

# Carolina Conductor



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Monthly Newsletter of the Carolina Railroad Heritage Association, Inc.

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## Preserving the Past Active in the Present Planning for the Future

**Web Site:** [hubcityrrmuseum.org](http://hubcityrrmuseum.org)

**Facebook:** Carolina Railroad Heritage Association & Hub City RR Museum

### Meeting Site:

**First Presbyterian Church**

307 North Main Street

Fountain Inn, SC 29644

Third Friday of the Month at 7:00 p.m.

### Hub City Railroad Museum and SOU Rwy Caboose #X3115:

**Spartanburg Amtrak Station**

298 Magnolia Street

Spartanburg, SC 29301-2330

Wednesday 10-2 & Saturday 10-2

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Articles can be submitted anytime.

# Southern Railway Passenger Trains

*The next three issues will discuss the named passenger trains of the Southern Railway; its predecessors and successors. Ed.*

## Aiken-Augusta Special

The *Aiken-Augusta Special* was a named night train of the *Southern Railway* between New York City and Augusta, Georgia. Different from other long distance Southern Railway lines which tended to briefly go through the northwestern edge of South Carolina, this route went through the interior of the state. Its route marked the last directly

north-south route between Charlotte and Columbia and it marked one of the last long distance trains into Augusta. The train began as the *Augusta Special* on October 24, 1915.

Beginning in 1928 the train had a section that split from the main route at Trenton and went to Aiken and so the train took the name, *Aiken-Augusta Special*. The train was carried over Pennsylvania Railroad tracks from New York City to Washington and in an unusual arrangement the coach cars were on a different train from the sleeping cars between New York and Wash-

ington, and upon reaching the latter city the itinerary became merged.

*Augusta Special* and its demise was caused by dwindling traffic in the 1950s, the Aiken spur



**Aiken-Augusta Special at speed.**

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# Museum Happenings



↑ Pat O'Shields mounts the protective plastic shield on the passenger train display.



Bob Klempner laying down on the job again. He is shown bolting the newly refurbished caboose chairs to the floor.



↑ Bruce "The Stud" finder doing what stud finders do! Locating the mounts for artifact display.

Artifacts from the caboose renovation have been mounted on the wall—original caboose floor board and rotted floor support 4x4. ↓



## Wanted—Articles for the Carolina Conductor

Submit an article of 200 words or more with some photos and captions and see them in print. Every one of us has some unique railroad experience that would make interesting reading for our membership. Your editor always needs more contributions of railway history and news.

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route was eliminated and in 1953 the train reverted to the *Augusta Special*. Sleeper service was eliminated on October 27, 1962. Its final run as a named train between Charlotte and Augusta was on October 22, 1966.

***Asheville Special***

The *Asheville Special* which split from the main route in Greensboro and continued west from Greensboro, to Winston-Salem and then to Asheville. The sleeping cars were continuous from New York City to Asheville; but the coaches and the diner were strictly Asheville to Greensboro cars. The remainder of the trip, Greensboro to New York was on *Aiken-Augusta Special* equipment. For four years (1966-1970) after the termination of the *Augusta Special*, the *Asheville Special* was tacked onto the *Crescent* from Greensboro to



**The Asheville depot circa early 1900s.**

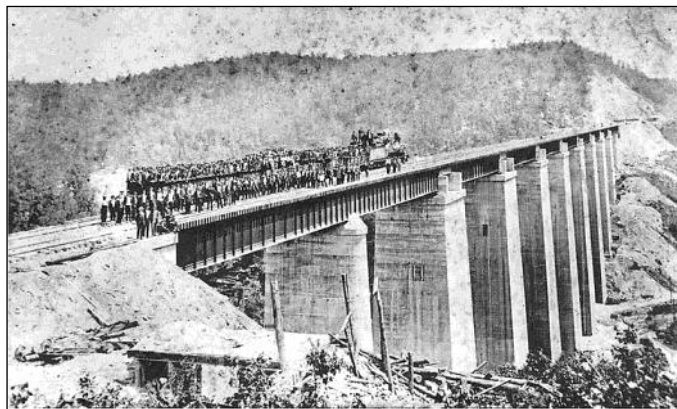
New York. However, southbound, the sleeping car was handled by the *Southerner* from New York to Greensboro.



**The Asheville Special in it's later years of declining ridership.**

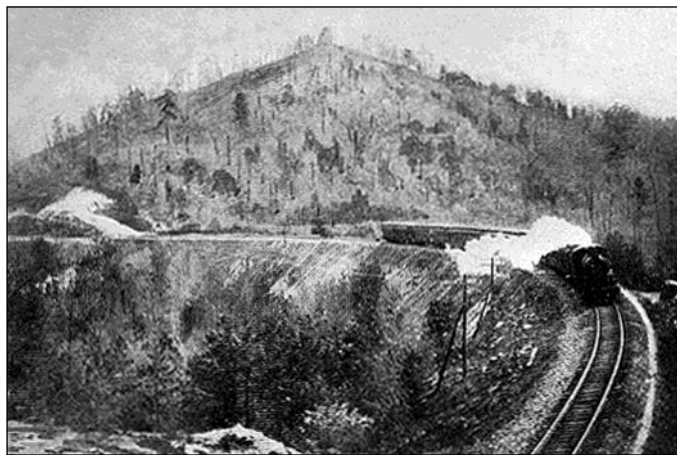
***Airline Belle***

The *Airline Belle* or *Air-line Belle* was a steam passenger train running between Atlanta and Toccoa on the Atlanta and Charlotte Air Line Railway (later the Southern Railway) between 1879 and 1931. Its route was 93 miles long with 39 stops.



↑ **Wells Viaduct after completion circa 1913 stands just west of Toccoa, Georgia.**

**The *Airline Belle* nearing Toccoa in Stephens County Georgia.** ↓



***Birmingham Special***

The *Birmingham Special* was a passenger train operated by the Southern Railway, Norfolk and Western Railway, and Pennsylvania Railroad in the southeastern United States. The train began service in 1909 and continued, with alterations, after Amtrak assumed control of most long-haul intercity passenger rail in the United States on May 1, 1971.

The Southern Railway introduced the *Birmingham Special* on May 17, 1909, running between Birmingham,

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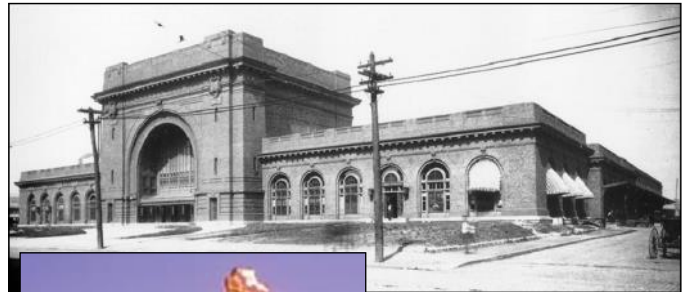
Alabama and New York City via Atlanta, Georgia and Washington, D.C. The Southern operated the train between Birmingham and Washington, while the Pennsylvania Railroad carried through cars between Washington and New York. The train consisted of coaches, Pullman sleepers, and a dining car.

On May 15, 1932, the Southern re-routed the *Birmingham Special* via Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Bristol, bypassing Atlanta. The Norfolk and Western Railway hauled the train between Lynchburg and Bristol, creating an unusual (though not unique) situation of the *Birmingham Special* using two unconnected sections of the Southern Railway: Washington to Lynchburg and Bristol to Birmingham. Into the 1950s the train consist included several types of sleeping accommodations for the New York to Birmingham train.

It was while riding this incarnation of the train that Mack Gordon and Harry Warren wrote "Chattanooga Choo Choo". The song's lyrics, which do not mention the *Birmingham Special* directly by name, mention boarding the train on track 29 at Pennsylvania Station, which has never had a track 29. Also, when the song was recorded in 1941, the *Birmingham Special* used an electric, not steam, locomotive between New York and Washington. Ironically, the premier train of the Pennsylvania Railroad's rival, the New York Central Railroad's *20th Century Limited*, used track 29 at Grand Central Terminal. The time points mentioned reflect liberties for rhyme and suggest the pre-Bristol reroute (when it passed through North Carolina, it did not yet serve Chattanooga).

The Pennsylvania ended through service north of Washington in 1956. By 1964 the sleeper service had been eliminated. However, the longer route, along the same trackage as far south as Chattanooga, the Southern's *Pelican*, retained sleeping cars. Through service to Memphis (connecting in Chattanooga) ended on January 31, 1967. The Southern Railway dropped the *Birmingham Special* name on February 1, 1970. Service south of Bristol ended August 11, 1970. The train was the last to serve Chattanooga's Terminal Station.

The Norfolk & Western joined Amtrak upon the latter's start on May 1, 1971. However, Amtrak chose not to operate the Lynchburg to Bristol portion of the train. The Southern Railway, which had not initially joined Amtrak, continued to operate the unnamed train between Washington and Lynchburg until June 1,



↑ Chattanooga depot as built.

← Chattanooga depot as a hotel with Choo-Choo sign on the roof.



**Birmingham Special with head end mail cars.**

1975. The Southern Railway joined Amtrak in 1979.

### **Carolina Special**

The *Carolina Special* was a passenger train operated by the Southern Railway between Cincinnati and the Carolinas. It operated from 1911 to 1968. It was the last passenger train to use the route of the Charleston and Hamburg Railroad, which, as the South Carolina Canal and Railroad Company. All Southern Railway Pullman service to Charleston rode over that historic, if bucolic, route from Branchville to the port city.

The Southern Railway introduced the *Carolina Special* on January 22, 1911, between Cincinnati and Charleston, South Carolina via Asheville. The trip took 25 hours. The train's equipment included coaches, Pullman sleeping cars, an observation car and a dining car. Through-sleepers were later added to and from three different origins, Chicago, Detroit and Cleveland via the New York

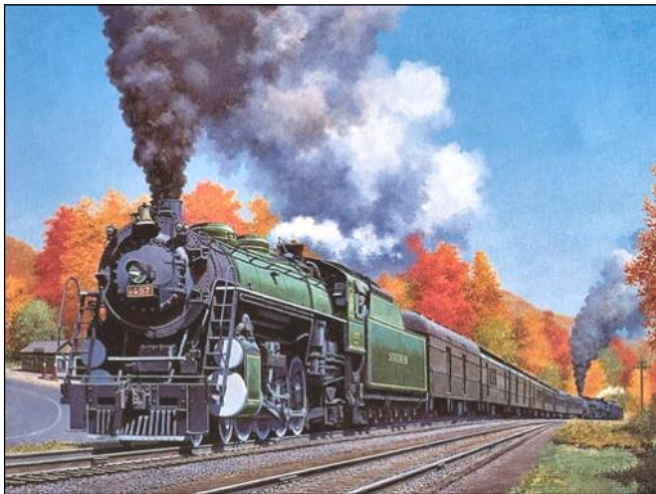
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Central (NYC). NYC coaches linked at Cincinnati from Detroit and Cleveland. In mid-20th century the train was augmented to have an eastern North Caroli-



**The *Carolina Special* arriving at Asheville prior to being split into two sections.**



**Howard Fogg painting of the *Carolina Special* under steam.**

na branch splitting off at Biltmore and heading east to Winston-Salem, Greensboro, Durham, Raleigh and Goldsboro. The Greensboro to Raleigh part of this branch is continued today in Amtrak's North Carolina-based *Piedmont* service.

Despite its singular name, the train served both Carolinas, with a northern section going to Greensboro and Goldsboro, and the southern section serving Spartanburg, Columbia, and Charleston. The train was divided at Asheville. Over the years the

consists varied (sleepers from Cincinnati to Columbia and Charleston were listed in 1917, Chicago to Columbia in 1925, Cincinnati to Spartanburg in 1930), but typically they included a Chicago to Charleston car. Before the train was inaugurated, the Southern had run a Charleston to Cincinnati sleeper by way of Augusta and Atlanta on the Georgia Railroad, but for the 57 years of its life, the *Carolina Special* offered a unique connection to the Cincinnati gateway.

In pre-World War II ear the train had additional sections that were northern destinations, aside from the default site of Cincinnati. A branch from Louisville joined with the train in Danville, and a Nashville branch running over the Tennessee Central's tracks joined the main route at Harriman. Continuing sleeper equipment was offered between Louisville and Asheville and between Nashville and Knoxville. This was a rare instance of a long-distance train traveling east out of Nashville. By the 1950s, the Louisville part persisted as a connection, but not a through-train. However, the Nashville section, running over the Tennessee Central's tracks, was entirely lost. The connecting TC train at Harriman was impractical as a connection, uncoordinated with the *Carolina Special* by several hours.

By 1954 the train's North Carolina route east from Asheville ended at Greensboro. By 1954 the South Carolina branch no longer went to Charleston; rather, it ended at Columbia. By 1966 the train lost its dining car, which in the early 1960s had been downgraded to a dinette. The Southern Railway discontinued the *Carolina Special* on December 5, 1968, which had by then dwindled to a coach-only remnant. In final



**State of North Carolina *Piedmont* service train.**

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**The Amtrak *Crescent* crossing Lake Ponchartrain near New Orleans. It no longer carries a baggage car.**

years, all that remained was a remnant of the *Asheville Special* was a three day a week train, Southern Railway between Asheville and Salisbury. The discontinuing of this unnamed remnant on August 8, 1975, was the last regularly scheduled passenger service for Asheville. Most of the line between Charleston and Aiken has been lifted as there was little freight traffic generated by the historic but redundant route to justify its continued operation.

### Crescent

The *Crescent* is a daily long-distance passenger train operated by Amtrak in the eastern United States. It operates 1,377 miles daily between Pennsylvania Station in New York City and Union Passenger Terminal in New Orleans. Most of the route of the *Crescent* is on the Norfolk Southern Railway. It is the successor of numerous trains dating to 1891, and was first introduced in its present form in 1970 by Norfolk Southern's predecessor, the Southern Railway. The *Crescent* passes through twelve states and the District of Columbia, more than any other Amtrak route. It is Amtrak's third-longest route in the East, behind only the *Silver Service* routes to Florida.

In the 1870s, the Richmond and Danville Railroad (R&D), the predecessor of the Southern Railway,

established the *Piedmont Air Line Route*, which connected the northeastern United States with Atlanta and New Orleans via Richmond and via Norfolk Southern's present route through Charlottesville and Lynchburg. The *Southern Express* and the *Southern Mail* operated over these routes on an advertised time of 57 hours and 40 minutes, including a change at Atlanta.

On January 4, 1891, the R&D launched the *Washington & Southwestern Vestibuled Limited*, the earliest direct ancestor of today's *Crescent*. It originally connected Washington and Atlanta. According to an official history compiled by Southern Railway, it was pro-



**A Southern Railway *Crescent* being pulled by the iconic 4-6-2 Pacific Ps-4.**

moted as a service second to none in completeness and elegance of detail, providing all the latest and best facilities for the comfort and enjoyment of its patrons. The South's first all-year train with vestibuled equipment, it was popularly known as simply the *Vestibule*. Among its amenities were drawing-room and stateroom sleeping cars, dining cars, smoking and library cars, and observation cars. Many passengers passed the time simply walking between cars just to enjoy the unusual experience of being able to do so without having their hats blown away.

Soon the Washington to Atlanta routing expanded via the West Point Route from Atlanta

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to Montgomery and the Louisville and Nashville Railroad from Montgomery to New Orleans, via Mobile. The route was then extended to New York (Jersey City before 1910) along the Pennsylvania Railroad's northeastern trunk line, now Northeast Corridor, via a connection in Washington with the *Congressional Limited*. Scheduled time for the New York to New Orleans run was advertised as a "40-hour, unprecedented" trip. Because of the popularity of this service, the *Vestibule* became a solid train of walk-through cars between New York and New Orleans. It also carried the first dining cars to operate between those two cities.

The new train's popularity was not enough to prevent the R&D from being forced into receivership in 1892. Two years later, the R&D merged with five other railroads to form the Southern Railway Company. Under Southern ownership, the train was initially called the *Washington & Southwestern Limited* southbound, and the *New York Limited* northbound. In 1906, the train was renamed the *New York & New Orleans Limited* in both directions and equipped with "club cars"

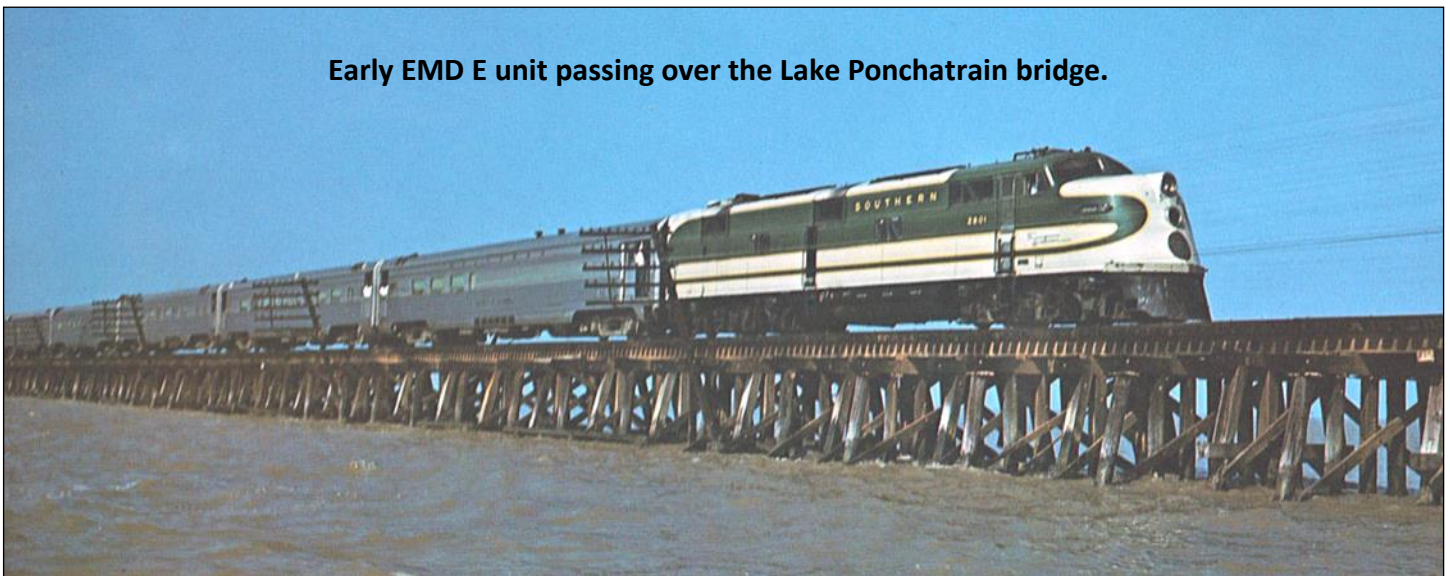
certainly knew which train was No. 38.

The Southern Railway and Southern Pacific discussed the possibility of running a single train from Washington to Los Angeles via New Orleans, which would have become the first truly transcontinental passenger train. The idea never came to fruition, but from 1993 to 2005, Amtrak's *Sunset Limited* was a transcontinental train running between Orlando and Los Angeles.

By 1925, the train was re-equipped and renamed the *Crescent Limited*, a true all-Pullman extra-fare train. By 1938 the name simply became the *Crescent*. It was dieselized in 1941 and streamlined in 1949. The *Crescent* also carried the through (coast-to-coast) sleepers of the "Washington-Sunset Route" in conjunction with the Southern Pacific west of New Orleans to Los Angeles.

During the interwar period, the *Crescent*, like the Southern's other major trains, was powered south of Washington by the celebrated Ps-4 class 4-6-2 locomotives. After World War II, it was powered by General

Early EMD E unit passing over the Lake Ponchartrain bridge.



and observation cars.

The train is referred to in the popular 1920s railroad ballad *Wreck of the Old 97*, which describes the doomed train No. 97 as "not 38." Number "38" was the operating number of the northbound *New York & New Orleans Limited*. No. 97 had operated over the same tracks as No. 38 between Washington and Atlanta, and over the same trestle where No. 97 wrecked in 1903. The original songwriter was a Southern Railway employee, who

Motors' Electro-Motive Division (EMD) E8 locomotives and FP-7 cab and booster units, in sets of two to five.

The 1952 schedule for the 1,355 miles from Atlanta to New York was 32 hours, 55 minutes. Passengers leaving New Orleans would arrive in Atlanta just after lunch time and into Charlotte, North Carolina, in the early evening. At Charlotte, northbound trains became

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"all-Pullman", and *limited*. The train carried sleeping cars only. It stopped only to discharge passengers, and only boarded passengers bound for destinations north of Washington. Arrival in Washington was about 4:00 a.m., but a sleeping car was uncoupled there, and passengers could sleep until a more reasonable hour. ✓



The Amtrak *Crescent* traversing one of the many southern states between New York and New Orleans.



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