River) and eastern sections (Broxton to West Green) are extant and discernable within the landscape, these former alignments are now separated into non-contiguous sections. Moreover, it appears there are no DGAG-affiliated depots, warehouses, or platforms in existence along the northern and eastern segments. Accordingly, it has been determined that

the northern and eastern segments of the DGAG's former, T-shaped layout do not retain integrity in the areas of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Therefore, on balance, the DGAG's segments to the north and east of Broxton no longer convey their former standings as uninterrupted railroad corridors.

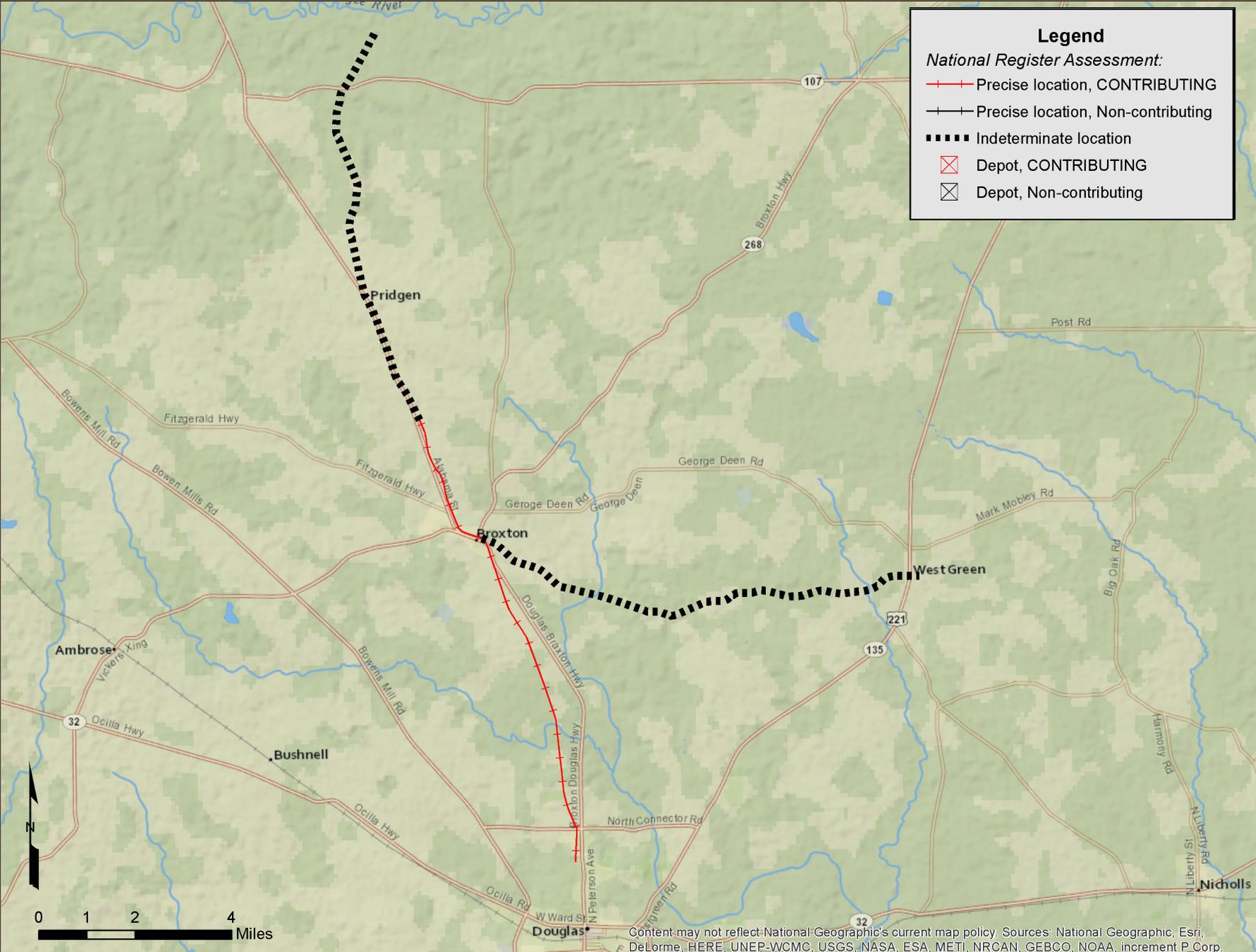
However, the section at the route's southern end between Douglas and Broxton, which now serves as a power line easement, has been determined to possess a comparatively high degree of integrity in the areas of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. No portion of this section of the former Broxton branch has been relocated, so its alignment remains substantially unchanged since its construction; therefore, the resource retains integrity of location and setting. As almost all of its alignment and railbed, including cuts and grades, remains intact, despite the abandonment of service nearly 60 years ago and the subsequent removal of rails, ties, and ballast, the resource still maintains a substantive level of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The railroad also retains integrity of feeling and association, as it conveys its linear and continuous physical characteristics as a historic railroad line.

## PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY

The proposed National Register boundary for the DGAG corridor corresponds to the railroad's historic rights-of-way, and includes the abandoned sections of the GAF's former Broxton Branch Line from Douglas to Broxton. This proposed boundary contains all National Register-qualifying characteristics and features of the resource and includes the railroad's currently abandoned but otherwise intact, unbroken sections of alignment, consisting of the railbed and other elements of the rail resource, such as any extant cuts and built-up grades.

## PREPARED BY

Steve Storey, David Ray, and Matt McDaniel



DGAG: Resource Location Map



DGAG: Railbed at SR 206/North Connector Road, Douglas



DGAG: Railbed along CR 535, Douglas vicinity



DGAG: CR 168 crossing, Lotts Crossing, Coffee County



DGAG: Little Avenue crossing, Broxton, Coffee County



DGAG: Railbed along South Railroad Street, Broxton



DGAG: SR 268 crossing, Broxton



DGAG: Railroad Avenue in Broxton, railroad ran in street



DGAG: Railroad cut at SR 31, Pridgen vicinity, Coffee County



DGAG: Railbed along SR 31, Pridgen vicinity



DGAG: Approximate SR 107 crossing, Relee, Coffee County

# MIDLAND RAILWAY (MIDL)

**Other names:** Statesboro Northern; Statesboro Branch Line

**System:** Georgia & Florida Railway

**NR Evaluation:** Not Eligible (Non-Contributing)

**Physical Status:** Abandoned and dismantled

**Current owner:** N/A

**Predecessors:** Savannah, Augusta & Northern Railroad

**Affiliates:** Savannah & Statesboro Railway

**Successors:** Statesboro Northern; Georgia & Florida Railway

**Location:** GAF branch line from Stevens Crossing, Emanuel County, to Statesboro



**GEORGIA & FLORIDA (GAF)**  
System Feature Inventory Form

## DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

The Midland Railway (MIDL) was incorporated in May of 1915 by railroad entrepreneur George M. Brinson to build a 150-mile line from Savannah northwest to Statesboro, Swainsboro, Wrightsville, Sandersville, and Milledgeville.

By the end of that year, the line had been built to Statesboro, some 49 miles northwest of Savannah. In June of the following year, Brinson purchased the Savannah, Augusta & Northern Railway (SA&N) which had laid 39 miles of tracks from Statesboro northwest to Stevens Crossing, near Midville, between 1908 and 1910.

The SA&N had initially and ambitiously planned to extend the line as far north and west as Chattanooga. The section from Statesboro to Garfield, and a connection there to the Georgia & Florida Railway's (GAF's) former Millen & Southwestern Railroad (MLSW) was the first to be completed in 1908. Grading was complete from Garfield to Louisville in 1909, when the company entered receivership. The SA&N was sold in 1910, around the time that the section of tracks was laid from Garfield to Stevens Crossing; that segment already graded to extend farther from Stevens Crossing to Louisville was never completed. However, although the planned "crossing" at Stevens Crossing was not fulfilled, the SA&N was able to interchange there with the GAF's north-south mainline.

Another local railroad, the Savannah & Statesboro Railway (SVSB), began operating the SA&N line in 1911 (see SVSB, documented as a short line). At Statesboro, the SA&N line was easily integrated with the SVSB's existing, 32-mile line from Statesboro southeast to Cuyler, a point on the Seaboard Air Line's mainline (originally the Savannah & Western Railroad) in Bryan County's northeastern corner.

The SVSB continued operations over the tracks from Statesboro northwest to Stevens Crossing until 1916, when the former SA&N line was bought out of bankruptcy by the MIDL, which ended the SVSB's lease. The MIDL's own new line from Statesboro southeast towards Savannah conceptually and geographically paralleled that of the SVSB's, only more directly, as it entered Savannah without relying on the lines of other railroads.

The result of the MIDL's takeover was an 88-mile line from Savannah to the GAF at Stevens Crossing in northern Emanuel County, just south of the Ogeechee River. In running northwest from Savannah towards Midville, the general route of the MIDL travelled roughly parallel to the original Central of Georgia (COG) mainline, only it traversed the lands west and south of the Ogeechee River, while the COG stayed along the river's eastern and northern banks.

Like its SA&N predecessor and with similarly ambitious plans, the MIDL never proceeded any farther north or west than Stevens Crossing. In 1919, the MIDL had three locomotives, 67 freight cars, four coaches, two combination cars, and one caboose. Yet it entered receivership in 1922, and Brinson was appointed receiver. The MIDL's own 43.6-mile section from Statesboro to Savannah was abandoned in December 1923 after having provided only a brief period (approximately 8 years) of service.

The remainder of the MIDL's line, from Statesboro to Stevens Crossing, was saved in 1924 when John Skelton Williams, president of the GAF, acquired that section which originated as the SA&N. He reorganized it as the Statesboro Northern Railway, and leased its operation to the GAF. The line was officially merged into the GAF in 1927. However, in 1950, it too was finally and fully abandoned.

## DESCRIPTION

Until its abandonment in 1950, this branch line diverged from the GAF mainline at the community of Stevens Crossing, located along SR 56's west side, halfway between Emanuel County's Summertown and Midville in Burke County. Wye track north of and parallel to CR 76 veered away from the mainline and to the southeast. The 1947 and 1953 editions of the *United States Geological Survey* topographic quadrangle maps for Savannah and Macon, respectively, illustrate the course of the alignment, which is denoted on the 1953 Macon map as a "Dismantled railroad." Much of the route to Portal follows various streambeds or valleys, and so a significant section proceeds cross-country and is inaccessible.

Halfway between Summertown and Canoochee, a brief, curving section of the current roadbed of SR 192 may have utilized some of the former railroad right-of-way, or else the railroad ran right alongside. At Canoochee, the railbed crosses CR 445/Canoochee-Garfield Road, but although the USGS maps confirm the location of the crossing, there is little discernable evidence of the railbed. Between Canoochee and Garfield, the railbed followed the stream valley of Fifteen Mile Creek, which runs south of Garfield. For this reason, and since Garfield was already extant at the

time of the SA&N's construction, the Statesboro branch line passed along the southern edge of town. A section of raised embankment is still intact and visible at its SR 23 crossing, right at the town limits and immediately west of where it once crossed the GAF's Millen branch.

Whereas Garfield was a town initiated by the construction of the Millen branch, the development of Portal was largely a result of the Statesboro branch, and the rail corridor is thus a much more notable and central feature in Portal's layout. Approaching Portal from the northwest, several unpaved county roads, including Aaron Station Road, Oglesby Pond Road, and CR 81, appear to now utilize the former railroad right-of-way or run directly beside it; the raised former embankment across Oglesby Pond is still prominent on aerial imagery. Likewise, the wide rail right-of-way and broad, flat railbed is still conspicuous and recognizable as such through the western side of downtown Portal; now serving as a de facto public green sward, this common space is set between West Railroad Street and US 80/SR 26. However, through the middle of downtown, east of the North Grady Street intersection, numerous buildings have now been erected on the railroad's former corridor. For part of the route from Portal to Statesboro, West Colfax Road/CR 111 and Colfax Station Road/CR 110 now use the former railroad right-of-way.

In Statesboro's northwest corner, the MIDL's right-of-way is still cleared and recognizable for a short stretch from the west side of the Bulloch County Board of Education offices on Williams Road to the west edge of the city's Arena Park/Luetta Moore Park at Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive/Blitch Lane. In fact, this triangular park's baseball diamond essentially occupies the former three-way wye interchange between the MIDL's SA&N segment from Portal, the MIDL's line from Savannah, and the SVSB, former operator of the SA&N. The SVSB's tracks on Statesboro's west side are still intact as a spur line from Norfolk Southern's Statesboro network; they now end at the Blitch Lane crossing.

Whereas the SVSB looped around the southeast and south sides of Statesboro to get to this junction, the later MIDL looped around the north and northwestern edges of the city's then extant development. The

roadbed of MLK, Jr. Drive maintains, and still utilizes as a transportation corridor, the MIDL right-of-way in the city's northwest corner, and West Moore Street, East Moore Street, and Odom Street all adaptively reused the rail corridor across its northern edge. From East Moore Street's present intersection with Statesboro's North Main Street, the MIDL corridor adopted and proceeded along a dead-straight course all the way southeast through Leefield and onward to the Ogeechee River crossing. The very eastern end of Statesboro's Brannen Road marks and retains the path of the former rail right-of-way, but otherwise the heavy commercial and residential development on the city's north side has disturbed most evidence of the railbed.

A short distance west of the river crossing and immediately west of Old River Road, CR 396 runs along and denotes the eastern extent of this western leg of the railbed's long, straight run. The MIDL's Ogeechee River bridge is no longer extant; on the river's east bank, the rail corridor made one gentle bend to the south-southeast. The curve's precise layout is still visible on aerial imagery due to the railbed's maintenance as a logging access trail. After this sole turn, the MIDL once again resumed an unbending course, which it maintained all the way into Garden City and Savannah. Between the Ogeechee River and Savannah, the precise heading of this former alignment is displayed by Midland Road, running southeast from Effingham County's Pineora community to its crossing of SR 30. Midland Road is appropriately named, since it adopted the former rail right-of-way and railbed for repurposing as its roadbed.

Apart from the specific sites and examples in the places described above, the route of the long-abandoned railroad corridor is often inaccessible, and it also difficult to identify on current aerial imagery. Just as some evidence of the extant roadbed and rail corridor can be definitively located, more routine are instances of the disturbance, eradication, or general disappearance of the railbed. Except for in the vicinities of Savannah and Statesboro, the nearly-level to gently rolling terrain through which the former railroad passed is still largely rural, but, as mentioned previously, it is heavily cultivated and managed, either for row crops or for pine plantations. In some such cases, the preparation for planting, or

the repeated plowing of agricultural fields, appears to have erased most remains of the railbed.

Hence, there now appear to be numerous and extensive gaps in the MIDL rail corridor's continuity. As described, traces were not hard to discover, either during ground-level field surveys or on current aerial imagery, but the entirety of the former alignment is now separated into numerous non-contiguous segments. On balance, the MIDL railbed no longer clearly and readily conveys its former standing as an uninterrupted railroad corridor.

### **NATIONAL REGISTER CONTRIBUTING STATUS**

The Georgia & Florida's Statesboro Branch operated as the independent Midland Railway or its predecessors for nearly 16 years, but after its consolidation into the GAF system in 1924, it served as a main branch line for the remainder and also the majority of its entire existence, which spanned another quarter century. As such, it was evaluated for its potential contributions to the historic significance and potential National Register-eligibility of the GAF system. The GAF is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce, Transportation, Community Planning and Development, and Exploration/Settlement, under Criterion B for its association with John Skelton Williams, and under Criterion C in the areas of Engineering and Architecture.

The MIDL was evaluated under Criterion A; due to its status as the GAF's Statesboro branch line, the MIDL does have the potential to contribute to the GAF system's significance. For a duration of four decades, from 1910 to 1950, this branch line played an important supportive role, whether under the direct control of the GAF or as an independent affiliate, in the GAF system's overall state and local levels of significance in the areas of Commerce and Transportation. In these areas, the MIDL benefited not only the cities and towns of Canoochee, Garfield, Twin City, Portal, Statesboro, Savannah, and other intermediate communities and station stops, but also the surrounding rural areas of Emanuel, Bulloch, Effingham, and Chatham counties. Considered both independently and

as a component of the partnership with its collaborating GAF mainline from Augusta to Valdosta, it gave farmers, timber companies, shippers, and passengers located in these counties and beyond new outlets and points of connection, not only by way of the larger GAF system, but also through the links to other connecting mainlines, such as the COG at either Midville or Statesboro. Particularly after the 1930 abandonment of most of the GAF's Millen branch, the northwestern half of the MIDL provided rail service to an area northwest of Statesboro that was otherwise bereft of railroads and rather isolated then with regard to modern transportation options. Thus, the MIDL is potentially significant in the area of Transportation for being not only a productive component of the GAF system, but also a part of the interconnected web of railroads that provided thorough coverage of east central Georgia during the first half of the twentieth century.

The MIDL would also have collected and distributed the various agricultural products produced in the east central Georgia region, such as timber, turpentine and naval stores, peanuts, and particularly cotton and tobacco. As a regional commercial and distribution center, Statesboro would also have received and exported raw materials, such as cotton and tobacco grown in Bulloch, Candler, and Effingham counties, and distributed finished or processed products via the GAF mainline. According to Delma E. Presley's history of Statesboro in the *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Statesboro "led the world in sales of long-staple Sea Island cotton" in 1908. Thus, the MIDL's physical presence and economic stimulus, by way of its role as the Statesboro branch, also affected the commercial growth and development of Statesboro and Portal, and had a similar if lesser effect on the smaller communities along the line. The MIDL thereby contributed to the overall prosperity of the region of southeast central Georgia and thus achieved potential significance in the area of Commerce.

The MIDL was evaluated under Criterion B for its potential to contribute to the GAF due to its association with John Skelton Williams and his vision to create a main trunk line linking east central Georgia with south central Georgia and northern Florida. As an acquired component of

the system amalgamated by J. S. Williams into the GAF, the MIDL has potential to contribute under this criterion.

The MIDL was also evaluated for its potential to contribute to the GAF's significance under Criterion C in the area of Engineering. However, because the MIDL's rail corridor has been broken and interrupted at numerous places along its course since its two stages of abandonment in 1924 and 1950, including the subsequent removal of its tracks, ties, and ballast, it no longer contributes in the area of Engineering. Although the railbed is in place and evident in the landscape at certain specific points along its path, the MIDL's essential linearity is no longer fully intact or visible. As a consequence, the MIDL no longer readily presents historically significant design characteristics, and does not represent a good example of either a rural, short-line railroad or of a component branch line from the early twentieth century. Since no former GAF or MIDL depots are still extant at the former station stops at or between Stevens Crossing and Statesboro, the MIDL no longer offers contribution to the significance of the GAF system in the area of Architecture. (Note: the MIDL's original depot and warehouse in Savannah is documented as a component resource of the COG subsidiary Savannah & Atlanta Railway which historically utilized the building for a considerable period of time.)

As described above, the MIDL has the potential to contribute to the GAF's significance under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Transportation, but its current, largely disturbed physical condition and disrupted, disjointed state does not allow it to convey this significance, as the line now lacks sufficient integrity, as is described above and hereafter. Due to its diminished integrity, the MIDL does not contribute, in its present state, to the GAF system's eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

## EVALUATION OF INTEGRITY

A ground-level field survey of the MIDL's former rail corridor was conducted, as was a review of available historic and current aerial imagery. In the vicinity of the abandoned right-of-way that was accessible to the

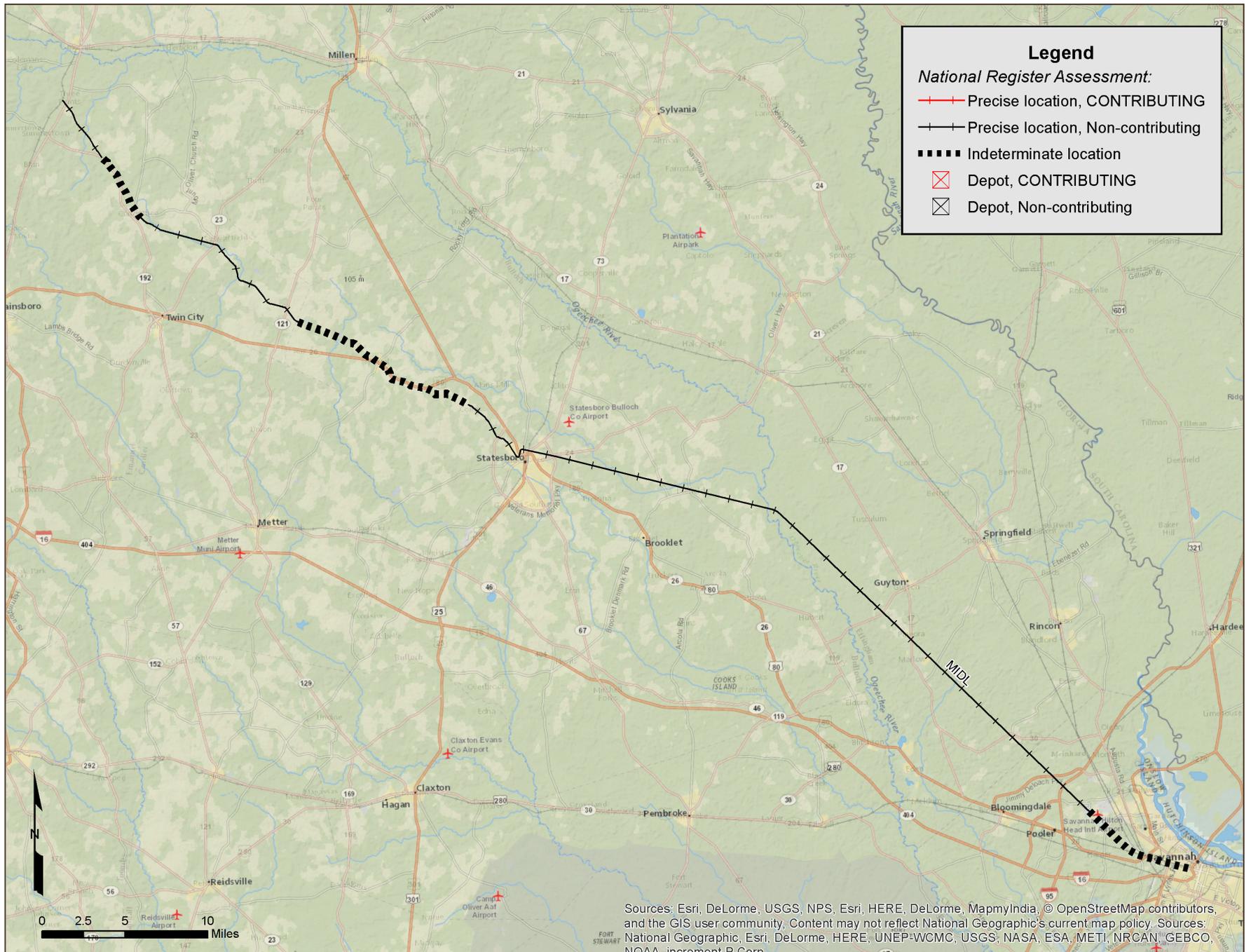
surveyors, little remaining evidence of the railroad's former railbed or infrastructure, such as raised embankments, cuts, trestles, or bridges, was identified, and it appears that no depots, warehouses, or platforms are in existence. Accordingly, it has been determined that the GAF system's MIDL does not retain integrity in the areas of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

**PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY**

Not applicable

**PREPARED BY**

Steve Storey, David Ray, Matt McDaniel, Erin Murphy, George Rounds,  
and Chris Mroczka



MIDL: Resource Location Map



MIDL: CR 76/Stevens Crossing Road, Stevens Crossing, Emanuel County



MIDL: Railroad grade at SR 56, Stevens Crossing



MIDL: Approximate ROW along SR 192, Summertown vicinity, Emanuel Co.



MIDL: CR 445 crossing, Canoochee, Emanuel County



MIDL: SR 23 crossing, Garfield vicinity, Emanuel County



MIDL: Railbed at SR 23, Garfield



MIDL: Railbed at CR 323 crossing, Garfield



MIDL: Oglesby Pond Road, also railbed, Piddleville, Bulloch County



MIDL: Railbed, Railroad Street, Portal, Bulloch County



MIDL: Colfax Road, also railbed, Colfax, Bulloch County



MIDL: Approximate railroad location, US 25 Bypass, Statesboro



MIDL: Former ROW along Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Statesboro



MIDL: Approximate alignment location, Beasley Road, Statesboro



MIDL: Approximate US 301 Bypass and SR 24 crossing, Statesboro



MIDL: Approximate US 301 Bypass and SR 24 crossing, Statesboro



MIDL: Approximate Burkhalter Road crossing, Statesboro



MIDL: Approximate Burkhalter Road crossing, Statesboro



MIDL: Approximate alignment, Leefield, Bulloch County



MIDL: Approximate Leefield-Stilson Road crossing, Leefield vicinity



MIDL: Approximate SR 119 crossing, Guyton vicinity, Effingham County



MIDL: Former ROW along Midland Road, Pineora, Effingham County



MIDL: Approximate SR 30 crossing, Black Creek Crossing, Bryan County

# MILLEN & SOUTHWESTERN RAILROAD (MLSW)

**Other names:** Millen Branch Line

**System:** Georgia & Florida Railway

**NR Evaluation:** Mixed (both Contributing and Non-Contributing elements)

**Physical Status:** Abandoned and dismantled

**Current owner:** N/A

**Predecessors:** Rogers & Summit Railroad; Millen & Southern Railway

**Acquisitions:** N/A

**Successors:** Georgia & Florida Railway; Southern Railway

**Location:** Millen, Jenkins County, to Pendleton Springs, southwest of Oak Park, Emanuel County



**GEORGIA & FLORIDA (GAF)**  
System Feature Inventory Form

## DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

The rail line from Millen to Stillmore was constructed in 1889-92 by the Rogers & Summit Railroad and its successor, the Millen & Southern Railway. When the latter entered receivership in 1897, it was reorganized as the Millen & Southwestern Railroad (MLSW).

Chartered April 23, 1889, the Rogers & Summit Railroad constructed a rail line between Rogers, located on the Central of Georgia's (COG's) original Savannah-Macon mainline a few miles west of Millen, and Summit, an Emanuel County town now known as Twin City.

In 1890, well before work was complete, it was reorganized as the Millen & Southern Railway (M&S). The president of the M&S was Loring R. Millen of New York; the vice-president was William B. Stillwell of Savannah. The two were partners in the lumber industry holding company of Stillwell, Millen & Company of Savannah, as well as L. R. Millen & Company of New York.

Rogers remained the line's northern terminus until 1891, when the M&S completed new track from Thrift, about 9.5 miles due south of Rogers, to Millen, which was the next station stop east of Rogers along the COG mainline. This replacement of the Thrift-Rogers segment redirected the line to the northeast, on a new alignment that allowed direct connectivity with not only the COG, but also the previously existing Augusta & Savannah Railroad, which traveled north-south from Augusta to Millen.

The entire railroad was completed in 1892, with Stillmore as the southern terminus. At Stillmore, the M&S would have soon offered connectivity to the Stillmore Air Line Railway (later succeeded by the Wadley Southern Railway), which was completed in 1893 between Stillmore and Collins in Tattnall County, and to the Macon & Atlantic Short Line Railway (later reorganized as the Bruton & Pineora Railway), which was completed from the Dublin satellite of Brewton to Stillmore between 1897 and 1900. The principal office of the M&S was in Millen, which was named not for Loring R. Millen, but instead for McPherson B. Millen, one-time COG superintendent.

In the 1894 edition of *The Official Railway List*, the M&S reported operating 32 miles of railroad with 5 locomotives, 4 passenger cars, and 32 freight and miscellaneous cars.

After the line's 1897 reorganization and renaming as the Millen & Southwestern Railroad, the MLSW built a short branch line in 1902 from Monte to Monte Junction. Two years later, in 1904, the mainline was extended south from Stillmore to Vidalia, by way of Oak Park, Pendleton Springs, and Normantown. At Vidalia, the MLSW interchanged with another major east-west mainline, that of the Seaboard Air Line's (SAL's) former Georgia & Alabama Railway from Savannah to Montgomery, Alabama. Hence, for a couple of years, the independent MLSW operated as a 53-mile long, north-south oriented bridge route between two important east-west mainlines, the COG and the SAL.

In 1906, the MLSW was merged into the newly emerging Georgia & Florida Railway (GAF). After the takeover, the GAF decided to utilize the southernmost extent of the MLSW's recent addition for the GAF mainline. It adopted the MLSW's new nine-mile long leg from Pendleton Springs south to Vidalia for use as the mainline, constructing a new section of track from Swainsboro to Pendleton to meet it. The former MLSW's remaining 44-miles from Pendleton Springs to Millen thereafter became the GAF's Millen Branch Line.

The GAF gradually abandoned the Millen branch in stages over two decades. Most of the branch line from Millen to Pendleton Springs was abandoned in 1930, but the brief run from Garfield to Summit-Graymont (now Twin City) remained open until 1950, accessed during this period by the GAF's crossing Statesboro branch, which was shut down the same year.

## DESCRIPTION

As described above, the MLSW and its two predecessors were cumulatively in service as an independent short line or bridge line railroad for about 15 years before they were acquired by the GAF. Yet, the MLSW's progenitor, the Rogers & Summit, was conceived and constructed as a local feeder branch to another major system's mainline, the COG; even though its successor, the M&S, moved the line's point of interchange from Rogers to Millen, the M&S remained a satellite and thus affiliate of the COG, for the short line initially offered no other connectivity to other, larger railroads.

As is illustrated on a 1921 United States Geological Survey map, the MLSW diverged from the COG mainline on the west side of downtown Millen, by way of a wye junction at the west end of Millen's rail yard, which is still in use by Norfolk Southern. Although both of Millen's extant depots, the original 1868 freight depot and the 1915 passenger station, were both built primarily for the COG, the later one was expressly described as a "Union Depot" on an early twentieth century postcard; it was likely used by the MLSW in addition to the COG and its Augusta & Savannah Railroad subsidiary.

From Millen's west side, the MLSW veered to the southwest and crossed the Ogeechee River in parallel to and a short distance north of the present US 25 alignment. A faint trace of the rail embankment through the river's swampy overflow can be discerned on current aerial imagery, but the grade is inaccessible, and it quickly disappears as the swamp gives way to many acres of managed pine plantations. Within Jenkins County, the line continued southwesterly through the Emmalane, Butts, and Thrift communities, but almost no evidence of the rail grade was discovered at ground level or on aerial views, apart from a slightly raised berm alongside what appears to be a freight depot, freight warehouse, or seed house along the northwest side of SR 23 in Thrift; this wood-framed, side-gabled, board & batten building features a cargo door, but its provenance and purpose could not be confirmed.

Within Emanuel County, wide, communal rights-of-way are still intact through Garfield and parts of the Summit area of Twin City, and the line's route is shown on USGS maps. In both towns, parts or even most of the former rail corridor is grassed to now serve as de facto linear parks or common ground, or paved to function as shared community parking lots. Likewise, in both places, some buildings or structures, such as the water tower and the community fire station in Garfield, also have been built over parts of this abandoned right-of-way. Nonetheless, historic houses from the MLSW's period of operation still face and overlook the former rail corridor from both Railroad Avenue and Railroad Street in Garfield, the two thoroughfares that frame the linear right-of-way. In the Summit section of Twin City, the wood-framed former Summit depot still stands at its original location, and a long, linear freight warehouse stands directly adjacent, to the northeast. Here again, the two railroad buildings stand side-by-side within the former rail corridor framed by North Railroad Avenue (now SR 23) and the parallel Railroad Street.

In Stillmore, it appears that the MLSW ran closely parallel to and just west of the Stillmore Air Line/Wadley Southern, along north-south alignments on the west side of town. The latter railroad corridor is denoted and acknowledged by the conversion of its raised bed to "Stillmore Airline Railroad Street," and it appears likely that part of the next street to its west,

Savannah Street, may have made use of the MLSW's former right-of-way. Two former depot buildings are still extant in Stillmore, but both have been moved. Due to its resemblance to the rather plain and unadorned, wood-framed depot in Summit, the Stillmore "Community House" may have been originally constructed by the MLSW or GAF.

Between Stillmore and Oak Park, the MLSW corridor roughly followed the present course of Old Kenfield Road to the southwest for some distance, and some sections of linear treelines mark the railbed, even amidst managed pine plantations, on current aerial imagery. In Oak Park, once called Horace, Northeast Railroad Avenue marks the route of the line's approach, which passed right by the cemetery at the town's northeastern edge. As at Garfield and Summit, the rail corridor through Oak Park is framed by two streets, here called Northwest Railroad Avenue and Southwest Railroad Avenue; as in Garfield, this communal green space is now home to a playground, a water tower, and a public works building. To Oak Park's northeast, the railbed has been cut through by Interstate 16, and to its southwest, it has similarly been disrupted by the ongoing widening of US 1/SR 4; between US 1/SR 4 and Reedy Creek, an extensive borrow pit for the four-laning project appears to have comprehensively disturbed the railbed.

Apart from the specific sites within the aforementioned towns, the route of the long-abandoned railroad corridor is often inaccessible, and it also very hard to identify on current aerial imagery, particularly because many sections are not noted on available historic maps, or few maps were made of the area during the line's period of operation. Just as some evidence of the extant roadbed and rail corridor can be definitively located, more routine are instances of the disturbance, eradication, or general physical disappearance of the railbed. The nearly level to gently rolling terrain through which the former railroad passed is still rural, but it is heavily cultivated and managed, either for row crops or for pine plantations. In some such cases, the preparation for planting, or the repeated plowing of agricultural fields, appears to have erased most remains of the railbed.

Hence, there are now numerous gaps in the continuity of the MLSW rail corridor. As described, traces are discernable, either during ground level

field surveys or on current aerial imagery, but the entirety of the former alignment is now separated into non-contiguous sections. On balance, the MLSW railbed no longer clearly and readily conveys its former standing as an uninterrupted railroad corridor.

## NATIONAL REGISTER CONTRIBUTING STATUS

The Georgia & Florida's Moultrie Branch operated as the independent Millen & Southwestern Railroad (MLSW) for more than 15 years. After its consolidation into the GAF system in 1906, its Pendleton Springs-to-Vidalia segment was incorporated into the GAF mainline (see GAF MAIN), and the remaining Pendleton Springs-to-Millen alignment served as a main branch line for the remainder and also the majority of that segment's existence, spanning another half century. As such, the MLSW, also the Millen Branch Line, was evaluated for its possible contributions to the historic significance and potential National Register-eligibility of the GAF system. The GAF is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce, Transportation, Community Planning and Development, and Exploration/Settlement, and under Criterion C in the areas of Engineering and Architecture.

Due to its status as the GAF's Millen Branch Line, the MLSW has the potential to contribute to the GAF system's historic significance under Criterion A. For a duration of almost a quarter century, the Millen Branch Line, at its fullest extent, played an important supportive role in the GAF system's overall state and local levels of significance in the areas of Commerce and Transportation. In these areas, the MLSW benefitted not only the cities and towns of Millen, Garfield, Twin City, Stillmore, Oak Park, Normantown, Vidalia, and other intermediated communities and station stops, but also the surrounding rural areas of Jenkins, Emanuel, and Toombs counties. Considered both independently and as a component of the GAF system, including the mainline connecting Valdosta to Augusta, it gave farmers, timber companies, shippers, and passengers located in these counties and beyond new outlets and points of connection, not only by way of the larger GAF system, but also through

the numerous links to other connecting mainlines at Millen, Garfield, Stillmore, and Vidalia, such as the COG, the COG's Dublin-to-Statesboro branch, and the SAL. Thus, the MLSW presents potential significance in the area of Transportation, for being not only a productive component of the GAF system, but also a part of the interconnected web of railroads that provided thorough coverage of southeast Georgia during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

The MLSW would also have collected and distributed the various typical agricultural products produced in the southeast Georgia region, such as timber, turpentine and naval stores, cotton, peanuts, pecans, corn, and wheat, as well as hogs and cattle. As regional commercial and distribution centers, both Millen and Vidalia would also have received raw materials and distributed finished products via the GAF and its MLSW branch. Thus, the MLSW's physical presence and economic stimulus, by way of its role as the Millen branch, also affected the commercial growth and development of Millen and Vidalia, and had a similar if lesser effect on the smaller communities along the line between these two cities. The MLSW thereby contributed to the overall prosperity of the southeast Georgia region and thus achieved potential significance in the area of Commerce.

The MLSW was also evaluated for its potential to contribute to the significance of the GAF system under Criterion C in the areas of Engineering and Architecture. However, because the MLSW's rail corridor has been broken and interrupted at numerous places along its course since its primary abandonment in 1930 and through the subsequent removal of its tracks, ties, and ballast, it no longer conveys significance in the area of Engineering. Although the railbed is in place and evident in the landscape at select points, the essential linearity of the MLSW is no longer intact or visible. As a consequence, the MLSW no longer readily presents its historically significant design characteristics and does not represent a good or intact example of either a rural, short-line railroad from the end of the nineteenth century or of a component branch line from the early twentieth century. However, the collection of four remaining depots and freight buildings once affiliated with the GAF and its MLSW branch line

at Thrift, Twin City, and Stillmore retain their potential to contribute to the GAF system's overall significance and National Register eligibility in the area of Architecture. These buildings are good and intact examples of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century railroad architecture.

As described above, the former MLSW has the potential to present significance under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Transportation and under Criterion C in the area of Engineering, but its current, largely disturbed physical condition and disrupted, disjointed alignment do not allow it to convey this significance, as most of the line now lacks sufficient integrity, as is described above and hereafter. Due to the diminished integrity of the MLSW railroad corridor, it does not contribute, in its present state, to the GAF system's eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. However, depot and freight buildings located along the MLSW, as indicated, contribute to the GAF system under Criterion C in the area of Architecture.

## EVALUATION OF INTEGRITY

A ground-level field survey of the MLSW was conducted, as was a review of available historic and current aerial imagery. In the vicinity of the abandoned right-of-way that was accessible to the surveyors, little remaining evidence of the railroad's former railbed or infrastructure, such as raised embankments, cuts, trestles, or bridges, was identified. Accordingly, it has been determined that the MLSW alignment does not retain integrity in the areas of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

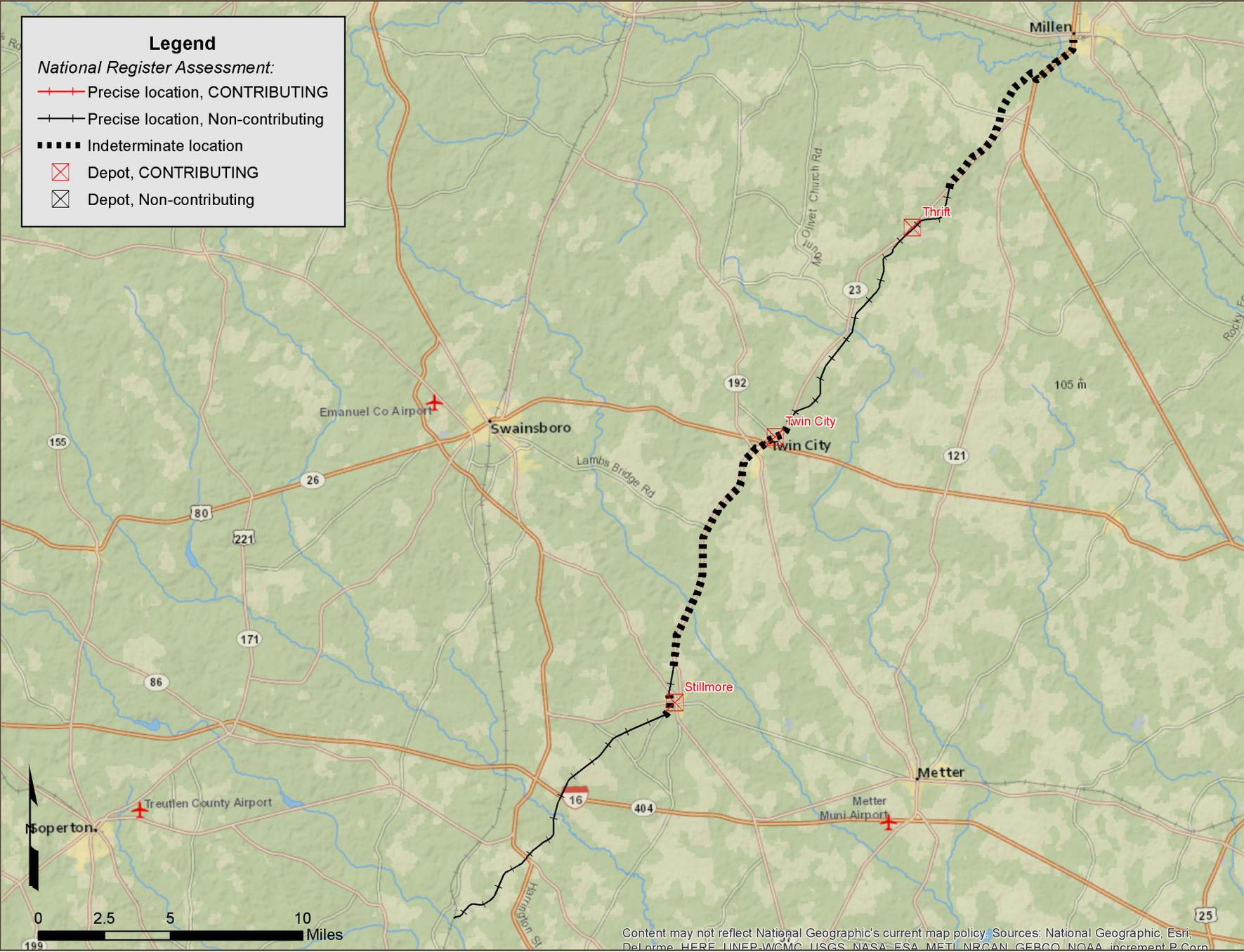
However, four depot and freight buildings along the long-abandoned route of the GAF's former Millen Branch Line are still extant, and three of the four are still located at their original sites, adjacent to the former railroad grade and former corridor rights-of-way. These resources contribute to the significance and integrity of the greater GAF system, and they generally retain integrity in the areas of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

## PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY

In the circumstance of the GAF's long-abandoned Millen branch, it has been determined that the MLSW corridor does not contribute to the GAF system's National Register eligibility. Nonetheless, the MLSW's intact complement of four extant depots or freight warehouses are still considered to contribute to the significance of the GAF system. The proposed boundaries for these specific buildings are to consist of their footprints in plan view. The buildings include the probable Thrift freight depot or seed house, Jenkins County; Summit (Twin City) combination depot and adjacent freight warehouse, Emanuel County; and the possible Stillmore depot, which has been moved to "Community Road" and now serves as the Stillmore Community House (MLSW provenance is highly likely, but unconfirmed).

## PREPARED BY

Steve Storey, David Ray, and Matt McDaniel



MLSW: Resource Location Map



MLSW: Millen Central of Georgia passenger and freight depots



MLSW: Freight depot and railbed, Thrift, Jenkins County



MLSW: CR 25 crossing, Garfield, Emanuel County



MLSW: Railbed between Railroad Avenue and Railroad Street, Garfield



MLSW: Summit freight and passenger depots, Twin City, Emanuel County



MLSW: Railroad Street, Twin City



MLSW: Railbed along SR 192, Stillmore, Emanuel County



MLSW: Former SAL crossing at SR 57, Stillmore



MLSW: Relocated depot, Stillmore



MLSW: Railbed at CR 252 crossing, Oak Park vicinity, Emanuel County



MLSW: ROW along Northwest Railroad Avenue, Oak Park, Emanuel County



MLSW: US 1/SR 4 borrow pit on railbed site, Oak Park

# NASHVILLE & SPARKS RAILROAD (NASH)

**Other names:** Moultrie Branch Line

**System:** Georgia & Florida Railway

**NR Evaluation:** Not Eligible (Non-Contributing)

**Physical Status:** Abandoned and dismantled

**Current owner:** N/A

**Predecessors:** N/A

**Successors:** Georgia & Florida Railway; Southern Railway

**Location:** Nashville, Berrien County to Sparks, Cook County



**GEORGIA & FLORIDA (GAF)**  
System Feature Inventory Form

## DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

Chartered March 16, 1900, the 11.5-mile Nashville & Sparks Railroad (NASH), which connected its namesake communities, was in operation by early 1901. The NASH connected with the Ocilla, Pinebloom & Valdosta at Nashville and the Georgia Southern & Florida Railway (GSF) mainline at Sparks, just north of Adel.

The NASH was acquired in 1906 by the new Georgia & Florida Railway (GAF), which utilized it to add a point of connection with the GSF, and to create the first leg of an eventual branch line westward to Moultrie. The Moultrie Branch Line was eventually assembled by purchasing two separate, already finished short lines that were geographically linked end-to-end on an east-west course, one of these being the NASH and the other the later Sparks Western Railway (SPRK). However, the SPRK was not completed until sometime in 1910, so the NASH operated on its own for four or five years as the de facto GAF Sparks branch. The meeting point for the two railroads was the north-south oriented GSF mainline, which was likely the main impetus behind their original developments. Nevertheless, the GAF's linking of the two to its own mainline created numerous points of connection to other railroads and possible transfers not only at Sparks, but also at its eastern and western termini.

The NASH, also the eastern component of the GAF Moultrie Branch Line, was kept open and in service until 1967-68; by that time, the Southern Railway had acquired and integrated not only the GAF, but also the GSF.

## DESCRIPTION

As described above, the NASH was only in service as a stand-alone short line railroad for about five years before it was acquired by the GAF. This takeover followed the GAF's preferred practice of acquiring and assembling existing, fledgling, or even more commonly, troubled railroad ventures. Southern Railway bought the GAF in 1963 and abandoned the Nashville-to-Sparks section of the Moultrie Branch about five years later. It then simply transferred the Sparks-to-Moultrie remainder to its GSF subsidiary, allowing the former Sparks Western Railway line to remain in service and accessible from the GSF.

In Nashville, the NASH line diverged from the GAF mainline at a wye junction located along the north side of SR 76 and immediately west of the Mathis Street crossing; essentially the east-west alignment of the mainline through the east side of Nashville continued westerly, while the mainline veered through a tight, approximately 120 degree turn back to the south/southeast on its way to Allenville and Ray City. A very brief remnant tail of the former wye track is still intact as a reminder. The narrow right-of-

way is still intact, and continues due west until it reaches the right-of-way of Hamilton Street. The NASH engaged in street running along Hamilton Street for most of its traverse of downtown Nashville; the rail line passed right along the south side of the original Nashville jail, which still stands at the corner of North Jefferson Street and East Hamilton Street. On Nashville's west side, the rail corridor passed along Reedy Creek's north side and Nashville's sewage treatment plant, as is still depicted on a 1975 edition of the United States Geological Survey map of the area. Remnant traces of the alignment in this area are still evident on current aerial imagery. From here, the line continued southwest and crossed through the Cottle community and over the New River into Cook County.

In Cook County, the line continues through the Masee and Barnesdale communities on its way to Sparks. At Masee, aerial imagery from 1971 appears to show the railbed running right along the south side of CR 172/Burnett Lane, and along the north side of CR 38/Van Brackle Road. Both of these unpaved roads may also utilize all or part of the former rail right-of-way. In the northeastern corner of Sparks, a short unpaved road called Gay Avenue utilizes the former rail right-of-way as it crosses CR 248/Brushy Creek Road. From Gay Avenue's northwest-southeast alignment, USGS maps show that the NASH line continued on a tightly arcing S-curve to the north and west over Bear Creek and the GSF, and then curved back to a three-prong wye intersection with the SPRK at the intersection of US 41 and Main Street. However, there is no longer clear physical evidence of the former NASH crossing of the GSF main, or of its former connections to the GSF or to the GAF's SPRK.

Just as some evidence of the extant roadbed and rail corridor can be routinely located, more routine are instances of the disturbance and/or eradication of the railbed. The near level or gently rolling terrain through which the former railroad passed is still rural, but it is heavily cultivated, either for row crops, for orchards of pecan trees, or for pine plantations. In many such cases, the preparation for planting, or the repeated plowing of agricultural fields, has erased all remnants of the railbed.

The result of these factors is that there are now numerous gaps in the continuity of the NASH rail corridor. Traces can be identified, either during ground level field surveys or on current aerial imagery, but the entirety of the former alignment is now separated into non-contiguous segments. On balance, the NASH railbed no longer clearly and readily conveys its former standing as an uninterrupted railroad corridor.

### **NATIONAL REGISTER CONTRIBUTING STATUS**

The eastern half of the Georgia & Florida's Moultrie Branch Line originated as the Nashville & Sparks Railroad (NASH), but has been operated as a branch or feeder line to the GAF system for all but five years of its entire existence; as such, it was evaluated for its possible contributions to the historic significance and potential National Register eligibility of the GAF system. The GAF is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce, Transportation, Community Planning and Development, and Exploration/Settlement, under Criterion B for its association with John Skelton Williams, and under Criterion C in the areas of Architecture and Engineering.

Due to its status as a section of the GAF's Moultrie Branch Line, the NASH has the potential to contribute to the significance of the GAF system under Criterion A. For a duration of more than half a century (1906-1968), the Moultrie Branch Line played an important supportive role in the GAF system's overall state and local levels of significance in the areas of Commerce and Transportation. In these areas, it benefitted not only the towns of Nashville, Sparks/Adel, Ellenton, and Moultrie, but also the surrounding rural areas of Berrien, Cook, and Colquitt counties. Considered both independently and as a component of the GAF system, it gave farmers, timber companies, shippers, and passengers located in these counties and beyond new outlets and points of connection, not only by way of the larger GAF system and its Augusta-to-Valdosta mainline, but also through the numerous links to other connecting lines at Moultrie, Sparks, and Nashville, such as the GSF and the Atlanta, Birmingham & Coast's Thomasville branch. Thus, the NASH presents potential significance in the area of Transportation for being not only a productive component of

the GAF system but also a part of the interconnected web of railroads that provided thorough coverage of south central and southwest Georgia during the twentieth century.

The NASH would also have collected and distributed the various typical agricultural products produced in the southwest and south central Georgia region, such as timber, turpentine and naval stores, cotton, peanuts, pecans, corn, and wheat, as well as hogs and cattle. As regional commercial and distribution centers, both Nashville and Moultrie would also have received raw materials and distributed finished products via the NASH and the SPRK. Thus, the NASH's physical presence and economic stimulus, by way of its role as the eastern half of the GAF's Moultrie branch, also affected the commercial growth and development of Nashville and Moultrie, and had a similar if lesser effect on smaller communities along the line between the two cities. The NASH thereby contributed to the overall prosperity of southwest and south central Georgia between Moultrie, Sparks/Adel, and Nashville, and thus achieved significance in the area of Commerce.

The NASH was also evaluated for its potential to contribute to the significance of the GAF system under Criterion C in the area of Engineering. However, because the NASH's rail corridor has been broken and interrupted at numerous places along its course since its abandonment in 1968 and the subsequent removal of its tracks, ties, and ballast, it no longer conveys significance in this area. Although the railbed is in place and evident in the landscape at certain specific points along its path, the NASH's essential linearity and alignment are no longer substantially intact or visible in the landscape. As a consequence, the NASH no longer conveys its historically significant design characteristics and does not represent a good example of a rural, short-line railroad from the turn of the twentieth century or of a component branch line from the early twentieth century. Since no former GAF or NASH depots are still extant at the former station stops at or between Nashville and Sparks, the NASH no longer offers contribution to the significance of the GAF system in the area of Architecture.

As described above, the NASH has potential significance under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Transportation, but its current, largely disturbed physical condition and disrupted, disjointed state does not convey this significance, as the line now lacks sufficient integrity, as described above and hereafter. Due to its diminished integrity, the NASH does not contribute to the GAF system's eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

### **EVALUATION OF INTEGRITY**

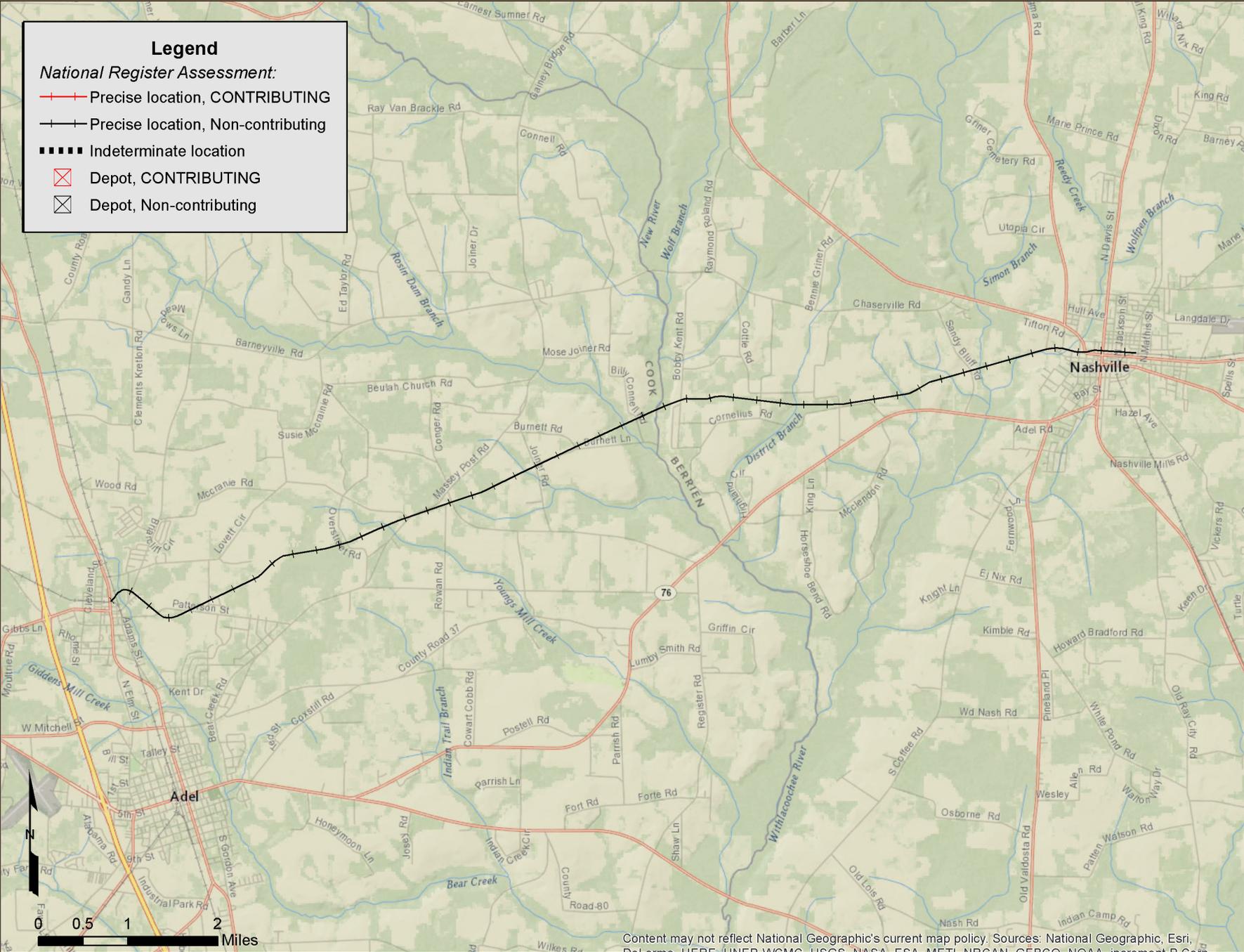
A ground-level field survey of the NASH's former rail corridor was conducted, as was a review of available historic and current aerial imagery. In the vicinity of the abandoned right-of-way that was accessible to the surveyors, little remaining evidence of the railroad's former railbed or infrastructure, such as raised embankments, cuts, trestles, or bridges, was identified, and it appears that no depots, warehouses, or platforms are in existence. Accordingly, it has been determined that the GAF system's NASH does not retain integrity in the areas of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

### **PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY**

Not applicable

### **PREPARED BY**

Steve Storey, David Ray, and Matt McDaniel



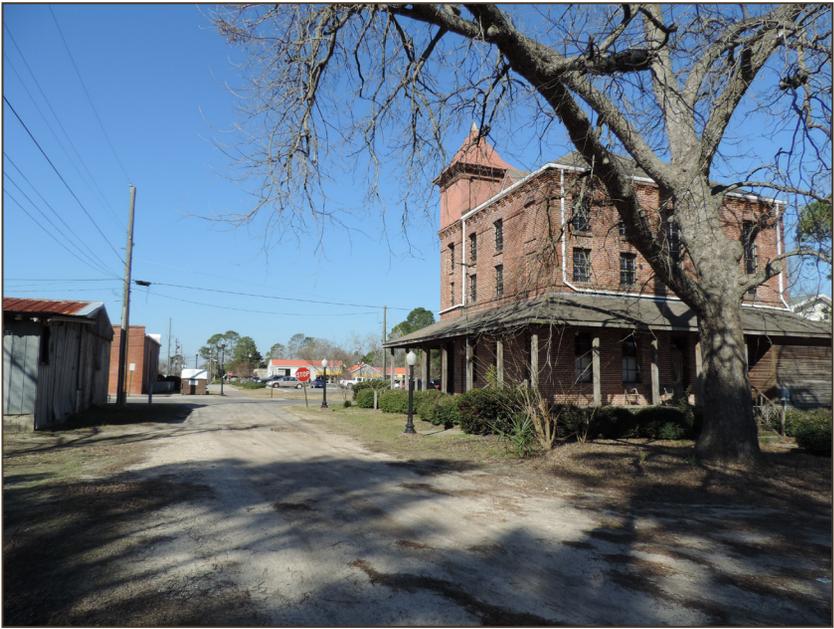
NASH: Resource Location Map



NASH: Wye junction remnant at North Mathis Street, Nashville



NASH: Bell Street crossing, Nashville



NASH: Former ROW at old jail, East Hamilton Street, Nashville



NASH: SR 125 crossing, Nashville



NASH: CR 172, also railbed, Masee, Cook County



NASH: CR 38, also railbed, Barnesdale vicinity, Cook County



NASH: CR 164, railroad passed through field, Sparks, Cook County



NASH: Gay Avenue crossing, Sparks



NASH: GSF MAIN and NASH crossing, Sparks



NASH: Former junction with GAF SPRK, Sparks

# SPARKS WESTERN RAILWAY (SPRK)

**Other names:** Moultrie Branch Line

**System:** Georgia & Florida Railway

**NR Evaluation:** Eligible (Contributing)

**Physical Status:** Active

**Current owner:** Georgia & Florida Railroad

**Predecessors:** N/A

**Acquisitions:** N/A

**Successors:** Georgia & Florida Railway; Southern Railway; Norfolk Southern; Georgia & Florida Railroad

**Location:** Sparks, Cook County, to Moultrie, Colquitt County



**GEORGIA & FLORIDA (GAF)**  
System Feature Inventory Form

## DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

The short-lived Sparks Western Railway (SPRK) was still in the process of constructing its new line west from Sparks to Kingwood, located about two miles east of Moultrie on the Thomasville Branch Line of the Atlanta, Birmingham & Atlantic (later the Atlanta, Birmingham & Coast, or ABC) when it was purchased in 1910 by the Georgia & Florida Railway (GAF). It was absorbed into the GAF the following year.

Through the purchase of the SPRK, agreements for trackage rights, and construction of short connectors to link the SPRK and the former Nashville & Sparks (NASH) together in sequence to the GAF mainline in Nashville, the GAF established a westward branch to Moultrie in 1911. This Moultrie Branch Line was assembled by purchasing these two separate, mostly completed short lines that were geographically linked end-to-end on an east-west course, and by then connecting the joined route to the GAF mainline with a wye junction at Nashville. The GAF also built a 2.2-mile branch from Sparks to the Cook County seat of Adel, in 1911.

The meeting point in Sparks for the two combined short line railroads was the Georgia Southern & Florida's (GSF) north-south mainline, which was likely the main impetus behind their original developments. Nevertheless, the GAF's linking of the two to its own north-south oriented mainline created numerous points of connection to other railroads and possible

transfers not only at Sparks, but also at its western terminus in Moultrie. The entire length of the Moultrie branch from Nashville to Moultrie was kept open and in service until 1967-68; by that time, the Southern Railway had acquired and integrated not only the GAF, but also the GSF. Although the NASH has been abandoned and dismantled, the SPRK alignment remains in service. It is now owned and operated by the Georgia & Florida Railroad (GFRR), a short line railroad company that now operates in the southwestern corner of Georgia. Headquartered in Albany, GFRR began rail operations in 1995 with 131 miles of track acquired or leased from Norfolk Southern, including 58 miles between Albany and Sparks.

## DESCRIPTION

As described above, the GAF purchased the SPRK even before construction of its planned line from Sparks to Moultrie was completed, but the takeover followed the GAF's preferred practice of acquiring and assembling existing, fledgling, or even more commonly, troubled railroad ventures. When Southern Railway bought the GAF in 1963 and abandoned the Nashville-to-Sparks section of the Moultrie Branch about five years later, it simply transferred the Sparks-to-Moultrie remainder to its GSF subsidiary, allowing the GAF's former SPRK line to remain intact and in service. Hence, the still active line now ties into the GSF's Macon-to-Florida mainline at a wye junction in Sparks just north of the Colquitt Street/Brushy Creek Road

crossing, and the wye curves to cross US 41 and exit Sparks to the west alongside Main Street. There is no longer clear evidence of the former GAF crossing of the GSF main.

The line travels along a circuitous route to Ellenton and passes just south of the Reed Bingham (State) Park Lake dam; it is not known if the line was rerouted to detour around the lake and dam, or, if so, by what distance. From Ellenton, the railroad then continues due west to Moultrie, crossing SR 37 at the Pineboro crossroads community. A short distance west at the CR 105 crossing, the present eastern railroad belt loop around Moultrie diverges from the former main branch line, which the GFRR now uses to connect to its line between Moultrie and Albany. A few more crossings west, the SPRK passes the remnant junction of the ABC's Thomasville branch (the former Tifton, Thomasville & Gulf) at the Kingwood community's South Main Street, which is now also the US 319/SR 35 bypass route. From this wye junction into Moultrie, the SPRK always utilized trackage rights along the already extant ABC rail corridor, which loops along a northern arc around downtown and to its west side. Along with most of the rest of the Thomasville branch from Moultrie to Tifton, much of this 2.2-mile final approach to downtown is either abandoned or out-of-service, but the right-of-way on Moultrie's east and northeast side is still cleared and intact.

### **NATIONAL REGISTER CONTRIBUTING STATUS**

The western half of the Georgia & Florida's Moultrie Branch Line originated as the Sparks Western Railway (SPRK), but has been operated as a branch or feeder line to the GAF system for essentially its entire existence; as such, it was evaluated for its possible contributions to the historic significance and potential National Register eligibility of the GAF system. The GAF is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce, Transportation, Community Planning and Development, and Exploration/Settlement, under Criterion B for its associations with John Skelton Williams, and under Criterion C in the areas of Architecture and Engineering.

Due to its status as part of the GAF's Moultrie Branch Line from the GAF's principal, north-south mainline, the SPRK contributes to the significance

of the GAF under Criterion A. From its completion to Moultrie in 1911 through the remainder of the GAF's history, the SPRK, which became the GAF's Moultrie Branch Line, played a supportive role in the GAF system's overall state and local levels of significance in the areas of Commerce and Transportation. In these areas, it benefited not only the towns of Nashville, Sparks/Adel, Ellenton, and Moultrie, but also the surrounding rural areas of Colquitt, Cook, and Berrien counties. Considered both independently and as a component of the GAF systems, it gave farmers, timber companies, shippers, and passengers located in these counties and beyond new outlets and points of connection, not only by way of the larger GAF system and its Augusta-to-Valdosta mainline, but also through the numerous links to other connecting lines at Moultrie, Sparks, and Nashville, such as the GSF and the ABC's Thomasville branch. Thus, the SPRK indicates significance in the area of Transportation, for being not only a productive component of the GAF system, but also a part of the interconnected web of railroads that provided thorough coverage of south central and southwest Georgia during the early twentieth century.

The SPRK would also have collected and distributed the various typical agricultural products produced in the southwest and south central Georgia region, such as timber, turpentine and naval stores, cotton, peanuts, pecans, corn, and wheat, as well as hogs and cattle. As a regional commercial and distribution center, Moultrie would also have received raw materials and distributed finished products via the SPRK. The SPRK would have likewise supported and supplemented the city's industrial expansion. Thus, the SPRK's physical presence and economic stimulus also affected Moultrie's commercial growth and development, and had a similar if lesser effect on smaller communities along the line. The SPRK thereby contributed to the overall prosperity of the region of southwest and south central Georgia between Moultrie, Sparks/Adel, and Nashville, and thus achieved significance in the area of Commerce.

The SPRK also has been determined to contribute to the GAF system's eligibility under Criterion C, due to its significance in the areas of Engineering. The trackage for this western half of the GAF's Moultrie Branch Line is still intact and in regular use. The SPRK's railbed is

thereby representative of the state of railroad design and engineering, including alignment, grading, and construction, during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Components of the original rail infrastructure of rails, ties, trestles, and bridges may have been replaced over the years, in the course of regular operational and safety upgrades, repairs, and improvements. Although these general modifications may diminish the integrity and significance of the railroad's parts and components as physical artifacts, they in no way lessen the significance or integrity presented by the SPRK's retained route alignment and intact corridor.

As described above, the SPRK is able to contribute to the significance of the GAF system, and thus its National Register eligibility, under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Transportation, and under Criterion C in the area of Engineering. The SPRK corridor represents a good example of a major branch railroad from the first quarter of the twentieth century.

### **EVALUATION OF INTEGRITY**

The SPRK, which long served as the western half of the GAF's Moultrie branch, has been determined to possess integrity in the areas of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The railroad has not been relocated, and its alignment remains essentially unchanged since its construction; therefore, the resource retains integrity of location and setting. As the alignment and roadbed, including cuts and grades, remains intact, and other materials have been upgraded to enable continued operation of the line, the resource also substantially retains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The railroad also retains integrity of feeling and association as it conveys its physical characteristics as a historic railroad line.

### **PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY**

For the GAF system's SPRK, the proposed National Register boundary corresponds to the current and historic railroad corridor rights-of-way along the line's entirety. These corridor rights-of-way extend the full length of the SPRK branch line in Georgia, from the junction with the GSF mainline in Sparks through Ellenton to Moultrie. Historically, the line technically ended at the SPRK's junction with the ABC's Thomasville branch line, along which the SPRK garnered trackage rights into Moultrie. The junction of the two branch lines occurs in the Kingwood community on the east side of Moultrie, immediately east of Kingwood's South Main Street crossing, and is still intact; a short section of the former Thomasville branch is still in use to the north of this junction, now as a spur off the SPRK line. The right-of-way of Kingwood's South Main Street has been widened to accommodate the present route of the US 319 East Bypass around Moultrie; its development has removed the tracks at the crossing. The proposed boundaries contain all National Register-qualifying characteristics and features of the resource and consists of the SPRK railroad corridor's fully intact, unbroken alignment, which includes, as currently present, level crossings, trestles, and other elements of the rail resource, such as cuts and built-up grades.

### **PREPARED BY**

Steve Storey, David Ray, and Matt McDaniel



SPRK: Resource Location Map



SPRK: GSF MAIN at Colquitt Street, Sparks, Cook County



SPRK: Wye junction to Moultrie, Sparks



SPRK: US 41/SR 7 crossing, Sparks



SPRK: SR 37 crossing, Pineboro, Colquitt County



SPRK: Sixth Street crossing, Moultrie

# AUGUSTA SOUTHERN RAILROAD (AGSO)

**Other names:** Sandersville-Tennille Branch Line

**System:** Georgia & Florida Railway

**NR Evaluation:** Mixed (both Contributing and Non-Contributing elements)

**Physical Status:** Abandoned and dismantled

**Current owner:** N/A

**Predecessors:** Augusta, Gibson & Sandersville Railroad

**Successors:** Georgia & Florida Railway

**Location:** Augusta to Tennille, Washington County



**GEORGIA & FLORIDA (GAF)**  
System Feature Inventory Form

## DEVELOPMENTAL HISTORY

The Augusta Southern Railroad (AGSO) was formed from the May 1, 1893 reorganization of the Augusta, Gibson & Sandersville Railroad Company (AG&S), which had completed, in 1886, a narrow (three-foot wide) gauge line covering approximately 80 miles between Augusta and Sandersville.

Incorporated in Georgia in 1884, the AG&S opened its line from Augusta to Stapleton in September, 1885; to Avera the following month; and to Gibson on December 10th. In June of 1886, the line reached Mitchell; in October it came to Warthen; and on November 28, 1886, it was completed to Sandersville. In 1889, the AG&S operated 4 locomotives, 8 passenger cars, and 43 freight and miscellaneous cars. The president and general manager was R. M. Mitchell of Augusta. The town of Mitchell is named in his honor.

After entering receivership, the AG&S was reorganized in 1893 and renamed the Augusta Southern Railroad. The new ownership group was headed by James U. Jackson, an Augusta businessman who would later build an electric interurban line between that city and Aiken, South Carolina.

Jackson soon leased the 3.5-mile Sandersville & Tennille Railroad (S&T), which conveniently connected with the southern end of the AGSO mainline. The S&T was chartered in 1875 with the authority to build

a rail line from Sandersville south to the Central of Georgia (COG) mainline (between Savannah and Macon) at Tennille. The short, 3.3-mile road opened in October 1876. In 1889, the S&T reported owning one locomotive and two cars.

After being leased to the AGSO in 1893, the S&T was soon thereafter purchased outright by the AGSO in 1894. In the 1894 edition of *The Official Railway List*, the AGSO, by then incorporating the S&T, reported operating 84 miles of three-foot gauge railroad, 4 locomotives, 8 passenger cars, and 41 freight and miscellaneous cars. The entire length of the AGSO was converted to standard gauge by September 1895.

Operation and then ownership of the S&T gave the AGSO connection not only to the COG mainline, but also to the Wrightsville & Tennille, and so on to Dublin, Eastman, and Hawkinsville. A company timetable published in December 1895 makes specific advertisement of the availability of transfers at Tennille to the Wrightsville & Tennille, continuing all the way to Grovania, and to the COG, providing easy access to Macon.

In 1897, the railroad was leased to the South Carolina & Georgia Railroad, and then to the Southern Railway from April 1899 to April 1901. After the latter lease ended, the railroad returned to independent operation, but it continued to be controlled by the Southern.

The AGSO entered receivership and was acquired by the Georgia & Florida Railway (GAF) in 1919. The GAF had secured trackage rights on the AGSO between Augusta and Keysville in 1906 as a cheaper alternative to building a parallel line over the same distance. The GAF thereby secured continued availability and use of the Keysville to Augusta route by acquiring the AGSO, and the continuation to Tennille was a bonus, becoming the GAF's Sandersville-Tennille branch.

The 57 miles of railroad between Tennille and Keysville, which constituted most of the length of the former AGSO mainline, as well as the entirety of the Sandersville-Tennille branch, was abandoned by the GAF in 1934. Another former AGSO segment, spanning 10 miles from Keysville to Hephzibah, was abandoned in 1966. The remainder of the line into Augusta, which became a critical component of the GAF mainline, is still intact; it is owned and operated by Norfolk Southern.

## DESCRIPTION

As illustrated on both the 1919 United States Geological Survey map for Gough, Georgia and a 1942 update of the same, the Sandersville-Tennille branch line of the former AGSO originally interchanged with the GAF mainline in downtown Keysville, at the intersection of SR 88 and Old Waynesboro Road. A three-way wye interchange was in place there, to allow trains from the GAF mainline across Brier Creek to either turn northeast towards Augusta or southwest towards Wrens. From this junction, the rail corridor of the branch line ran alongside SR 88 and veered away along Center Street's north side to approach the AGSO's own crossing of Brier Creek on the town's west side. The right-of-way from Center Street to the creek appears to still be intact and passes through dense forest.

Since the Sandersville-Tennille branch approached Keysville from the southwest and the GAF mainline from the south, the GAF and its AGSO branch also developed a southern bypass loop around Keysville and Brier Creek, to make a shortcut between the two lines. It is not known which company funded this detour, but it would most likely have been the GAF.

The southwestern belt is illustrated on 1913 and 1916 editions of the *Rand McNally New Commercial Atlas Map of Georgia*. The three-pronged wye intersection between the beltway and the GAF mainline can still be very plainly recognized on current aerial imagery. It comprises three intersecting treelines amidst a pecan grove just east of the intersection of SR 305 and CR 19/Sidetrack Road (Pecan Grove Road for the short segment in Burke County). Almost the entire length of the appropriately named Sidetrack Road is comprised of the former right-of-way of this "sidetrack" cutoff.

However, from this point all the way to Sandersville, opportunities to clearly identify the AGSO's Sandersville-Tennille route are limited, and much of the alignment travels away from present highways and is thus inaccessible. The area of Jefferson County around Wrens, at least, is heavily cultivated, with its landscape consisting largely of a patchwork quilt of plowed fields. The lands of Glascock County and north Washington County are more heavily involved with silviculture, comprising many acres of managed pine plantations. For these reasons, only short segments of the branch line's railbed traveling cross-country can be viewed on current aerial imagery. Yet, changes between the 1920 and 1948 editions of the USGS surveys maps for Stapleton make it obvious that the dead-straight, east-west aligned AGSO right-of-way between Matthews and Wrens was utilized to create SR 88 between the two towns after the rail line's abandonment, and, furthermore, that most of the present course of SR 102 between Wrens and Stapleton also runs on the former rail right-of-way. In 1920, neither of these roadways were in existence in any form, but the railbed precisely matches the highway alignments in 1948.

These maps also reveal that the AGSO once engaged in street-running in the middle of Stapleton Highway through downtown Wrens. In Stapleton, a short, three-block section of grassy common ground on Stapleton's east side, between Baker Street and East Main Street/SR 102 defines the former rail right-of-way. The same is similarly true in Avera, where the railbed traveled through a wide public right-of-way through the middle of town that is now fittingly called Broad Street/SR 102.

Although it crosses through pine plantation, the former line from SR 102's Deep Creek crossing all the way into Gibson is still discernable on current aerial imagery. On Gibson's southeast side, a curving section of Griffin Circle now incorporates the former railbed, which continues into Gibson as the course of Railroad Avenue, located a short distance south of downtown. In Mitchell and again in Warthen, the extant depots attest to the rail corridor's general alignments, but there are otherwise no rail embankments or other remnant traces in the two towns. Mitchell's depot is sited along SR 102's east side, while Warthen's depot is on SR 15's west side, at the south end of its small historic commercial district.

From the Fall Line Freeway/Sandersville Bypass, on Sandersville's northeast side into downtown, the former AGSO rail corridor can be made out on aerial imagery. Railroad Avenue between East McCarty Street and North Hospital Road constitutes the course of the former AGSO and includes its former crossing of the Sandersville Railroad tracks; the alignment of the AGSO through this section of Sandersville essentially ran straight northeast-southwest along Railroad Avenue to North Smith Street in downtown. Curiously, there is a new track segment on the formerly abandoned railbed that has been laid across the new, four-lane width of the Fall Line Freeway/Sandersville Bypass. Parts or all of the right-of-way in the area appears to be intact, as no buildings are built within it; instead, modern metal warehouses and parking lots have been purposefully placed to avoid entering the AGSO corridor. The railbed passes east of the courthouse square, through the middle of the block bounded by North Harris Street and North Smith Street, and by East Gilmore and East Haynes streets. A few historic commercial buildings fronting Gilmore and Haynes streets still display the canted side walls necessary to fit them against the curving rail alignment, and a set of tracks is still embedded in the pavement at the East Haynes Street crossing.

From Sandersville to Tennille, the rail corridor stayed east of SR 15's present alignment. Within Tennille, the present course of White Line Street, from its northern intersection with East Montgomery Street down to the COG mainline, marks the location of the rail grade, which once ran along the street's east side. From the crossing at East Church Street, it still

does, as the tracks are still intact and now used as a spur siding, utilized by Norfolk Southern to store rail cars. At Tennille Junction, the AGSO's wye interchange, which ties in below the West Adams Street overpass, is located a short distance west of the Sandersville Railroad's, and its junction point is directly across the wide COG corridor from the western wye interchange of the former Wrightsville & Tennille.

Apart from the specific sites in the aforementioned towns described above, the route of the long-abandoned railroad corridor is often inaccessible, and it also very hard to identify on current aerial imagery, particularly because many sections are not noted on available historic maps, or few maps were made of the area during the line's period of operation. Just as some evidence of the extant roadbed and rail corridor can be definitively located, more routine are instances of the disturbance, eradication, or general disappearance of the railbed. The gently rolling terrain through which the former railroad passed is still rural, but, as mentioned previously, it is heavily cultivated and managed, either for row crops or for pine plantations. In some such cases, the preparation for planting, or the repeated plowing of agricultural fields, appears to have erased most remnants of the railbed.

Hence, there are now numerous gaps in the continuity of the AGSO rail corridor. As described, traces can be located, either during ground-level field surveys or on current aerial imagery, but the entirety of the former alignment is now separated into non-contiguous sections. On balance, the AGSO railbed no longer clearly and readily conveys its former standing as an uninterrupted railroad corridor.

## **NATIONAL REGISTER CONTRIBUTING STATUS**

The Georgia & Florida's Sandersville-Tennille Branch Line operated as the independent Augusta Southern Railroad (AGSO) or its predecessors for nearly 35 years, but after leasing trackage rights over its Keysville to Augusta section to the GAF in 1906, the AGSO became an integral or even critical component of the GAF system. The northeastern length of the AGSO also became the most northern and eastern span of the GAF mainline, and constituted its only way into Augusta, which was not only the

location of the GAF's general offices, but also the northern terminus and focal point of the entire system. As such, that segment has been evaluated as part of the GAF's mainline (MAIN), as this became its most significant role within the GAF system. After the GAF's eventual takeover of the entire AGSO in 1919, the AGSO's southwestern section from Keysville to Tennille thereafter served as one of the GAF's main branch lines for the remainder of its existence, until 1934. As the GAF's Sandersville-Tennille branch, the AGSO was evaluated for its possible contributions to the historic significance and potential National Register eligibility of the GAF system. The GAF is considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce, Transportation, Community Planning and Development, and Exploration/Settlement, under Criterion B for its associations with John Skelton Williams, and under Criterion C in the areas of Engineering and Architecture.

Due to its status as the GAF's Sandersville-Tennille Branch Line, the AGSO has the potential to contribute to the significance of the GAF system under Criterion A. For a duration of over a quarter century, from 1906 to 1934, this branch line played an important supportive role, whether under the direct control of the GAF or as an independent affiliate, in the GAF system's overall state and local levels of significance in the areas of Commerce and Transportation. In these areas, the AGSO benefitted not only the cities and towns of Keysville, Wrens, Stapleton, Avera, Gibson, Mitchell, Warthen, Sandersville, Tennille, and other intermediate communities and station stops, but also the surrounding rural areas of Jefferson, Glascock, and Washington counties. Considered both independently and as a component of the GAF system, it gave farmers, timber companies, shippers, and passengers located in these counties and beyond new outlets and points of connection, not only by way of the larger GAF system and its Augusta-to-Valdosta mainline, but also through links to other connecting system mainlines at Augusta and Tennille, such as the Georgia Railroad and the COG. The southwestern half of the AGSO provided rail service to and through an area of the state northeast of Sandersville that was otherwise bereft of railroads and rather isolated with regard to modern transportation options. Thus, the AGSO presents potential significance in the area of Transportation, for being not only a productive component of the GAF

system, but also a part of the interconnected web of railroads that provided thorough coverage of east central Georgia during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth century.

The AGSO would also have collected and distributed the various agricultural products produced in the east central Georgia region, such as timber, turpentine and naval stores, cotton, pecans, corn, and wheat, as well as hogs and cattle. As regional commercial and distribution centers, both Augusta and Sandersville would also have received and exported raw materials, such as kaolin mined around Sandersville, and distributed finished products via the GAF and its AGSO branch. Thus, the AGSO's physical presence and economic stimulus, by way of its role as the Sandersville-Tennille branch, also affected the commercial growth and development of Augusta and Sandersville, and had a similar if lesser effect on the smaller communities along the line between and beyond these two cities. The AGSO thereby contributed to the overall prosperity of east central Georgia and thus achieved potential significance in the area of Commerce.

The AGSO was also evaluated for its potential to contribute to the significance of the GAF system under Criterion C in the areas of Engineering and Architecture. However, because the AGSO's rail corridor has been broken and interrupted at numerous places along its course since its primary abandonment in 1934 and the subsequent removal of its tracks, ties, and ballast, it no longer conveys significance in the area of Engineering. Although the railbed is evident in the landscape at select points along its path, the essential linearity of the AGSO is no longer substantially intact or visible. As a consequence, the AGSO no longer presents its historically significant design characteristics, and does not represent a good or intact example of either a rural, short-line railroad from the end of the nineteenth century or of a component branch line from the early twentieth century. However, the AGSO retains five depots once affiliated with the GAF and its AGSO branch line. These buildings are good examples of depot architecture from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century and so contribute to the overall significance and thus the National Register eligibility of the greater GAF system in the area of Architecture.

As described above, the AGSO, which became the GAF's Sandersville-Tennille Branch Line from Keysville to Tennille, has the potential to present significance under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Transportation. However, its current, largely disturbed physical condition and the disrupted, disjointed state of significant portions of its former length do not allow it to convey this significance, as most of the line now lacks sufficient integrity, as is described above and hereafter. Due to the diminished integrity of the AGSO railroad corridor, it does not contribute, in its present known state, to the GAF system's eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. However, as indicated, its extant depots do contribute to the GAF's eligibility under Criterion C in the area of Architecture.

#### **EVALUATION OF INTEGRITY**

A ground-level field survey of the AGSO rail corridor was conducted, as was a review of available historic and current aerial imagery. In the vicinity of the abandoned right-of-way that was accessible to the surveyors, little remaining evidence of the railroad's former railbed or infrastructure, such as raised embankments, cuts, trestles, or bridges, was identified. Accordingly, it has been determined that the AGSO alignment, the GAF system's former Sandersville-Tennille branch, no longer retains integrity in the areas of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

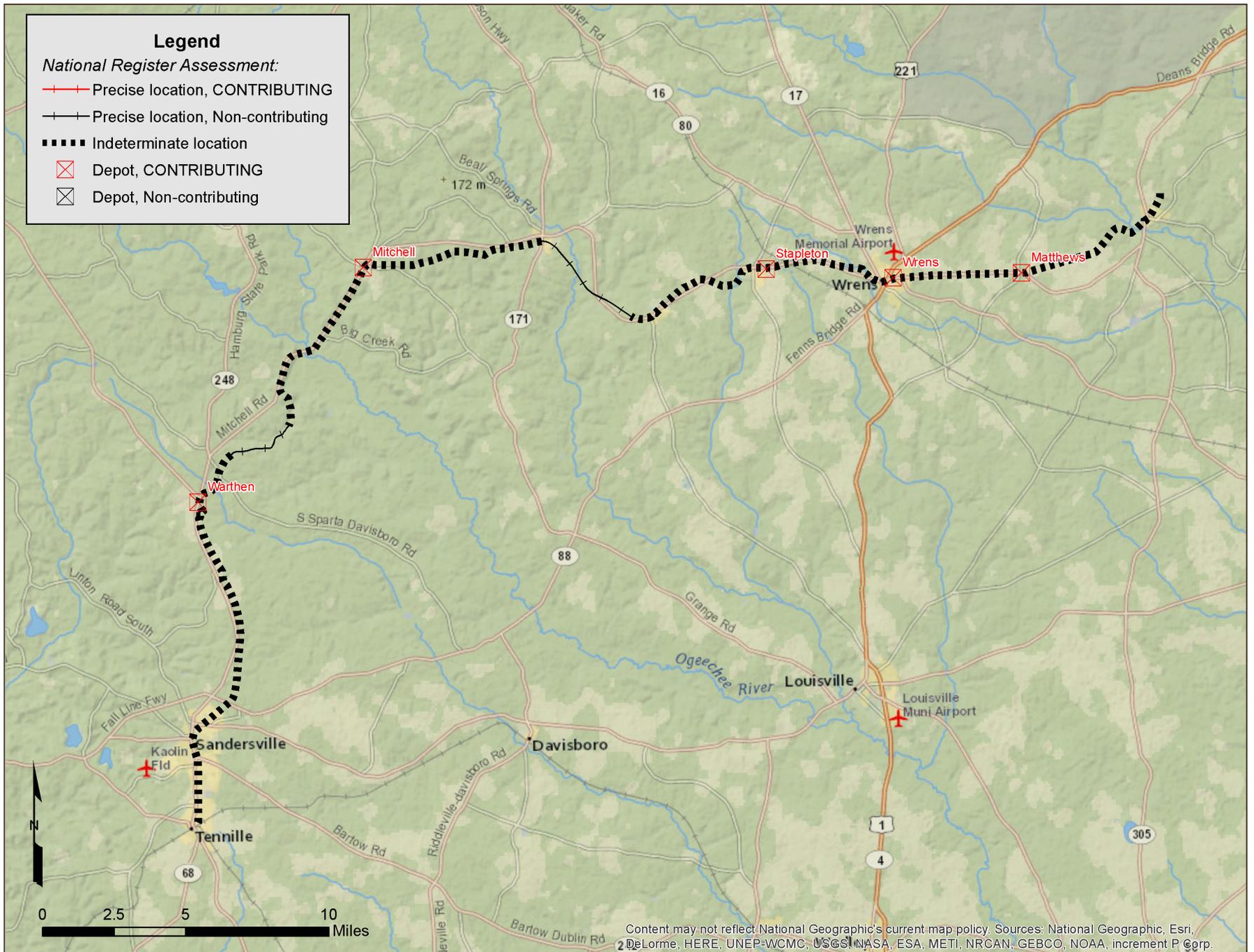
However, at least five depots buildings along the long-abandoned AGSO are still extant, and all appear to still be located at their original sites, adjacent to the former railroad grade and former corridor rights-of-way. These resources contribute to the significance and integrity of the greater GAF system, and they retain integrity in the areas of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

#### **PROPOSED NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY**

The AGSO, the GAF's long-abandoned Sandersville-Tennille branch, has been determined to not contribute to the National Register eligibility of the greater GAF system. Nonetheless, the AGSO's intact complement of five associated buildings, including depots and a freight warehouse, are still considered to contribute to the GAF system's significance in the same manner as an intact depot that has been moved away from its formerly affiliated rail corridor. The proposed boundaries for these specific buildings are to consist of their footprints in plan view. These depots include the Matthews depot and attached freight warehouse, Jefferson County; the Wrens depot, Jefferson County; the Stapleton depot, Jefferson County; the Mitchell depot, Glascock County; and the Warthen depot, Washington County.

#### **PREPARED BY**

Steve Storey, David Ray, Matt McDaniel, and Mike Reynolds



AGSO: Resource Location Map



AGSO: Former ROW along CR 469, Keysville vicinity, Burke County



AGSO: Former ROW at CR 19/Side Track Road, Keysville vicinity, Jefferson



AGSO: Matthews depot, Jefferson County



AGSO: Wrens depot, Jefferson County



AGSO: Stapleton depot, Jefferson County



AGSO: ROW along SR 102, Stapleton



AGSO: Approximate ROW along SR 102, Avera, Jefferson County



AGSO: Approximate ROW along SR 171, Gibson, Glascock County



AGSO: Mitchell depot, Glascock County



AGSO: Railbed along SR 102, Mitchell



AGSO: Approximate ROW along CR 181, Chalker vicinity, Washington County



AGSO: Warthen depot, Washington County



AGSO: Approximate ROW at SR 15, Warthen



AGSO: Railroad Avenue crossing, Sandersville



AGSO: East Haynes Street crossing, Sandersville



AGSO: Wye junction with COG, Tennille