

The Railway  
Historical  
Southeast



& Locomotive  
Society, Inc.  
Chapter

Newsletter No. 41, June 1997

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## R&LHS Rides The Rails



The officers of the R&LHS were caught practicing for a possible entry in Ogden's Gandy Dancer Hand Car Race. But after careful consideration of trying to pump the hand car along the 900 feet of race track, they made a thoughtful decision to not enter the race. However, 18 other teams did compete during Ogden's 128th anniversary celebration of the joining of the transcontinental railway. On the hand car are the President of the R&LHS and five Chapter Presidents - a true presidential special! From left to right are: R&LHS President, Bill Howes; Southern California Chapter President, Bob Kredel; Chicago Chapter President, Charlie Stats; New York President, Charles Smith; Southeast Chapter President, Jim Smith; and Golden Spike President, Mike Burdett. Photo by Jim Wilk.

In a related matter, the Southeast Chapter had six representatives at the Ogden Convention. In addition to Bill Howes and Jim Smith, Chapter Treasurer, Jim Wilk and members Jim Bumett, Roger Simon and Grant Whipple, joined the crowd that witnessed the meeting of the Jupiter and the 119. We had a great time in Utah, thanks to the efforts of Mike Burdett and his Golden Spike Chapter.

# Henry Bradley Plant and the Express Business

by Edward A. Mueller  
Part Two - Conclusion

The election of Republican President Abraham Lincoln in November, 1860, due primarily to the split in the Democratic party and the fielding of two candidates, further fueled the disillusion the Southern states had been feeling for decades. Secession was almost enthusiastically agreed upon and one by one the states left the union.

It was obvious that predominantly northern interests would not be welcome in the south and business by so-called "Yankees" would be difficult to say the least.

The Adams Express Company was on the horns of a dilemma. Should it try to keep its southern holdings intact and carry on business as usual (a very remote possibility)? Should it abandon its holdings in the south? Should it try to set up a subsidiary corporation and stay in business? Or, should it find a buyer and sell out? Obviously the buyer would have to be of southern extraction and would have to have the financial means to pay Adams, a somewhat remote possibility. Plant, as their southern superintendent, had declared that when a confederacy had been established, all northern owned properties would be confiscated.

Whether Plant took advantage of the situation to further his own cause or whether Adams was sufficiently alarmed and concerned that they might lost all of their assets is not clearly recorded. Perhaps it was a combination. In after years, Plant told some of his associates that he had told Adams that if they did not sell their southern assets to him, he would set up a company to take over the routes



Henry Bradley Plant became a cooperative competitor with Alvin Adams in the express business. All illustrations from *Old Waybills, The Romance of the Express Companies*, by Alvin F. Harlow.

and work for the Confederacy.

Certainly the problem was apparent to the Adams hierarchy and they met with Plant in Louisville several weeks before hostilities broke out at Fort Sumter on April 12. Also, in early April, President William Dinsmore and Alvin Adams and

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## SOUTHEAST CHAPTER OFFICERS:

James A. Smith	Chairman
William F. Howes, Jr.	Vice-Chairman
Frank H. Dewey	Secretary
James H. Wilk	Treasurer
Clifford J. Vander Yacht	Editor

*The Southeast Limited* is published bi-monthly by the Southeast Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society  
P. O. Box 664  
Jacksonville, FL 32201

several directors met with Plant in Augusta and on April 8, information was being circulated that a new company was being formed and had purchased the assets of the Adams holdings in the Confederacy. The operations would be run in the same manner as before.

Plant and nine associates (all southern residents) purchased the Adams assets in the ten southern states for \$500,000. The estimated \$2 million that Adams was worth was paid for by Plant who signed five personal promissory notes, each for \$100,000. The money was to be paid after the war at interest of eight percent. Plant then persuaded Adams Express that the purchase document state that only \$300,000 had been paid as Plant thought no one would believe he had the means to pay the \$500,000 price.

The business was reorganized into the Adams Southern Express Company and a charter for 14 years was granted by the state of Georgia. The "Adams" was shortly dropped from the title as on July 6, Plant stated to his employees, "To Agents and Messengers: Gentlemen as you are doubtless already aware through notices in the public journals, the Southern Stockholders of the Adams Express Company, have purchased from their late associates, all the property and interests of said company in the Confederate States, with the right to use the name of 'Adams' in their business; and have fully organized themselves for business under the title of Southern Express Company." Plant went on to state the directors were Edward Sebring of Charleston, D. H. Baldwin of Savannah, W. R. Chilton of Montgomery and himself.

Plant was the only 'Yankee' in the company and since all who remained in the south were expected to become citizens of the Confederacy or leave, Plant obviously was in a potentially embarrassing position.

Plant, of course, had been concerned that his northern birth would jeopardize his company and decided to speak with Jefferson Davis and plead his case. Plant is said to have told Mr. Davis that he did not entirely approve of the action of the South as he thought it was a mistake. However, he would become a Confederate citizen and would not take part in politics and would give all of his attention to his express business, which fulfilled an obvious need for the newly formed government. President Davis apparently appreciated his frank-

ness, thought him sincere and gave him a passport enabling him to travel at will, even through army lines during military operations. This was a rare distinction. The company was designated as the official carrier of government documents, monies, some government and military payrolls and even collected revenues for the government!

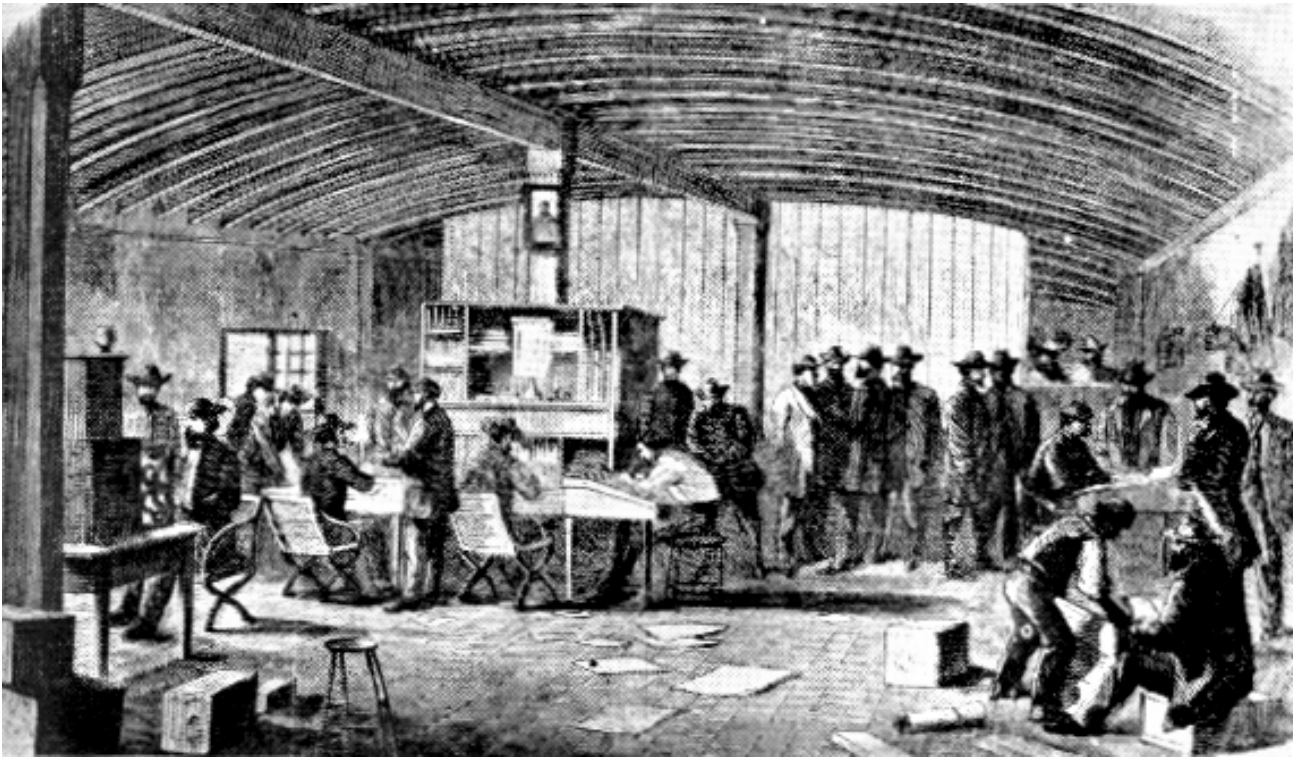
The Confederate Secretary of the Treasury accepted a bond from the Southern Express Company for \$100,000; this was to insure that the company faithfully performed its duties as a collecting agent for the Confederate revenue department.

The company earned considerable good will, when, in late May, 1861, it announced that it would carry all packages of clothing for soldiers free of charge. In July, 1861 the granting of the charter by the Georgia Legislature was announced to the employees. The Adams signs came down, Southern ones went up and business was carried on as usual. After the Battle of Bull Run, a southern correspondent wrote that goods from all parts of the South were being transported to officers and men in Virginia with little or no risk. The Macon Index asked that money in amounts larger than ten dollars be sent to them by express. "We have found this Company distinguished for despatch and reliability; and we can recommend it to all who have occasion to remit any kind of articles as a most convenient, safe and quick mode of transportation. Its officials are always gentlemanly, polite and obliging, and the Company is strongly Southern in character and deserving of patronage."

Regardless of whether Adams had made its decision under duress, it still had friendly relations with Plant, relations that were to continue on a similar basis for years after the conflict.

The express service was vital to both North and South. Express employees were exempted from military service. They often offered free express transportation and were viewed as providing patriotic services at times. On many occasions the respective governments publicly thanked them.

Many thought that the Southern Express Company was a division of Adams under another name and at times it seemed like it was. Although the express companies were not supposed to cross into the other's territory, communications to prisoners of war and the like got through being carried by both Adams and Southern. Although



**Adams Express office at City Point, VA, in 1864 during Grant's siege of Richmond. *Harpers Weekly*.**

packages to soldiers might be carried free or at half price, letters mailed 'back home' to families required a fee for the service. Barter was often resorted to in the south as it was realized that the paper money issued was virtually worthless. Sometimes packages as large as bales of cotton were carried at express rates in the Confederacy!

As the Union and Confederate forces moved north or south, the business conducted by the Adams and Southern companies did the same. Adams would take possession of its former offices almost before the battle was over when the Confederates retreated. If Lee advanced northerly, Southern was not far behind. Adams had by far the best of it in the west and on the Gulf coast. When Memphis was captured, the Southern Express company had removed only a small part of its equipment when Adams came in and took over the office, complete with furniture, some undelivered freight, some Confederate money and all its wagons.

In the eastern part of the Confederacy during the latter days of the war, railroads were in generally bad shape. Southern Express couriers between Richmond and Wilmington, North Carolina were sometimes four or five days in making the trip. When Grant was nearing Petersburg in 1864, southern trains could not get nearer than two miles

to that city and express employees had to make a four mile detour by wagon, some of it under fire from Northern batteries. It was not unusual for express employees to suffer wounds.

At the close of the conflict, Adams Express Company turned over its route on the Mississippi River and its tributaries and all railroad lines in the South (except a few in Kentucky) to the Southern Express Company. Conditions in the west and some areas where discharged and poor soldiers were prevalent, were somewhat of a menace to express officials as offices were broken into and wagons stolen.

After the conflict, many Adams people believed that the formation of the Southern Express company was simply a sham to preserve the assets of Adams. Rumors and the like persuaded some of the parties, such as Plant, Dinsmore and Hoey, to the April, 1861, signing to divulge its contents which (were) that Adams had sold to Plant and associates "and others who may hereafter be associated with him" all personal property, chattels, leases, contracts, etc. in the ten southeastern states. The receipt of the money was acknowledged and Plant and associates declared to be the owners of the property.

During the conflict there were attacks upon

the Southern Express Company, usually by letters published in the southern press. There was also praise for the company, especially for its free carriage of soldiers' parcels. When compared to the Confederacy's postal service, the Southern Express Company came out best. The Atlanta Appeal stated that no greater public convenience existed in the South than the Southern Express Company!

In August, 1863, after a serious illness, Plant was ordered by his doctors to make a complete change. Accordingly he went to Europe for several months. Using his passport issued by Jefferson Davis, he passed through the Confederate lines and went to Canada. He then went to Liverpool and afterwards to the continent visiting Paris, Rome, other Italian cities and Switzerland. He then went back to London and Paris, finally returning to the United States in 1865. He was in New York at the time of Lincoln's assassination and back in Augusta as the war closed.

After the end of the war, did Plant pay Adams for the business he had acquired? The apparent facts are that Plant held some Adams stock and left his dividends from it to accumulate at interest and at some time he would have this money applied to his debt. In 1868 he paid \$80,000 cash on his notes and \$307,936 in 1869. By 1870 Plant directed that his debt be settled using his Adams stock and accumulated dividends. Upon calculating the amount owed, it was found that Plant had overpaid his notes by some \$506.42. A check for that was issued to Plant. The debt had amounted to some \$782,916.66 (the original \$500,000 and interest owed on it).

Adams and Southern, although separate corporate entities, conducted some of their business like they were affiliated companies. Where they were in business in the same city, the offices were in the same building and the freight and money shipments were sometimes handled in the same room. Often the same wagons were used, names of both companies were painted on the sides.

In 1880 the Southern Express Company conducted its operations over 10,337 miles of railroad, steamboat and stage lines. It had 24 general officers and administrators and some 1,201 agents and messengers. In that year it had net earnings of \$318,000, total earnings of \$1,645,618 and expenses of \$1,327,618.

Further noting the value of the company, Southern Express Company stock was never quoted publicly. The 1861 charter authorized some 50,000 shares but only 558 were issued and of those, Plant owned 80 to 85 percent. In 1866 a distribution of another 20,000 shares was authorized and a further distribution of 20,000 shares in 1886. At the time of his death in 1899, Plant was still owner of 80 to 85 percent of all shares and had been President since the date the company started. During his lifetime, dividends of 8 percent had been paid almost every year for 31 years and there were millions of surplus cash in undivided profits accumulated in the coffers of the company! As President during this time he was also a salaried official.

Henry Plant started his railroad purchases in the south near the end of the decade of the 1870s. By further purchase and construction he would eventually own more railroad mileage in Florida than any other individual. He would also own and operate steamboat lines on the Apalachicola, Chattahoochee and Flint Rivers as well as the St. Johns River. Steamship lines would be established between Tampa and Havana, Cuba, and from Tampa to Mobile and the Manatee River towns. Several magnificent hotels would be built by Plant.

At the time of his death he had a personal wealth of about \$10 million and transportation and allied properties worth many times that. His Southern Express business had served as the financial vehicle to enable him to carry out his other projects.

After Plant's death, the Southern Express business was carried on by Plant's various associates in a profitable manner. Most of the many express companies also had large investments in railroads. Morton Plant, Henry's son, for example, was the seventh largest Pennsylvania Railroad stockholder, his Southern Express Company held \$200,000 worth of stock there and \$1,000,000 of its bonds. The Southern Express Company also owned 1,183 shares of Adams Express Company stock, 1,185 shares of American Express, and 1,500 of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, almost all of which paid good dividends.

In 1914 the mileage of the four largest express

companies was:

Company	Steam, rail and water	Stage and electric	Total
Adams	33,800	4,583	38,383
American	57,820	3,699	61,519
Southern	32,813	891	33,704
Wells Fargo	63,692	35,325	99,017

Obviously the Southern Express Company had stood up well over the years.

More stringent postal regulations including the adoption of parcel post by the post office and

problems caused by The Great War were detrimental to most of the express companies and they no longer were able to make a profit. All of the Express companies were combined into the American Railway Express Agency in July, 1918, as a solution.

Today, of course, that agency is out of business as other forms of the express business took over. The express agencies still carry on as profitable businesses, competing with each other, and probably few are conscious of what went on in this business a century and a half ago.

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# R&LHS Member Services

Newsletter editor. A new editor has been appointed for the quarterly newsletter. Please send any material for the newsletter to: Vernon J. Glover, Editor, P. O. Box 4077, Manassas, VA 20108-0708.

Trading Post. Society members may use, without charge, the Trading Post section of the Newsletter to advertise items they wish to sell, trade, or acquire or to seek information from other members. This service is available for personal, not general commercial, use. Send submissions to the newsletter editor, above.

Locomotive Rosters & Records of Builders' Construction Numbers. The Society has locomotive rosters for many roads and records of steam locomotive construction numbers for most builders. Copies are available to members at 20 cents per page (\$5 minimum) from: James L. Larson, 12820 Westside Road, Manassas, VA 22111. A list of available rosters may be obtained from Mr. Larson for \$2.

Articles from the BULLETIN and RAILROAD HISTORY. Copies of articles from back issues of these publications of the Society are available to members for 20 cents a page (\$5 minimum) from Jacqueline J. Pryor, Archivist-R&LHS, P. O. Box 1674, Sacramento, CA 95812-1674. Phone 916-323-8074.

Back issues of RAILROAD HISTORY. Many issues of Railroad History since No. 131 are available at \$7.50 each (members' price) from Milepost 1 Bookstore, 912 Sutter Street - #16, Folsom CA 95630. For information on the availability of specific issues and volume discounts, send a stamped self-addressed envelope to Milepost 1 or phone them at 916-985-4777 or 800-336-7547. NOTE: Do not direct any other R&LHS membership service inquiries to Milepost 1.

Research Inquiries. Source materials—printed, manuscript, and graphics—are housed in the Society's archives in Sacramento, CA. Inquiries concerning these materials may be addressed to Jacqueline J. Pryor, Archivist-R&LHS, P. O. Box 1674, Sacramento, CA 958121674. When writing, please enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope and a daytime phone number. Use of the Archivist's services in excess of 30 minutes will be billed at the rate of \$15 an hour and is subject to her availability.

Membership Matters. Membership applications, changes of address, and other membership status inquiries should be sent to: Robert E. Kredel, Membership Secretary-R&LHS, P. O. Box 215, East Irvine, CA 92650-0215.

## Minutes of the Southeast Chapter, Railway & Locomotive Historical Society

The April meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society was held in the 13th Floor Conference Room of the CSXT GOB on Thursday, April 10, 1997 at 6:00 P.M. A quorum was present. Chapter Chairperson Jim Smith chaired the meeting. The minutes of the March meeting were not available. Cliff Vander Yacht was appointed acting Secretary. The treasurer reported \$1304.87 in savings, \$352.55 in checking for a total of \$1657.42. The signature card is now complete. Jim Wilk now has the checks and renewal forms. Twenty five of our fifty nine members have renewed.

### Old business -

The annual meeting in Ogden, UT., will be attended by three of our members: Bill Howes, Jim Smith and Jim Wilk.

The Short Term Finance Committee reaffirmed its December action by recommending that \$300.00 be kept in reserve, that \$100.00 be allocated for each National Convention attendee, and the equal donations be made to the North Florida Museum, the Clay County Historical Society, and the National Archives of the R&LHS. A motion was made by Arby Vandebossche, seconded by Mark Bennett to award \$200.00 to each of the three historical groups. The motion passed.

It was decided that with three officers away at Utah that Frank Dewey could still conduct a meeting at the normal date next month.

### New business -

Bill Howes gave an update on the National R&LHS doings including an announcement that there will be a new editor, Mr. Glover.

### Committee -

Cliff needs more material for the April issue of the *Southeast Limited*. Ed Mueller said he will supply a story on how Henry Plant made his money.

Mac Mitchell advised that the proposed visit to Dave Nelson's railroad in Walthourville, GA, will have to be postponed until repairs are made on the engine.

There were no other committee reports.

### Announcements -

Jim Smith has mailed the extra Glover picture book to Richard Dickinson.

### Meeting Programs -

Bill Howes and Jim Smith showed slides of Utah. Barry Baines showed slides of California (as close to Utah that he could get).

Frank Dewey will provide the program and goodies for the May meeting. We may see "Union Pacific" by Cecil B. De Mille.

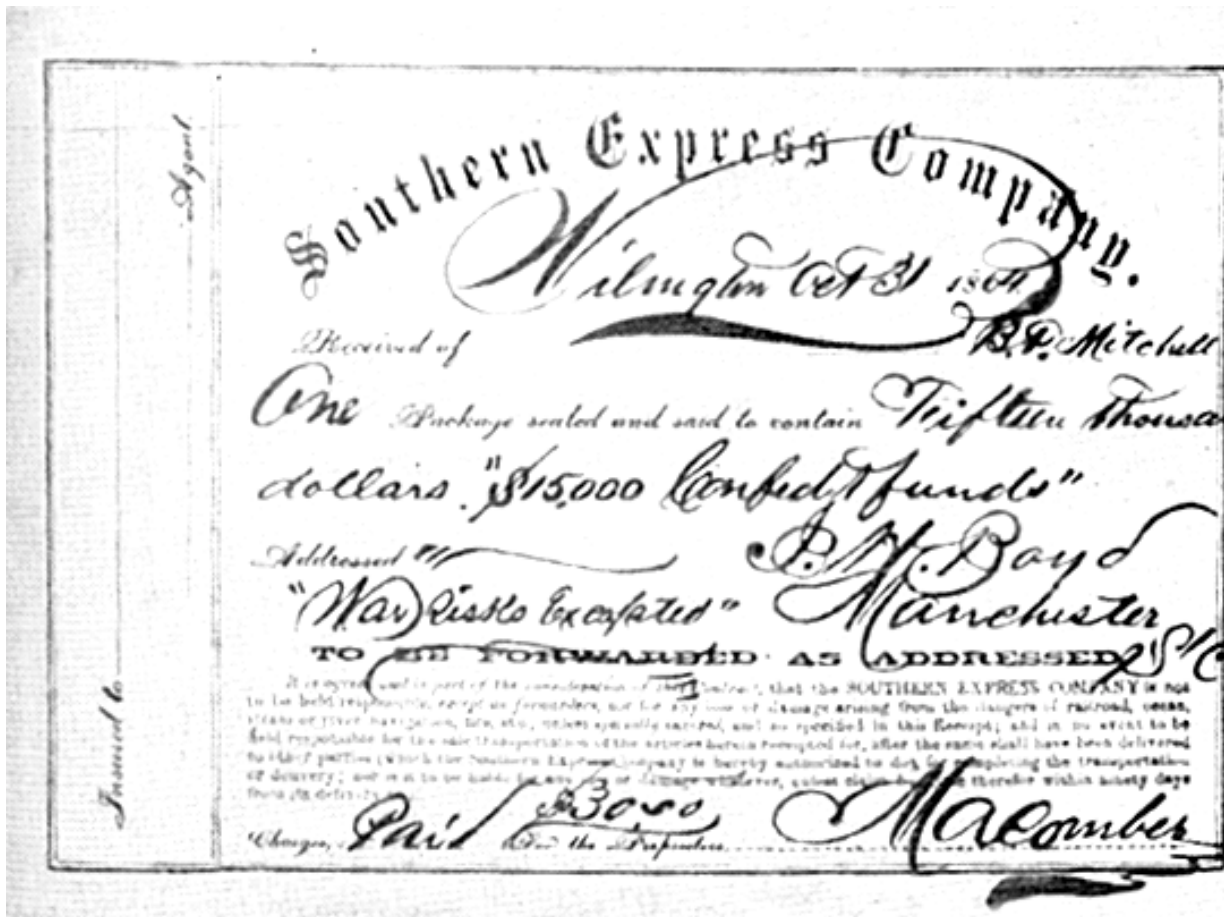
The June meeting will feature Canadian scenes by Jim Smith and any other member willing to bring Canadian slides. Mark Bennett providing the goodies.

Ed Mueller suggested a river dinner cruise the latter part of June.

Respectfully submitted,



Editor's Note: There were very few in attendance for the May meeting, so no business was conducted, nor are there any minutes. If you're curious about what videos we watched, you should have been there.



Wartime express receipt for a package of \$15,000 Confederate bonds.

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