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## THE ORIGINS OF THE NASHVILLE AND CHATTANOOGA RAILROAD

By S. J. FOLMSBEE

The first railroad actually completed in Tennessee was the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, connecting the Cumberland River at Nashville, with the Tennessee at Chattanooga. Although the movement which eventually reached fruition in the completion of this line in 1854 was not initiated until about 1845, suggestions of such a road had been made as early as 1837. These early and abortive proposals were in response to the incorporation by the state of Georgia, in December, 1836, of the Western and Atlantic Railroad, to be constructed at state expense from the site of Atlanta to the Tennessee River, and to serve as an extension of other railroad lines already under construction or in prospect in that state.<sup>1</sup> The citizens of lower East Tennessee immediately became interested, and on March 25, 1837, a meeting was held at Ross Landing (Chattanooga), at which resolutions were adopted advocating the selection of Ross Landing as the terminus of the Georgia road, and also the extension of the line to Nashville and Louisville.<sup>2</sup>

Interest was also manifested in Georgia in the proposed extension to the Cumberland River. When Daniel Newman, the agent of the Georgia legislature, appealed to the Tennessee General Assembly of 1837-38 for the grant of a right of way in Tennessee for the Western and Atlantic, he included in his memorial the suggestion that it would be to the interest of Tennessee to construct a road from Nashville to connect with it at the Tennessee River.<sup>3</sup> Some time later, however, he intimated in a letter to Governor Newton Cannon, that it would be easier for Nashville to obtain access to the Georgia system by constructing a road more directly southward to the Alabama line and thence to the Tennessee River at Ditto Landing, and by using the river from that point to the proposed terminus of the Western and Atlantic at Ross Landing.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> U. B. Phillips, *History of Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt* (New York, 1908), 308-310.

<sup>2</sup> *Knoxville Register*, Apr. 12, 1837.

<sup>3</sup> *Tenn. House Jour.*, Appx., 1837-38, p. 874.

<sup>4</sup> Newman to Cannon, Oct. 16, 1838, *Governors' Papers* (Cannon), Tenn. State Library.

These suggestions, it seems, elicited no response on the part of the citizens of Nashville. Middle Tennesseans at that time were more interested in the construction of macadamized turnpikes than in experimenting with a type of improvement of such doubtful expediency as a railroad, and were devoting their energies under the state aid laws of 1836 and 1838 to the construction of a series of turnpikes radiating from Nashville. Soon the prolonged depression which followed the panic of 1837 cast a blight over the whole subject of internal improvements and created in Tennessee a wave of reaction against what was regarded as the reckless squandering of public funds upon fruitless undertakings. Not only were the railroad enterprises begun in East and West Tennessee driven into bankruptcy, but work of construction on the Georgia system of roads was also indefinitely suspended. Consequently, the idea of extending the Georgia system from the Tennessee River to Nashville slumbered peacefully, except for spasmodic expressions of interest along the route,<sup>5</sup> until reawakened in 1845 by the voices of two prominent citizens of Nashville, A. O. P. Nicholson and Dr. James Overton.

This revival of interest in the Nashville and Chattanooga connection, although aided considerably by the recovery from the depression, was largely induced, as was the case with the original proposal, by news of railroad activities in Georgia. The Georgia railroad program, initiated in the boom years of 1835-1836, was designed largely to carry forward the efforts already begun by South Carolina to establish a rail connection between the Atlantic seaboard and the Mississippi Valley. The South Carolina Railroad had been in operation since 1833 between Charleston and the Savannah River at Hamburg, opposite the thriving Georgia town of Augusta. The Georgia legislature, therefore, had incorporated the Georgia Railroad and Banking Company for the purpose of extending this line to the Tennessee River. This plan had been modified in 1836-37, however, by the diversion of the Georgia Railroad route in the direction of the Chattahoochee River near the present site of Atlanta, where it was to be joined by another railroad line coming from the Georgia seaport of Savannah. From Atlanta, the Western and Atlantic Railroad was designed as an extension of both of these prongs to the Tennessee River at Ross Landing. After a temporary suspension caused by the depression, work was vigorously renewed on this system of roads in 1843-44. The Georgia Railroad was completed

<sup>5</sup> See memorial from citizens of Bedford and Coffee counties, Tenn. Archives (Petitions and Memorials, 1839-40); also *H. Jr.*, 1843-44, Nov. 6, (Resolution by Mr. Morrow).

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to Atlanta in the fall of 1845, and by this time the line from Savan-  
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 companies, had approached within twenty miles of this junction  
 point. After a reorganization of the Monroe Company under the  
 new name of Macon and Western, this gap was closed during the  
 next year. Meanwhile, work had been resumed by the state of  
 Georgia on the Western and Atlantic in the direction of the Tennes-  
 see River. By the close of 1845, about eighty miles of the road was  
 in operation, and the remainder under contract. On December 1,  
 1849, the road was placed in operation from Atlanta to Chattanooga,  
 with the exception of a tunnel in Northern Georgia. This tunnel was  
 completed and uninterrupted transportation established in May, 1850.<sup>6</sup>

The rapid approach of the South Carolina-Georgia system of  
 railroads toward the borders of Tennessee naturally aroused interest  
 throughout the state in the possibility of constructing lines designed  
 to establish a connection with it. Nashville was no exception. One  
 of the first Nashvillians to take a definite and open stand in favor  
 of the extension of the Western and Atlantic road to the Cumberland  
 River was the editor of the *Nashville Union*, A. O. P. Nicholson.  
 His position, as the editor of the leading Democratic organ in the  
 state, was an especially favorable one in which to draw public atten-  
 tion to the subject; and his own political prominence, as well as his  
 intimate connection with the initiation of the State Aid System of  
 1837-38, made certain that his words would receive a respectful  
 hearing.

In his first reference to the subject, in the editorial columns of  
 the *Union* of February 6, 1845, he admitted that he expected the  
 suggestion of a railroad to connect the Tennessee and Cumberland  
 rivers to be received with surprise, in view of the antagonism toward  
 internal improvements which had developed as a result of the dis-  
 astrous consequences of the mania which had hit Tennessee, as well  
 as other states, about 1835. He expressed the opinion, however, that  
 the public mind was recovering from the shock; and he prophesied  
 that the forth-coming report of the legislative committee appointed  
 to investigate the internal improvement companies of the state would  
 reveal that Middle Tennessee had no cause to regret the public and  
 private funds expended in the construction of turnpikes in that sec-  
 tion. Furthermore, it would cause the people in the extreme ends of  
 the state to take steps to obtain similar benefits from expenditures on

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, *op. cit.*, *passim*; R. S. Cotterhill, "Southern Railroads and Western  
 Trade," *Miss Valley Hist. Rev.*, III, 427-441; *Amer. Railroad Journal*, xv, 238,  
 xvii, 267; *Charleston Courier*, Dec. 8, 1849; *Nashville True Whig*, May 16, 1850.

internal improvement. In regard to the Nashville and Chattanooga project, he declared that a railroad connection with Charleston, South Carolina, would be a great benefit to the farmers of Middle Tennessee in that it would enable them to import and export through the same channel, instead of being required to export their surplus to New Orleans and to import practically everything they needed, except groceries, from Philadelphia.

A few weeks later Nicholson reported that although Nashville still remained indifferent to the proposition, he had observed a "deep and growing solicitude" on the subject in the intervening country between Nashville and Chattanooga. He also commented that there were signs of an awakening of the people of East Tennessee to a realization of the benefits they would derive from the completion of the Western and Atlantic Railroad to the Tennessee River.<sup>7</sup> In April he was able to express his gratification that even in Nashville he no longer stood "solitary and alone" in his advocacy of a railroad from Nashville to Chattanooga—that "some of our citizens of wealth and intelligence are discussing the subject in private circles and they find it readily exciting an interest."<sup>8</sup>

In fact, it was not long before the subject was attracting sufficient public attention to compel other newspapers in the city to allot some space for its discussion. Beginning in June, the *Nashville Whig* began the publication of a series of articles by a correspondent writing over the signature, "Viator," describing his journey over the South Carolina-Georgia system of roads, commenting on the prosperity which the roads seemed to create in regions through which they passed, and advocating the extension of the lines to Nashville.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the news that Memphis was again becoming interested in the possibility of a rail connection with Charleston, as was evidenced by the calling of a commercial convention to be held in that city on July 4, created some apprehension in Nashville. It was forcibly called to the attention of Nashville merchants that if this Memphis-Charleston connection should be established it would draw off a large portion of the trade of the southern counties of Middle Tennessee, which at that time was monopolized by the city on the Cumberland.<sup>10</sup> Thus it was time for the people of Nashville to bestir themselves.

Although the publicity given the subject by editor Nicholson was of immeasurable importance in initiating the movement for the

<sup>7</sup> *Nashville Union*, Mar. 18, 1845.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, Apr. 3, 1845.

<sup>9</sup> *Nashville Whig*, June 17, 1845, and following. The articles were reprinted in the *Whig's* weekly edition, called the *Politician*.

<sup>10</sup> *Nashville Whig*, Apr. 29, 1845; *Nashville Politician*, May 2, 1845.

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Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad, its influence was equaled if not surpassed by the work of another citizen of Nashville, an eminent physician by the name of Dr. James Overton. Dr. Overton has with justice been called the father of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad. During the summer of 1845, he presented himself as a candidate for the office of state senator from Davidson county, and he waged his campaign on the issue of the construction of a railroad from Nashville to Chattanooga.<sup>11</sup> Overton's candidacy was vigorously supported by Nicholson in the editorial columns of the *Union*; and their combined attack upon the position taken by the Whig candidate, John Trimble, succeeded at last in breaking the studied silence with which the editor of the *Nashville Whig* up to that time had viewed the railroad project.

Instead of flatly opposing the undertaking, the Whig editor attempted to claim that the *Whig*, and also Mr. Trimble, were more sincerely in favor of the road than the *Union*. He quoted from the Democratic organ an editorial comment opposing a proposition made by one of its correspondents that the state of Tennessee subscribe \$500,000 to the project; and he cited this as proof that the editor of the *Union* was only "generally" in favor of the construction of the road. "So are we," the editorial continued, "so is everybody in this region that we have heard speak on the subject." The *Whig* he stated, would go further and advocate the "most liberal charter for that purpose that could be granted, consistent with the public interests" and as soon as it was certain that the Western and Atlantic road would terminate at Chattanooga, it would advocate an appropriation by the legislature for the survey of the route.<sup>12</sup>

The Whig candidate, himself, however, was much more cautious than his editorial proponent. In his "True Position", printed in the same issue of the *Whig*, Trimble denied that he was opposed to the construction of the road, declaring that he had said that he thought it prudent, before embarking on an undertaking of such magnitude and expense, to await the completion of the Western and Atlantic to Chattanooga, and the prosecution of a survey to determine whether it would be possible without ruinous cost to surmount the serious natural obstacle in the way, the Cumberland Mountain. He also insisted that no information had been furnished which would indicate that rail transportation was cheaper than water transportation, or that Charleston would be a better market than New Orleans.

<sup>11</sup> J. B. Killibrew and J. M. Safford in their *Introduction to the Resources of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1874) erroneously dated this Overton campaign, 1843.

<sup>12</sup> *Nashville Whig*, June 24, 1845.

Finally, he declared "most emphatically," that he "did oppose, and would oppose, the attempt to make the State of Tennessee issue *her* bonds towards this measure," because "her bonds were now issued and outstanding for \$3,000,000 and a fraction," and it was not in his opinion, "prudent to increase her liabilities." He had no objection, however, to the granting of a charter for the construction of the road "by individual capitalists."

In reply to Trimble's declaration against state aid, Overton and Nicholson attempted to disarm the opposition by asserting that the proposition would be sufficiently attractive to the holders of the large surplus of capital in Middle Tennessee to make the aid of the state unnecessary; and the doubts of Trimble and others as to the feasibility of constructing a railroad over the Cumberland Mountains were soon to be answered, at least in part, by the bi-ennial report of the state geologist, Dr. Gerard Troost. As a result of the rapid growth of interest in this railroad project, Troost had been induced to vary the program of his geological survey and to direct his investigations to the region lying between Nashville and Chattanooga with a view to determining the feasibility of a railroad, as well as the extent of the mineral resources along the route. Thus the advocates of the undertaking were placed in possession of something in the nature of a preliminary survey.

Although this geological report<sup>13</sup> was not printed until after the legislature had convened in October, 1845, Overton obtained an interview with Troost soon after the geologist's arrival in Nashville, and made extensive use of the results of his researches in the preparation of a speech which he delivered before a railroad meeting in Nashville, in the midst of the senatorial campaign, on July 3, 1845. In this address,<sup>14</sup> after some general remarks concerning the superiority of railroads as a means of travel and transportation, and some statistics as to the distance from Charleston to Nashville and the large portion of the road already constructed or under construction in South Carolina and Georgia, Overton turned his attention to the feasibility of the smaller portion of the route in Tennessee for which provision had not yet been made. Referring to his interview with Troost, he asserted that the geologist had informed him that a route could be selected between Chattanooga and Murfreesboro over which a railroad could be constructed more cheaply than from Murfreesboro to Nashville, except for a section of five miles over a spur of the Cumberland Mountain, through which there existed a deep gap

<sup>13</sup> *H. Jr., Appx.*, 1845-46, pp. 65-75.

<sup>14</sup> Overton's address was reported in great detail in the *Nashville Union*, July 17, 1845.

seemingly designed for a railroad. He estimated that the total cost of construction from Nashville to Chattanooga would not be more than \$1,300,000, or about \$10,000 per mile.

Overton then exhibited a specimen of coal which Troost had brought back with him from what he considered an inexhaustible mine located near the terminus of the route on the Tennessee River. The transportation of this coal would not only insure a profit to the stockholders of the railroad company, he asserted, but the cheapness with which it could be sold in Nashville would result in the development of that city into one of the manufacturing centers of America.

Another advantage which would result from the construction of the road, according to Overton, would be the enhancement of the value of real estate along the route by at least fifty percent. Even the value of the stock of the turnpike companies would be increased, for the railroad would bring increased business to the turnpikes connecting with it. He then referred to the inadequacy of New Orleans as a market, in that it could be reached only when the "casualties of season" permitted, and always behind the produce of the states on the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio rivers. With the completion of the railroad, the produce of Middle Tennessee, instead of passing over 2460 miles of dangerous navigation with heavy insurance and many transshipments, would reach Charleston or Savannah in twenty-eight hours, without danger or insurance, at one-fifth the cost and in one-tenth the time. Imports could also be obtained from New York in eighty-eight hours. The saving which would result, he said, would build two such roads.

As a further indication of the profitable nature of investments in railroad stock, Overton quoted from the latest report of the Georgia Railroad Company. "Railroads *create* the business they thrive upon"; and from the *Merchants Magazine*, "It is the nature of railroads to multiply commercial transactions through the facilities they offer, and to *create business where none existed before*—so that a line which scarcely pays its expenses the first year of its existence, must in a few years become extremely lucrative." He showed that this was the case with the Georgia roads, which, although still unfinished, were already yielding a profit of 6%. The experience of Georgia had completely invalidated the sage conclusions of certain wiseacres who had held that railroads could be successfully and profitably maintained only in the North, or in the vicinity of large and populous cities.

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Although slightly over-optimistic and somewhat open to the charge of exaggeration, this address was very effective in stimulating interest in the project, and not only received favorable comment even in the opposition press, but attracted attention in regions as far removed as Charleston, South Carolina. On October 4, 1845, a meeting was held in Charleston for the purpose of selecting delegates to attend the November session of the Southern and Western Commercial Convention at Memphis, and in the resolutions adopted Charleston responded enthusiastically to the efforts under way in both Memphis and Nashville to establish rail connections with the South Carolina - Georgia system of roads. One of the resolutions specifically tendered the thanks of the city to Overton for the "zeal he has manifested" in regard to the Nashville and Charleston project, and for the "able and eloquent exposition in his address of the great public benefits to be derived."<sup>15</sup>

A few days after printing the proceedings of this Charleston meeting, the *Nashville Whig* recurred to the subject again, this time reprinting an editorial from the *Charleston Courier* strongly eulogistic of Overton's speech and quoting extensively from it. The same issue reprinted a letter from F. H. Elmore, a prominent South Carolina politician, to a citizen of Nashville, enlarging upon the advantages which would result from a rail connection between Charleston and Nashville.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the *Nashville Banner*, a Whig organ which had hitherto been silent on the subject, joined the ranks of the Nashville newspapers in advocacy of a railroad between Nashville and Chattanooga. The *Banner's* editorial page read in part as follows:<sup>17</sup>

When the project of the extension of the Georgia railroad from its present terminus, not far from Chattanooga, through that place to Nashville, was discussed during the past summer by a portion of the newspapers of the State and by some of our public speakers, we were disposed, from slight examination, to view it with indifference, if not with feelings of opposition. We were inclined to doubt both its practicability and expediency, and to believe that it would at least prove detrimental to the interests of our growing and beautiful city, and have a tendency to check its prosperity, if not to destroy it altogether. The reasons for this opinion it is not necessary to give, especially, as after a more thorough examination, which we have recently bestow-

<sup>15</sup> *Nashville Whig*, Oct. 16, 1845.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, Oct. 21, 1845.

<sup>17</sup> *Nashville Banner*, Oct. 25, 1845

ed upon the subject, we have arrived at a different conclusion. We have now but little doubt that the extension of the Georgia and South Carolina Railroad to Nashville is not only practicable, but that, if made in connection with the improvement of the Cumberland to its mouth by means of locks and dams, it would prove a great advantage to our town and to the state.

It is significant that these Whig papers postponed the printing of these eulogies of Overton's address and the endorsement of his project until after Overton, as the Democratic candidate for the State Senate, had been safely defeated in the August election. Another influence contributing to the more general and vigorous support in the press of both parties of the Nashville and Chattanooga railroad project was the wide publicity being given to the second session of the Commercial Convention to be held in Memphis in November. At this convention, which was to be representative of most of the southern and western states, and which was to be presided over by John C. Calhoun, the subject of an Atlantic and Mississippi Railroad was to be one of the major topics of discussion.<sup>18</sup> Memphis was earnestly pressing its claims as the most logical western terminus of the proposed line, and the citizens of Nashville were becoming increasingly apprehensive as to the possible results of such a development. At a meeting held in Nashville on October 22, a large delegation, headed by Overton, was appointed to represent the interests of Nashville and Davidson county at Memphis; and this group was later joined by a delegation of ten members of the legislature. Plans were also initiated for a convention to be held at Nashville shortly after the adjournment of the Memphis meeting, in the interest of the Nashville and Chattanooga extension.<sup>19</sup>

There the foundations were well laid for an application to the General Assembly of 1845-46, already in session, for the incorporation of a company to construct the road; and if care should still be maintained to avoid any suggestion of state aid, the application would have an excellent chance of meeting with success. Both the retiring and incoming governors, James C. Jones and Aaron V.

<sup>18</sup> St. George L. Sioussat, "Memphis as a Gateway to the West," in *Tenn. Hist. Mag.*, III, 77-114.

<sup>19</sup> *Nashville Whig*, Oct. 23, 1845; *Nashville Union*, Oct. 28, Nov. 8, 11, 1845. The list of delegates (30) also included John Bell, E. H. Foster, V. K. Stevenson, and R. J. Meigs. The legislative delegation, which included the names of J. A. Whiteside, V. Sevier, and W. G. McAdoo, was instructed to invite the leading figures at the Memphis convention, particularly Calhoun, to attend also the subsequent meeting in Nashville.

Brown, referred to the subject in their messages; and although they both vigorously opposed the appropriation of any state funds, they expressed themselves in favor of the granting of a liberal charter of incorporation. Governor Brown, of the Democratic party, however, was more earnest in his advocacy of the proposition than his Whig predecessor. He expressed the opinion that the Georgia system should be extended to both Memphis and Nashville, and stated that he should regret to witness any spirit of rivalry develop between the two projects. In regard to the Nashville road, he said that "the practicability of its construction at a cost of about two millions of dollars, is now almost universally conceded." After a review of some of the advantages which he believed would result, he closed with an "earnest recommendation that a most liberal and judicious charter be granted to individuals for its construction."<sup>20</sup>

A few days before the presentation of this message by Governor Brown the House Committee on Internal Improvements had brought forward a bill for the incorporation of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad Company, prepared by James A. Whiteside, a Whig member from Hamilton county.<sup>21</sup> While this measure was under consideration by the legislature, the commercial conventions already referred to were being held at Memphis and Nashville. At the Memphis' convention, a notable gathering of some six or seven hundred delegates in session from November 12 to November 15, the subject of a railroad from Nashville to Chattanooga was considered as only one phase of the larger subject of establishing a rail connection between the Atlantic seaboard and the Mississippi Valley. The Nashville delegations had feared that some conflict might develop in case any attempts were made to "concentrate public opinion and action on any one line to the disparagement and injury of others;" but this was not the case. The report of the railroad committee, presented by Colonel James Gadsden of South Carolina, advocated the extension of the South Carolina-Georgia system of roads to both Nashville and Memphis; and the resolution of the convention advocating the establishment of an Atlantic-Mississippi highway was so phrased as to avoid the designation of any particular route. The legislative delegation from Tennessee was therefore able to report to the General Assembly that this policy "leaves all sections and interests in our state, as well as others, free to enter the lists of useful and honorable competition for the accomplishment of works which must be of incalculable advant-

<sup>20</sup> *H. Jr.*, 1845-6, Oct. 10, Nov. 7, 1845.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 3, 1845; *Nashville Union*, Nov. 6, 29, 1845.

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age, not only to the sections embracing them, but to the whole South and West."<sup>22</sup>

Although the Memphis convention was of great benefit to the Nashville and Chattanooga railroad project in that it stimulated interest in the general proposition of a rail connection between the Atlantic and the Mississippi Valley, the subsequent convention in Nashville, held on November 24 and 25, was of more direct influence because its proceedings were devoted exclusively to the subject of a railroad between the Cumberland and Tennessee rivers.

At this convention there assembled about 150 delegates from seven counties of Middle and East Tennessee, in addition to numerous members of the legislature, two delegates from South Carolina, and one from Mobile. The proceedings were marked by the introduction of evidence corroborating the conclusions of Troost, the state geologist, as to the feasibility of the construction of a railroad from Nashville to Chattanooga. This was in the form of a report presented by Judge Nathan Greene of an actual instrumental survey of the route under the direction of Dr. Estil of Winchester. The convention adopted a series of resolutions advocating the construction of the road and recommending to the legislature that it grant a liberal charter in which provision should be made for an early survey and location of the route. A. O. P. Nicholson, James Overton and J. A. Whiteside were appointed as a committee to prepare an address to the people.<sup>23</sup>

On November 26, 1845, the day after the adjournment of the Nashville convention, Whiteside's bill for the incorporation of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad Company was passed by the House of Representatives by the overwhelming vote of 54 to 9. On December 9, it was passed by the Senate with several important amendments, by a vote of 20 to 4. One of the four votes in opposition was cast by John Trimble, the Whig Senator from Davidson county, despite his promise, given during his campaign against Overton, to support a charter of incorporation.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Sioussat, *loc. cit.*; *Journal of the Proceedings of the South-western Convention* (Memphis, 1845). Good accounts of the convention are to be found in the *Memphis Eagle*, Nov. 13-20, 1845, and *Nashville Whig*, Nov. 22-25, 1845. The report of the railroad committee was printed in *DeBow's Review*, January, 1846; and that of the Tennessee legislative delegation in the *Nashville Whig*, Nov. 22, 1845.

<sup>23</sup> *Nashville Whig*, Nov. 25, 27, 1845. The counties represented were Davidson, Rutherford, Smith, Warren, Giles, Franklin and Hamilton. The South Carolina delegates were Major Black and Colonel Trescott. Mr. Lewis Troost, the son of Dr. Troost, attended as a representative of the Mobile and Ohio Railroad Co., of which he was chief engineer. Judge Nathan Greene presided and Dr. Overton delivered the opening address.

<sup>24</sup> *H. Jr.*, 1845-46, Nov. 26, 1845; *Sen. Jr.*, Dec. 9, 1845.

In the debate on the bill, the only controversies which developed were in regard to the provisions in the House measure giving the company the right to acquire coal lands within ten miles of the road, and exempting the capital stock from taxation forever, and the rails and other property for thirty years. Both provisions were struck out by the Senate, and the House was eventually forced to concur with regard to the coal lands. A committee of conference, however, worked out a compromise regarding the taxation dispute which provided for permanent exemption for the capital stock, but reduced the period of exemption for rails and other property to twenty years. Despite the failure to grant the right to purchase coal lands, the *Union* commented that the charter was a liberal one and expressed gratification at its passage. Thus the first battle for the road was won.<sup>25</sup>

It is probably true that a study of the origins of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad should close with the incorporation of the company; and a precedent for such a procedure exists in the fact that most of the supporters of the project in 1845 ended their efforts at that point. Many, who had been enthusiastic in their agitation for the road, suddenly became very lukewarm when asked to subscribe for stock in the company and pay down fifty cents a share as evidence of good faith. Fortunately, this was not the case with all; and it will be necessary, therefore, to say a few words regarding the heroic efforts of those few who were largely responsible for carrying the project forward to a successful completion.

Two major obstacles interfered with the sale of stock by the commissioners appointed under the charter of incorporation. One was the receipt of disquieting news from Georgia to the effect that the governor and legislature of that state had refused to make any further appropriation of funds for the extension of the Western and Atlantic Railroad. For two years the extension of this road in the direction of Chattanooga was dependent entirely upon the earnings of that part of the road already in operation. Naturally, the work of construction proceeded with snail-like slowness, and many doubted that it would ever reach the Tennessee River. Tennesseans were therefore hesitant about investing their money in a Tennessee project which was to be merely an extension of the Western and Atlantic road beyond Chattanooga. Stimulated, however, by the progress being made by the Nashville and Chattanooga undertaking,

<sup>25</sup> *H. Jr.*, 1845-46, Dec. 10, 1845; *Nashville Whig*, Dec. 12, 1845; *Nashville Union*, Dec. 16, 1845. The charter may be found in *Pub. Acts*, 1845-6, pp. 17-26. The legislature also adopted a joint resolution asking Alabama to grant the company the right of way for the portion of the route which would lie within the bounds of that state. *Ibid.*, 340.

the Georgia Legislature, in 1847, finally appropriated \$375,000 for the completion of the Western and Atlantic, and thereby set at rest all doubts as to its eventual completion to the Tennessee.<sup>26</sup>

The other obstacle was the hesitancy of Tennessee capitalists to invest in the stock of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad before there was available some reliable data as to the actual cost of the work, such as would be provided by a definitive survey and location of the route. Consequently, it was difficult to collect enough money even to finance a survey. The board of commissioners named in the charter met on December 16, effected a temporary organization under the chairmanship of Dr. Overton, and made preparations for the opening of subscription books on January 1, 1846. They met again on January 19 and completed a more permanent organization with the election of Dr. Overton as president, J. J. Gill as vice-president, and A. O. P. Nicholson as secretary.<sup>27</sup> The public response to the opening of subscription books, however, was very disappointing, and it was not until May 1 that enough subscriptions had been obtained to justify the employment of a surveyor.<sup>28</sup>

A Vernon K. Stevenson was then delegated to visit South Carolina and Georgia for the purpose of selecting a competent engineer; and he obtained the services of J. Edgar Thomson, a Pennsylvanian, who had been employed by the Georgia Railroad Company as superintendent of construction, and who was later to attain fame and fortune as president of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Thomson completed his survey by the close of the year; and his report, including a definite location of the road, was printed the following March. The report was favorable, indeed. The engineer declared that the route was more favorable for a railroad than any other which had been proposed for the connection of the Atlantic with the valley of the Mississippi. By the selection of a route dipping down through a corner of Alabama, the Cumberland Mountain could be obviated easily with a maximum elevation of about half of that which had been overcome in the construction of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. Only one short tunnel would be necessary. He estimated the total cost of construction at \$2,810,000. As to the possibility of profit, he declared that if a Georgia road passing through what was in comparison with the route of the Nashville and Chattanooga "a barren waste," could make six percent on the investment, without

<sup>26</sup> Phillips, *op. cit.*, 316-18; *Nashville Union*, Nov. 29, Dec. 16, 1845.

<sup>27</sup> *Nashville Union*, Dec. 18, 1845, Jan. 22, 1846.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, May 2, 1846.

the advantage of coal along the line, there should exist no doubt of the profitable nature of an investment in the Tennessee project.<sup>29</sup>

Spurred on by the favorable nature of the Thomson report, the board of commissioners redoubled their efforts; and early in the summer of 1847 they took a very wise step in appointing ex-Governor James C. Jones and V. K. Stevenson as agents to solicit subscriptions. It was largely through their influence that the city council of Nashville was induced in July to subscribe on behalf of the city for \$500,000 in the stock of the company.<sup>30</sup> The next month Stevenson started out on a whirlwind campaign for subscriptions which was so successful that he deserves to rank with Overton and Nicholson as one of the fathers of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad. He addressed enthusiastic meetings, not only along the line of the road, but in South Carolina and Georgia; and his transcending eloquence melted the hearts and opened the pockets of his hearers and brought forth a veritable rainstorm of subscriptions. By the close of the year \$1,200,000 had been subscribed, and it was at last possible to complete the organization of the company. The first meeting of the stockholders was held on January 24, 1848; a board of directors was elected; and this board, in recognition of the invaluable services of Stevenson, elected him as the first president of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad Company.<sup>31</sup>

It is a tribute to the ability of Stevenson that he was able to retain this position until near the close of the Civil War. It was under his skillful and energetic guidance that the road was actually constructed and put into successful operation. The work of construction was started at the Cumberland Mountain tunnel, not far from Winchester, in August, 1848; and on February 22, 1851, the company celebrated, with appropriate ceremony, "knocking the daylight" through the Cumberland Mountain. The first train was run on April 9, 1851, from Nashville to Antioch, nine miles distant; and in February, 1854, the road was opened all the way from Nashville to Chattanooga.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the promises, however, of the original advocates of the project that the road would be built without the aid of the state, the company was compelled several times to ask the state to come

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Nov. 10, 1846, Mar. 11, 1847. The Thomson report was also printed in pamphlet form, a copy of which is in the Tennessee State Library.

<sup>30</sup> *Nashville Union*, July 14, 1847.

<sup>31</sup> *Proceedings of the First General Meeting of the Stockholders of the Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad Company.*

<sup>32</sup> *The Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway* (Nashville, 1923).

to the rescue. On three separate instances the Tennessee legislature responded to the fervent appeals of President Stevenson, and authorized the indorsement by the state of a total of \$1,500,000 of the bonds of the company.<sup>33</sup> These bonds were all paid off by the company, however, and the state was never called upon to make good its indorsement. The Nashville and Chattanooga Railroad therefore, has the honor, not only of being the first railroad completed in the state, but also of being the only Tennessee railroad to which the state government rendered aid without suffering some financial loss as a result.

<sup>33</sup> *Public Acts*, 1847-48, pp. 272-5; 1851-52, p., 213; 1853-54, p., 207. The subscriptions of the city of Charleston of \$500,000 and of the Georgia Railroad Co. of \$250,000, in addition to the \$500,000 subscribed by Nashville, and smaller subscriptions by other Tennessee towns, were of considerable assistance in financing the construction of the road.