

A brief history of a southern shortline

DONALD G. MEADOWS

On a grey fall morning, Gerry Meacham stood chatting in the high-ceilinged freight station of the Chattahoochee Valley Railway Company. There was a distinct sadness in Meacham's voice as she talked about the CVR and her pending retirement after 40 years with the railroad. For the past month she'd been sorting through papers of the shortline, deciding which to archive and which to feed through a shredder.

The CVR, a company-owned railroad begun in 1895, once stretched 41 miles. It served West Point Pepperell and its predecessors along the central Alabama and Georgia border, as well as the communities from West Point, GA, on down to Blecker, AL, and up as far as Standing Rock, AL. Unlike the Aberdeen & Rockfish Railroad, however, the CVR will not celebrate its 100th anniversary. Sept. 1, 1992, marked the last day of operation for the CVR.

Passenger service, begun in 1908, once accounted for 25% of the CVR's gross receipts. That and the line from West Point to Standing Rock were abandoned in 1932.

A temporary spur to the site of the West Point Dam in 1966 profited the railroad during the construction. Revenues peaked in

1969 because of the extra traffic associated with the construction of the dam. The railroad handled 14,825 carloads that year, with a total freight tonnage of 602,823 lb. The spur was removed in 1973, the same year the CVR abandoned its tracks from McGinty, AL, to Blecker.

Over the years, automobiles, trucks, and a modern highway network drained more and more business from the CVR, though the railroad operated profitably through 1983. Since 1985, there has been a marked decline in business. The railroad lost most of its main commodities—coal, cotton piece goods, synthetic fibers, chemicals, cotton, and cotton factory sweep-

ings—to trucks. Finally, the management at West Point Pepperell decided the railroad was an expensive luxury that was no longer needed. ■

Meadows is editor of Tappi Journal.

The freight office and shop of the Chattahoochee Valley Railway Company

