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THE BUILDING OF THE EAST TENNESSEE AND VIRGINIA RAILROAD*

By JAMES W. HOLLAND

The year after the beginning of operation of the South Carolina Railroad, the first of any considerable length in the United States, found certain progressive citizens of upper East Tennessee advocating the construction of a railroad through their mountain-bound counties. The impetus for this early railroad movement seems to have come from Virginia where enterprising citizens of that state were advocating the building of a railroad from Lynchburg to the Tennessee line. During the summer of 1831 public meetings at Rogersville, Jonesboro, Blountville, Knoxville, and Athens endorsed the idea of a railroad from Knoxville to the Virginia line. By some far-sighted persons, such as Solomon D. Jacobs, such a road was envisioned as a link in a line of railroads that would extend from the East to the Mississippi River. Citizens of Rogersville were particularly active and as a result of a decision of a meeting in June there was issued from the press in that town on July 4, 1831, the first issue of a bi-weekly newspaper, the *Railroad Advocate*.¹

At a public meeting at Abingdon, Virginia, August 25-29, 1831, delegates from several counties in southwest Virginia and upper East Tennessee memorialized the legislatures of Virginia and Tennessee to grant charters for railroads within their respective limits that would form a connection between Lynchburg and Knoxville.² In December Tennessee's legislature chartered a road to run from Knoxville to the Virginia

*This paper was read at a meeting of the East Tennessee Historical Society at Knoxville. It is based upon Mr. Holland's Masters thesis, "A History of Railroad Enterprise in East Tennessee, 1836-1860" (Univ. of Tenn., 1930) [Ed.]

¹*Railroad Advocate*, July 4, July 19, Aug. 2, Aug. 20, 1831. Mr. S. J. Folmsbee, of the Department of History of the University of Tennessee, is making a study of state aid to internal improvements in Tennessee and informs me that a file of this paper is in the library of the Bureau of Railway Economics, Washington, D. C. He has kindly permitted me to use his notes from this paper. See also *Knoxville Register*, July 13, July 23, Aug. 3, 1831.

²*Knoxville Register*, Sept. 7, Sept. 14, Oct. 13, 1831.

line, but made no provision for giving to it financial aid as some of its advocates had desired. Virginia's legislature chartered the Lynchburg and New River Railroad; the company was organized and some stock subscribed; but when the legislature refused to subscribe to two-fifths of the stock the stockholders, on May 25, 1832, decided to abandon the enterprise. On June 14 the *Railroad Advocate* of Rogersville made its last appearance.³

A road from Knoxville to the Virginia line would be of little value to Tennesseans unless it should connect with a road that would give access to Eastern markets. The idea of such a road was dropped and attention was given to the possibility of the securing of an outlet in another direction. Instead of with the East, a connection was to be made with the South Atlantic seaboard by an extension of the Charleston and Hamburg Railroad.⁴ From this idea developed the daringly brilliant Louisville, Cincinnati and Charleston project which held sway in the minds of the western railroad enthusiasts until the dissolution of the company in 1840.⁵

Meanwhile, McMinn County had been actively engaged in railroad planning and construction. A charter had been obtained for a railroad, called the Hiwassee, to be built from Knoxville to the Georgia line, there connecting with a Georgia-built railroad to Atlanta, and from there to the Atlantic. The company had been organized and considerable work done when the panic of 1837 temporarily suspended operations.⁶

New Years Day, 1847, saw the reorganization of the Hiwassee Company, and fresh resolutions on the part of its officers to construct the railroad.⁷ Roads from Nashville to Chattanooga and from Memphis to Chattanooga were also being planned. Virginians, too, were contemplating again the construction of a railroad to the Tennessee line at Bristol. Thus there would be wanting only a line of railroad from Knoxville to Bristol in a series of roads from the Southwest to the East.

³*Knoxville Register*, Oct. 19, Dec. 7, 1831, May 16, 1832; *Railroad Advocate*, Jan. 12, Apr. 19, June 14, 1832; *Private Acts of Tennessee*, 1831, p. 157.

⁴*Knoxville Register*, Aug. 1, 1832.

⁵U. B. Phillips, *History of Transportation in the Eastern Cotton Belt* (New York, 1908), and T. J. Jervey, *Robert Y. Hayne and His Times* (New York, 1909).

⁶J. W. Holland, "The East Tennessee and Georgia Railroad," *East Tennessee Historical Society, Publications*, No. 3 (1931), 89-107.

⁷"Memorial of the Hiwassee Railroad Company," *Senate Journal Appendix*, 1847-48, p. 107. All references to journals and acts are to those of Tennessee.

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⁷*The Eastern Cotton Belt* (New York,
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It was to the building of such a railroad that the upper East Tennesseeans now seriously applied themselves. Rogersville, Tennessee, was the scene of the first convention in the interest of the project. At this meeting, held in May, 1847, a resolution was passed inviting all of the counties of East Tennessee to send delegates to a convention to be held at Greeneville on July 5 of the same year. Following a precedent set by the promoters of the Louisville, Cincinnati and Charleston, the president of the convention appointed a committee of correspondence whose duty it was to write letters of invitation to citizens of the various counties.⁸

Another preliminary convention was held, June 12, at Jonesboro. At this time there was appointed a committee to collect commercial statistics and to report the findings to another convention to be held at the same place about two weeks later. At the second Jonesboro convention delegates were appointed to attend the convention at Greeneville, and a resolution was adopted to the effect that "this meeting adopt the plan of a railroad as of all others best suited to our section of the state."⁹

The convention which met at Greeneville comprised delegates from ten counties in East Tennessee and three counties in Virginia.¹⁰ In this convention, two factions fought for supremacy. One of these, the conservative, advocated river improvements, especially of the Holston and French Broad; the other, the progressive element, held that nothing short of a railroad could meet the transportation needs of upper East Tennessee and western Virginia. Three days of discussion followed, but no decision was reached. Then a compromise resolution was adopted. This contained a recommendation to the legislature of an appropriation of \$250,000 to be expended in the improvement of the Holston River from Knoxville to Kingsport, and of the French Broad to the mouth of the Nolichucky. Also, the resolutions asked that Tennessee and Virginia should give "cordial and favorable consideration" to the building of a railroad from Knoxville to Charlottesville, Virginia, or that Tennessee alone should build a McAdam road "graded suitably for a

⁸*First Annual Report of the President and Directors to the Stockholders of the East Tennessee and Virginia Rail Road Company* (Jonesboro, 1850), 4. Hereafter referred to as *Report*, 1850.

⁹*Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰*Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858.

railroad" from Knoxville "to the Virginia road now in progress, to run through East Tennessee between the Holston and Nolichucky Rivers—thus to unite Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, and Tennessee with Virginia and the North."¹¹ The secretary of the convention furnished a copy of these resolutions to the Tennessee legislature, and they were introduced into the Senate by Major Britain, representing the counties of Greene and Hawkins.¹²

The East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad Company was incorporated by the General Assembly on January 27, 1848. In the charter, the purpose of the organization of the company was stated to be the establishment of a line of railroad communication between Knoxville and the state of Virginia, through East Tennessee, east of Bay's Mountain, between the Holston and Nolichucky rivers.¹³

The capital stock of the company was set at 60,000 shares at twenty-five dollars per share, and the books of the company were to be opened for subscription on the first Monday in April, 1848. Fifty cents was to be paid on each share at the time of subscription. On the first Monday in May, the board of commissioners was to meet in Jonesboro to ascertain the total number of shares subscribed. If five hundred, or more, had been subscribed the company would be considered formed, under the control of the board of commissioners. This board was then empowered to survey the route, and to make estimates of cost, but could not establish a permanent location until after the election of the first board of directors.¹⁴

Before the company might be fully organized and a board of directors elected 25,000 shares of stock must have been subscribed. If this amount were not obtained on or before January 1, 1850, the charter would be annulled. The company was expressly forbidden to carry on any banking operations. The charter gave to the company the right to own as many slaves as might be necessary for the building of the road and the keeping of it in repair. No provision was made for any state subsidy for the road.¹⁵

¹¹*Report*, 1850, pp. 4-5.

¹²*Senate Journal*, 1847-48, p. 64.

¹³*Acts*, 1847-48, p. 195.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 195-8.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 198-205.

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was organized and a board of commissioners must have been substituted on or before January 1, 1849. The company was expected to be in operation for banking operations. The board was to own as many slaves as possible on the road and the keepers of the road and the keepers of the road for any state subsidy

The first board of commissioners failed to open the books of the company for subscription, and the books were not opened by the second board until after the passage of an act, in February, 1849, by the Virginia legislature, binding that state to a subscription of three-fifths of the stock required in the construction of the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad—the railroad which the East Tennessee and Virginia was to meet at the Tennessee-Virginia line.¹⁶

This act seems to have aroused the people of upper East Tennessee from their lethargy, and to have led them to attempt the salvation of the charter of their railroad. Legal authorities were consulted regarding the advisability of a tardy opening of the books for subscription. They were of the opinion that such an action would not render the charter invalid. Accordingly, a second board of commissioners was organized on January 3, 1849 (some eight months late under the charter) at the court house in Jonesboro. From eight to ten thousand dollars were subscribed on that day. Subscriptions were taken also in Greene, Carter, Jefferson, and Knox counties. It was extremely doubtful, however, whether the amount required by the charter could be obtained within the time limit prescribed. Therefore the commissioners waived the initial payment of fifty cents per share.¹⁷

In August of 1849, a Knoxville newspaper printed an announcement that a convention of citizens interested in the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad, or in the improvement of the Holston and French Broad rivers, would meet at Greeneville on September 10.¹⁸ The Greeneville convention formally accepted the charter, subscribed \$5,000, and in an unduly optimistic moment voted to ask the state legislature to subscribe \$1,500,000 to the railroad and to appropriate \$250,000 for the improvement of the French Broad and Holston. T. A. R. Nelson, J. W. Deadrick, and S. B. Cunningham were appointed a publicity committee whose duty it was to advertise the project throughout the state. Each delegate pledged himself to "use all honorable and

¹⁶Report, 1850, p. 5.

¹⁷Ibid., 5-6.

¹⁸Brownlow's Knoxville Whig, Aug. 11, 1849. The announcement was signed by Samuel B. Cunningham, S. J. W. Lucky, John Blair, L. C. Hoss, A. E. Jackson, N. Gammon, and T. A. R. Nelson.

fair means" to secure subscriptions sufficient to save the charter.¹⁹

After diligent efforts to gain the necessary amount of subscriptions, however, there were less than \$200,000 subscribed by the first of November. Furthermore, indications were not lacking in the General Assembly that if the required amount of stock were not subscribed by January 1, 1850, there would be no extension of time.²⁰ Under these very trying circumstances, someone recalled the feat of the six McMinn County railroad promoters who had saved the charter of the Hiwassee railroad by a subscription (not *bona fide*) of some \$280,000.²¹ Adopting the same plan, thirty men banded themselves together as the "Washington County Railroad Company," on October 26, 1849, and, after a compact had been signed by all of the members, one of them was appointed to subscribe for the remainder of the stock to any amount not exceeding \$500,000.²² A. E. Jackson was elected to the presidency of this joint stock company. The name of the company was afterward changed to the "East Tennessee Rail Road Company," but it was popularly known as the "East Tennessee Stock Company."²³

The General Assembly, on November 6, 1849, surprised the East Tennessee and Virginia promoters by granting an extension of time to be allowed for the subscription of \$625,000 in stock from January 1, 1850 to January 1, 1852.²⁴ By the time of the passage of this act, however, the joint stock company had been organized and had subscribed for the required amount of stock. The stockholders met at Greeneville on November 21, 1849 and elected fifteen directors who in turn elected Dr. Samuel Blair Cunningham to the presidency of the company.²⁵ With this

¹⁹*Greeneville Spy*, in *ibid.*, Sept. 29, 1849.

²⁰*Report*, 1850, p. 6.

²¹J. B. Killebrew and J. M. Safford, *Introduction to the Resources of Tennessee* (Nashville, 1874), 311. See Holland, *op. cit.*, 91-2.

²²*Report*, 1850, p. 8.

²³*Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858.

²⁴*Acts*, 1849-50, p. 19.

²⁵The directors were: A. E. Jackson, Dr. Samuel Blair Cunningham, J. F. Broyles, J. S. Rhea, J. B. Hamilton, J. J. James, James A. Scruggs, William P. Reeves, J. C. Mitchell, Jacob Klepper, G. W. Telford, William K. Blair, William G. Gammon, Samuel Rhea, and John Lyle. *Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858. Dr. Cunningham, in addition to being a most energetic railroad builder, was a physician of the first order. It is said that his medical reputation extended to the European clinics. See S. R. Miller, "Pioneer Physicians of East Tennessee," in P. M. Hamer, ed., *The Centennial History of the Tennessee State Medical Association* (Nashville, 1930), 237-8.

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election of directors, the company was relieved of the problem of organization, and was initiated into the vastly more perplexing problems contingent upon the construction of a railroad through a section which was, in the main, antagonistic toward such an enterprise.

The newly elected directors did not have long to wait before they encountered trouble, and the first controversy arose within the ranks of the stockholders. Certain of these objected, in no uncertain terms, to the control which the "East Tennessee Stock Company" had exercised in the election of the directors, pointing to the fact that a by-law had been adopted which exempted the company from payment of fifty cents per share at the time of subscription. When we consider the fact that all of the fifteen directors were members of the joint stock company, and furthermore, that Samuel B. Cunningham, president; E. S. Mathes, treasurer; and William G. Gammon, secretary, were also members of that company, the complaint seems reasonable.²⁶

On the other hand, however, it seems that the individual stockholders could ill-afford to complain of the joint stock company's vote upon grounds of non-payment of the initial payment on the stock, in view of the fact that neither had many of the individual stockholders paid such instalment, the payment of it having been waived. It was accordingly suggested by some of the proponents of the joint stock company that the company should not be allowed to vote until it had paid the fifty cents per share instalment, provided that the individual stockholders paid the instalment on the stock held by them. In July, at a meeting of stockholders in Greeneville to pass upon this suggestion, they "disclaimed any such right." In other words, they did not care to pay the instalment for the privilege of debarring the joint stock company from voting.²⁷ Thus the thirty men constituting the company were left in command of the destinies of the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad.

One of the first acts of the board of directors was to petition the legislature to ratify the proceedings of the commissioners, which had been somewhat irregular, and to declare the charter valid.²⁸ In accordance with this request, the General Assembly

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷*Report*, 1850, p. 8.

²⁸*Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858.

passed an act in which it was stated that, although there had been "defects and irregularities in the proceedings of the different boards of commissioners," the required amount of stock had been subscribed and the subscription was "declared to be a full compliance with the requirements of the charter."²⁹

Captain Lloyd Tilghman was appointed chief engineer, with instructions to get his associates and instruments and to come to Jonesboro. He and his assistants left New York on March 9, and arrived in Jonesboro on March 26. Assuming that he came to Jonesboro directly and with reasonable haste, the fact that seventeen days were required for the journey emphasizes the need for the railroad which he had come to construct, along with other railroads to be linked together to form a connection between New York and the Southwest.³⁰

Fortunately the press of East Tennessee showed a pronounced inclination to support the project. The maiden number of the *Rail Road Journal*, under the auspices of Samuel Greer and James L. Sparks, editors and proprietors, made its debut in Jonesboro on April 6, 1850. According to its weekly repeated testimony it was "Devoted to Internal Improvements, Agriculture, Education, Mechanic Arts, News, and General Intelligence—Neutral in Politics and Religion." The latter it may have been, but its neutrality did not extend to the matter of railroad construction, especially that of the East Tennessee and Virginia which was continuously referred to as "our Rail Road," as witness the following:³¹

If it was an earthquake, [a rumor was current that one had occurred in East Tennessee] it is designed to rouse up the counties below to the importance of taking stock in the East Ten. & Va. R. Road. Come gentlemen of Jefferson, Grainger, Sevier and Claiborne attend to your part of the Railroad and see that sufficient stock is taken in it to build your share, or the repetition of this warning may leave you neither room for Railroads or standing ground!

In the same issue, the following straightforward statement of editorial policy appeared: "The great object of the Journal will be to advocate the cause of the E. T. & Va. R. R. and this

²⁹*Acts*, 1849-50, pp. 491-2.

³⁰*Report*, 1850, p. 11.

³¹*Rail Road Journal* (Jonesboro), Oct. 26, 1850.

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shall engage our attention until the work is under full way."³²

The *Greeneville Spy* turned its espionage to the advantage of the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad at every opportunity.³³ The redoubtable "Parson" Brownlow, too, gave his vehement blessing to that road and to the East Tennessee and Georgia (successor of the Hiwassee) and made them beneficiaries of editorial benedictions in *Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, the while denouncing the *Knoxville Register* as an "anti-rail-road" sheet.³⁴ Also the *Knoxville Plebeian* seems modestly to have sponsored the cause of the East Tennessee and Virginia.³⁵

From the time of Tilghman's arrival at Jonesboro until September 1, 1850, he and his assistants made some 476 miles of experimental surveys. Thereupon the stockholders, by resolution, requested the directorate to put under contract any part of the road which they believed "compatible with the interest of the Stockholders, and within the means they may be able to collect and command, after receiving the report of the Chief Engineer, locating said road." The directors took advantage of this manifest interest on the part of the stockholders in the immediate beginning of operations by calling for an instalment of one dollar per share to be paid in forty days.³⁶

It was planned that the work be started at or near McBee's Ferry rather than at either of the termini. This decision was made in view of the fact that it would be necessary to wait at one terminus for the Virginia and Tennessee and at the other for the East Tennessee and Georgia, which at that time had no funds to build the road further than Blair's Ferry (Loudon). Also the company had pledged to expend money, as far as practicable, where it was raised.³⁷

The contract for the first section of forty miles was taken by S. B. Ferguson. One-half of the contract price was to be paid in stock of the company, and the other half, in cash. Where the optimistic directors expected to get the latter is problematical.³⁸

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Greeneville Spy*, in *ibid.*, April 27, 1850; *Greeneville Spy*, Apr. 17, 1851.

³⁴*Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, July 21, Aug. 11, Sept. 29, 1849; May 26, 1855; April 3, 1858. Any statement by Brownlow about the *Register* must be taken advisedly.

³⁵*Knoxville Plebeian*, in *Rail Road Journal* (Jonesboro), Oct. 26, 1850.

³⁶*Report*, 1850, p. 12.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 13; *Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858.

³⁸*Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858.

State aid had been refused to the East Tennessee and Virginia,³⁹ and Knoxville, the largest city on the route of the embryonic railroad was sadly remiss in support of it, moral or financial. President Cunningham and Chief Engineer Tilghman had gone to that city to enlist aid. Although their coming had been advertised well, the people of Knoxville and Knox County did not even turn out to hear the railroad officials speak, much less subscribe for any stock.⁴⁰ Grainger, a county which the railroad was not to touch, had subscribed more than Knox County through which the road would run for some fifteen miles and whose county seat was to be the more important of the termini.⁴¹

It was thought, however that if the counties through which the railroad was to pass (excepting Knox) should grade it and prepare it for the rails, state aid would be forthcoming more certainly than if the directors merely waited for a new session of the legislature without exerting themselves in their own behalf. As Cunningham said, in 1850:⁴²

Having graded the road out of our own private means, Tennessee will present a monstrous anomaly, when compared with any or all other sister States, should she persist in such a miserable novercal policy—alike humbling to State pride, and in opposition to the interests of the State, should she refuse her help.

Doubtless, had the subscribers paid their subscriptions promptly when called for, the company should have had little difficulty in effecting the above plan. However, they did not, and Cunningham complained:⁴³

The want of punctuality on the part of subscribers, is a grievous drawback which must ever be kept in view, and compel any Directory who expect to meet their engagements, to act slowly and with caution. . . . The want of punctuality may be traced to the loose manner of doing business in our country—always employing credit.

Every day, except Sunday, from October 21 to November 25, four energetic apostles of the railroad were scheduled to address

³⁹*Greeneville Spy*, in *Rail Road Journal* (Jonesboro), April 13, 1850.

⁴⁰*Rail Road Journal* (Jonesboro), Sept. 28, 1850.

⁴¹*Knoxville Plebeian*, in *ibid.*, Oct. 26, 1850.

⁴²*Report*, 1850, p. 13.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 15.

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people of upper East Tennessee gathered at cross road stores and other convenient places, pointing out the advantages to be derived from the construction of the railroad and endeavoring to gain aid for the enterprise.⁴⁴

At the time of the second annual meeting of the stockholders, November 29, 1850, the "bona fide subscription" (that exclusive of stock held by the "East Tennessee Stock Company") amounted to only \$250,000. Of this amount, furthermore, only a very small proportion had been paid.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, on March 30, 1851, the ground was first broken "in the midst of doubting thousands," about one mile east of McBee's Ferry. The beginning of work on the East Tennessee and Virginia seems to have attracted considerable attention, but to have engendered little expectation or hope among the residents of East Tennessee of its completion. It was freely predicted by smug, conservative farmers along the proposed route that "the acorns had yet to grow the trees to make the ties."⁴⁶

Even the staunch advocates of the project realized that without state aid there was little reason to hope for success. Accordingly they began a campaign for the election of "sound, able, efficient Railroad men" to the next General Assembly.⁴⁷ A. E. Jackson and Samuel Rhea were sent by the company to the new legislature as agents to solicit the urgently needed aid. In this quest they were partially successful. On January 15, 1852, the General Assembly passed an act authorizing the governor to issue to the East Tennessee and Virginia coupon bonds to an amount not exceeding \$300,000 to be used in the construction of bridges. These bonds, when issued, were to constitute a lien, automatically and without a deed, upon all of the stock of the company. Furthermore, before \$100,000 of the bonds should be issued, it would be necessary for the directors to have put forty miles of the road under contract; the work must be progressing, and there must be bona fide subscriptions to an amount necessary to grade and put the culverts on that section. The \$200,000 remaining was to be

⁴⁴The complete schedule may be found in the *Rail Road Journal* (Jonesboro), Oct. 26, 1850. The four men were: Col. Haynes, Col. Thornburg, O. P. Temple, and Col. A. E. Jackson.

⁴⁵*Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷*Greeneville Spy*, Apr. 17, 1851.

issued in two equal instalments, subject to like requirements.⁴⁸

By the end of 1851, three miles of the road had been graded, and \$15,000 had been collected, apparently by a process closely analogous to the extraction of teeth, from the subscribers. The stockholders had met in annual convention on November 27, 1851, and had made a considerable revision in the directorate. Cunningham, however, had been, for the third time, elected president, and Gammon had been re-elected secretary and treasurer.⁴⁹

During the following year, the General Assembly passed a general act for the aid of railroad companies to the extent of \$8,000 for each mile of road constructed. The bonds issued under this act were to mature in forty years, and the recipient companies were required to pay interest semi-annually.⁵⁰

The directors, having calculated that the financial condition of the company was such as would warrant the issuance of the first \$100,000 of state bonds for bridge construction, sent A. E. Jackson to Nashville to attempt to secure them.⁵¹ He was successful, and immediately proceeded to New York to market them.⁵² There he was eminently successful, succeeding in disposing of one-half of the bonds at a premium of eight per cent. The remaining bonds were afterward sold at the same figure. Furthermore, the citizens of Washington County, on August 14, 1852, voted a subscription of \$50,000 in the stock of the company. The financial affairs of the East Tennessee and Virginia were decidedly on the increase. Before the end of the year almost the entire road had been put under contract.⁵³

The annual meeting of the stockholders convened at Greeneville on November 25, 1852. At this meeting the board of directors was retained intact, and again Cunningham was chosen to lead the company. Gammon was re-elected secretary and treasurer. Tilghman, chief engineer, however, resigned and was replaced temporarily by Robert C. Morris who took charge of the western end of the road. In February of the following year Montgomery Lynch was appointed chief engineer. Under his

⁴⁸*Acts*, 1851-52, pp. 76-7.

⁴⁹*Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858.

⁵⁰*Acts*, 1851-52, ch. CLI.

⁵¹*Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858.

⁵²*Greeneville Spy*, July 5, 1852.

⁵³*Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858.

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direction the grade was reduced to a maximum of sixty-eight feet to the mile.⁵⁴

About this time the directors began to realize the desirability of having completed the grading between McBee's Ferry and Knoxville before the East Tennessee and Georgia should be completed to the latter point—its northern terminus.⁵⁵ But in the fall of 1854 a bar presented itself to this contemplated construction work in the form of what, in the legal phraseology applicable to common carriers, would be called "an act of God." This was the epidemic of cholera in Knoxville. From the first to the fourth of September there were, in the small city of Knoxville, some thirty deaths from this dread disease. Of the epidemic, the *Kingston Gazetteer* had the following to say: "Knoxville is nearly abandoned, there being scarcely help enough to lay out and bury the dead—public houses closed and Newspaper publication ceased except Extras published by W. G. Brownlow who says if he dies it will be at his post."⁵⁶ For the entire period of the epidemic, sixty-six deaths were reported in Knoxville, and more than one hundred in East Tennessee.⁵⁷ Workers on the East Tennessee and Virginia left their work, causing a virtual suspension of building operations on the road.⁵⁸

Furthermore, the increased demand for labor and consequent high wage scale, the general advance in prices, and crop failure hindered the contractors in their work at this time. Instalments on stock were "sparsely paid" during this year and, on the whole, no year since the drawing of state bonds had presented so many difficulties to the East Tennessee and Virginia. During the year two directors, James F. Broyles and Joseph Shannon, resigned and were replaced by D. Kennedy and R. H. Davis.⁵⁹

One of the many difficulties which President Cunningham encountered was the depreciation of state bonds which the law did not allow to be sold for less than par value. Thus he was confronted by a situation similar to that in which J. G. M. Ramsey had been placed in 1849.⁶⁰ Cunningham, however,

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵*American Statesman* (Knoxville), July 6, 1853.

⁵⁶September 9, 1854.

⁵⁷*Kingston Gazetteer*, Sept. 30, 1854.

⁵⁸*Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰J. G. M. Ramsey, *Autobiography*, 26-8. See Holland, *op. cit.*, 101.

succeeded in contracting for iron for the remainder of the road to be paid for in state bonds at par.⁶¹ Probably this contract called for a price to be paid for the rails which would be enough in excess of the market price. Thus would the letter, if not the spirit, of the law be observed.

On July 4, 1855, at the time of the Knoxville "Jubilee" to celebrate the completion of the East Tennessee and Georgia, tracklaying was started in Knoxville on the East Tennessee and Virginia.⁶² By the end of the year 1855, the track had been laid from Knoxville to McBee's Ferry despite the fact that during the year the company met many reverses. Early in the year the work progressed satisfactorily,⁶³ but the winter was an especially severe one and consequently little construction work could be done. Prices, too, were at a high level and the outlay for equipments far exceeded \$10,000 per mile. State bonds, still under par, could not be sold. Stockholders were so delinquent in payment of instalments that it became necessary for the board to issue first mortgage bonds, after the state lien, to the amount of \$100,000 and these could be sold only at a liberal discount. The directors finally were forced to borrow money on their personal credit for use in building the railroad.⁶⁴

Nevertheless, under the indomitable leadership of Dr. Cunningham, the work went on steadily albeit slowly because of the many obstacles to be overcome. On February 23, 1856, the first trip was made on the East Tennessee and Virginia from Knoxville to New Market, a distance of twenty-four miles. According to Fleming, editor of the *Knoxville Register*, "an immense assemblage of old Jefferson's 'fair women and brave men'" were on hand to meet the train at New Market. John Netherland and Horace Maynard delivered addresses. Then, "having tarried long enough for the denizens to examine the wonderful proportions of the 'Iron horse' and to note his 'flesh-marks,' the train returned to Knoxville."⁶⁵ John Goforth about this time was made supervisor of the railroad.⁶⁶

Less than five months later the cars were running to Russellville, a distance of about fifty miles from Knoxville. A celebra-

⁶¹*Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858.

⁶²*Brownlow's Knoxville Whig*, May 26, 1855.

⁶³*Loudon Free Press*, Feb. 14, 1855.

⁶⁴*Knoxville Register*, May 27, 1858.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, Feb. 28, 1856.

⁶⁶*Greeneville Democrat*, June 22, 1859.

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tion was held at Russellville at which "the people were counted
 by the acre."⁶⁷ It was planned that the tracklaying should, for
 some time, end at this town, as a considerable amount of grad-
 ing remained to be done above that point. When the Virginia
 and Tennessee should be completed to the state line, tracklaying
 would begin there and proceed toward Russellville.⁶⁸ Thus the
 Virginia and Tennessee Railroad could be used to transport rails
 from the East.⁶⁹

During the fall of 1856, the Virginia and Tennessee was built
 to Bristol.⁷⁰ The East Tennessee and Georgia had been com-
 pleted to Knoxville in June of the preceding year.⁷¹ This placed
 the East Tennessee and Virginia in a peculiar, and a very un-
 pleasant, position. It was the only uncompleted link in a great
 combination of railroads designed to be a highway joining the
 Northeast and the Southwest. Naturally the East Tennessee
 and Virginia Railroad, under such circumstances, was the butt
 of many unpleasant remarks; the more rapid construction of
 the road was urged on every hand; and, all in all, the company
 had a most miserable time from the fall of 1856 until the time
 of its completion.⁷²

Very early in 1857, there remained a gap of some seventy
 miles in the road. It was expected that by fall the line would
 be extended to Jonesboro.⁷³

The panic of 1857 added to the never-ending succession of
 obstacles to the success of the railroad. The "hard times" were
 reflected in changes in the personnel of the company. In May,
 Montgomery Lynch, chief engineer, resigned. William G. Gam-
 mon relinquished the office of secretary and treasurer which
 he had held since the organization of the company. A. E. Jack-
 son and Joseph Henderson resigned from the directorate. Lynch
 was succeeded by C. A. Mee and J. A. Aiken; Gammon, by John
 Keys;⁷⁴ Jackson by E. Davis. A. A. Broyles was elected to
 replace Henderson, but he refused to shoulder the tempestuous
 duties of a director, and there remained a vacancy in the board

⁶⁷*Knoxville Register*, Aug. 7, 1856.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, July 17, 1856.

⁶⁹*Lynchburg Virginian*, in *ibid.*, Aug. 21, 1856.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹*Knoxville Register*, June 28, 1855.

⁷²*Lynchburg Virginian*, in *ibid.*, Sept. 11, Sept. 25, 1856; *Daily Gazette* (Nash-
 ville), in *ibid.*, Apr. 30, 1857.

⁷³*Knoxville Register*, Feb. 12, 1857.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, May 21, 1857.

until the next meeting of the stockholders. William Brazleton was appointed superintendent of the lower end of the road.⁷⁵

At a special meeting of the stockholders, in the latter part of the year, the board was authorized to issue \$300,000 in second mortgage bonds. These were to be used as collateral security in the raising of \$100,000 to aid in the completion of the grading.⁷⁶

The work progressed steadily, though slowly, and by June, 1857, there were seventy-eight miles in operation. On the northeastern end of the line trains were running from Bristol to a station on the west side of the Watauga River, twenty miles away. At the other end, they were running from Knoxville to Bull's Gap, a distance of fifty-eight miles.⁷⁷

Although the East Tennessee and Virginia was used chiefly for local traffic, it was possible at this time to make a through trip from Knoxville to Bristol using the railroads to its full extent. This was accomplished by transferring the passengers to a stage at Bull's Gap, and driving this along the right-of-way of the railroad to the point on the Watauga where the track started again, at which point the passengers again boarded the train. The last portion of the road to be completed was the Bull's Gap section, and so was a part of the staging until the completion of the railroad. Of this section, John McGaughey later said: ". . . and perhaps the traveler who was compelled to encounter the mud holes, in going from one point to the other will never forget Bull's Gap."⁷⁸

Due to this unfortunate feature the hybrid railroad-stage coach line lost many through passengers. Travelers from New Orleans and the Southwest, wishing to avoid the staging, went by rail to Vicksburg, and from there by steamer to Memphis, taking the railroad from that point to New York, via Louisville and Cincinnati.⁷⁹

The original estimate of the cost of the entire railroad was \$835,853. With this in mind, it is interesting to review the cost of the railroad until 1857. The whole cost of the road and equipment had been \$2,153,748.47; of which \$1,054,390.25 had been

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, May 27, 1858.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, June 11, 1857.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, May 27, 1858.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, May 6, 1858.

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expended for iron and equipment, and \$1,099,358.22 for the grading of the roadway.⁸⁰

On November 26, 1857, the stockholders met at Blountville and re-elected the former board, adding John White to fill the vacancy caused by the non-acceptance of A. A. Broyles. Cunningham was "triumphantly re-elected" to the presidency, despite a secret attempt which had been made to oust him.⁸¹ Brazleton resigned as superintendent and Joseph Sevier who, until that time had been a conductor on the road, was appointed in his stead. C. A. Mee was elected chief engineer.⁸²

Throughout the winter, in mud and water, every effort was made to lay track at the eastern end of the gap in the line, and to continue the grading of all ungraded points between Bull's Gap and Greeneville.⁸³ On March 20, 1858, the trains began to run to Greeneville, and it was expected that the road would be completed by May of that year.⁸⁴ At this time the eighteen mile gap in the East Tennessee and Virginia was the only break in railroad connections between Memphis and New York.⁸⁵

Shortly before the track had reached Greeneville, the citizens of that town held a meeting and determined to inaugurate the completion of the railroad with a "Grand Railroad Celebration." They invited "all who are desirous of mingling with us, in the contemplated Celebration, not only in the adjoining counties, but in adjacent States, from one end of the great line to the other."⁸⁶

While preparations for the celebration were in progress, the track crept steadily toward the center of the gap. On midnight of May 6 the last shovel full of dirt was thrown to complete the grading.⁸⁷ On May 14, 1858, two and one-half miles west of Blue Springs, the last spike was driven by President Cunningham.⁸⁸ Excursion trains left Knoxville and Bristol and passengers were carried at half fare to the scene. Apparently this event was considered something of a social affair. Fleming

⁸⁰*Senate Journal Appendix*, 1857-58, p. 63.

⁸¹*Abingdon Virginian*, in *Knoxville Register*, Nov. 19, 1857.

⁸²*Knoxville Register*, Dec. 10, 1857; May 27, 1858.

⁸³*Ibid.*, May 27, 1858.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, Mar. 18, 1858.

⁸⁵*Chattanooga Advertiser*, Mar. 18, 1858.

⁸⁶*Knoxville Register*, Mar. 18, 1858.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, May 27, 1858.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*; *Sunday Times* (Chattanooga), May 31, 1858.

facetiously remarked: "Of course it will be expected (though we have received no information to that effect) that every young man will be charged *double* fare unless he take a lady with him, or makes an honest effort to do so."⁸⁹

The last rail was laid with impressive ceremony, after which there was an address by John McGaughey. This address is interesting, quite apart from any connection with the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad, for its bombastic phraseology and its confusing number and variety of historical allusions. The following passage from this classic of the mixed metaphor is typical of the whole: "... and you, Mr. President, Company, Directors, Engineers and Contractors must feel that the Rubicon which took longer than the siege of Troy, is crossed. And our fellow citizens in upper East Tennessee after a bondage of 88 years, since the germ of a civil community was first planted upon the banks of the beautiful Watauga, have comparatively, speaking, crossed the Jordan to till the land, that can now be made to flow with milk and honey."⁹⁰

The Greeneville Convention, held on June 3, 1858, unlike the Knoxville celebration in 1855 staged in honor of the completion of the East Tennessee and Georgia, seems to have been an unqualified success.⁹¹ And so, while the deservedly happy president and his aides are imbibing lemonade and listening to the "Knoxville Military Brass Band" and to extravagant speeches in their honor, we conclude our study of them and of the East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad, their handiwork.

This one hundred and thirty mile railroad was built under more adverse conditions than was any other early railroad in East Tennessee, and possibly under as unfavorable financial conditions as were encountered by any railroad which was ultimately constructed. Friends of the road were told that "the acorns had yet to grow the trees to make the ties," and yet seven years and forty-five days after the breaking of the ground the last rail was laid. These seven years were filled with discouragements, difficulties and near-disasters, which ever threatened to bring the project to an abrupt and premature end. It was largely due to the perseverance and never-failing energy of Dr. Cunningham that the company was guided safely through these

⁸⁹*Knoxville Register*, May 13, 1858.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, May 27, 1858.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, June 10, 1858. See Holland, *op. cit.*, 104-5.

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trying times. Certainly the completion of the East Tennessee and Virginia may be counted a triumph, and one well deserved, over countless difficulties which seemed at the time insuperable and which seem, even in retrospect, to have been formidable indeed.

The completed East Tennessee and Virginia Railroad was a complement of the East Tennessee and Georgia and increased greatly the traffic and general usefulness of the latter. These two railroads formed indispensable links in a chain of railroads which constituted a direct air-line from Washington to Chattanooga, connecting at the latter city with railroads to Atlanta, Nashville, Memphis and Mobile; which railroads, in turn, connected at Atlanta with lines to Pensacola, Augusta, Charleston, Montgomery and Savannah; and at Memphis, with lines to Vicksburg and New Orleans.⁹² Accordingly the East Tennessee and Virginia was hailed by Union-loving East Tennesseans as the savior of the Union. The following appeared in a Knoxville newspaper: "The completion of this route is not merely the union of Knoxville with Bristol, but the binding together of the North and the South with a bond indissoluble."⁹³ That the railroad did not have this effect is, of course, universally known. The extreme strategic importance of the line of railroad formed by this road and the East Tennessee and Georgia during the struggle that followed, however, is not so generally recognized. But that is another story.

⁹²W. E. Dodd, *Expansion and Conflict* (New York, 1915), 191. A map, based on Lloyd's map of 1860, of railroads in operation that year.

⁹³*Knoxville Register*, May 20, 1858.