

Civil War Echoes at the Tennessee

BY BILL SCHAFFER AND
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History and Geography

Over 50 years ago, in 1961, the Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum (TVRM) was founded by a group of Chattanooga-area railfans. Most of these guys were members of the Atlanta Chapter of the National Railway Historical Society, who were tired of driving over 200 miles round trip on pre-Interstate highways just to attend the monthly meetings. A couple of years after TVRM was formed, one of the founders, Paul Merriman, purchased steam locomotive No. 12 from the dieselizing Kentucky & Tennessee Railroad of Stearns, Ky.

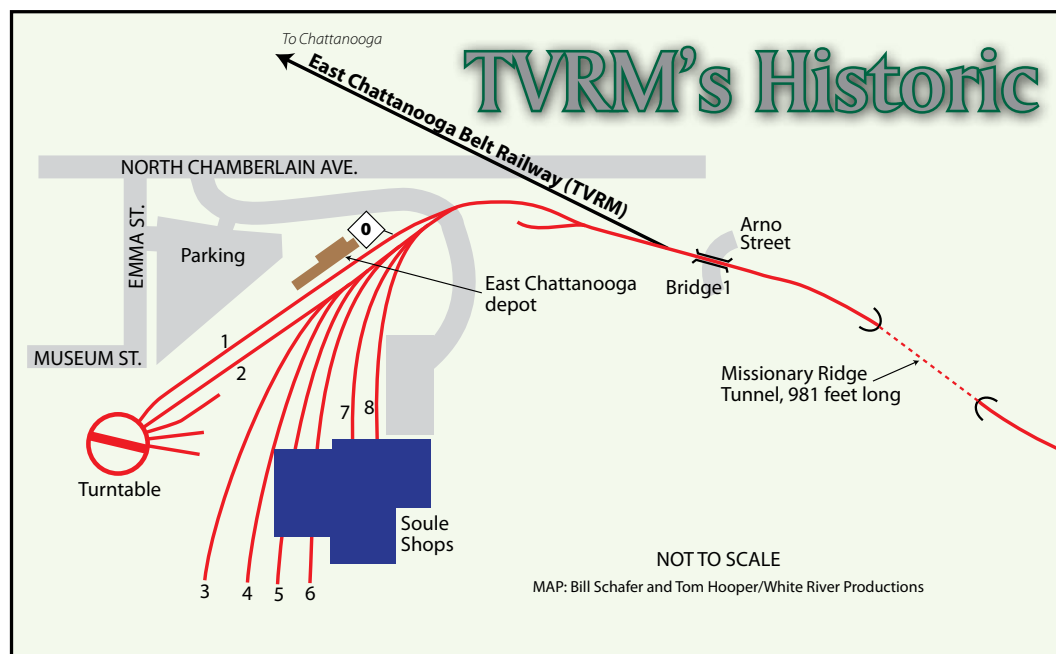
Before steaming from Stearns to her new home in Chattanooga, K&T 12 was repainted as Southern 4501 in the black freight scheme. Southern Railway aficionados of a certain age know what happened next—volunteers gave 4501 an overhaul at Lucey Boiler Works. She emerged in sylvan green and gold passenger colors in 1966, and that fall, 4501 powered an excursion train of heavyweight cars on a 59-day, 2,800-mile odyssey throughout much of the Southern system. This event inaugurated what would become the 28-year Southern (and later Norfolk Southern) Steam Program.

The 4501, Merriman, and TVRM quickly became favorites of Southern's new president, Graham Claytor, the genie who made many of the nascent museum's dreams come true. Among the dreams was enough right-of-way and track in the Chattanooga area where the museum's equipment could be stored and restored, and where trains could be operated for the enjoyment of the public and the delight of TVRM members. Southern Railway leased or donated over three miles of unused right-of-way between East Chattanooga and Jersey (all within the Chattanooga city limits) to TVRM, which laid track, rebuilt bridges, and constructed yards. TVRM began operating trains over the full three miles in 1978.

This right-of-way had lain fallow since July 1954, when Southern opened a new heavy-duty double-track main line three miles from Jersey to Citico Junction (the north end of today's DeButts Yard). The new alignment redirected trains from Knoxville and Atlanta conveniently into the yard and onto subsidiary Cincinnati, New Orleans & Texas Pacific, offered generous clearances to accommodate beefier rolling



Southern Railway's VM Tower is seen in this 1915 view several hundred feet west of Missionary Ridge Tunnel. In 1912, Southern straightened and double-tracked its main line between Chattanooga and Ooltewah except through the tunnel. VM Tower was manned by round-the-clock operators, who controlled train movements over the two main line tracks that converged at each end of the tunnel. The home signal for northbound trains, for example, was an upper-quadrant semaphore behind the photographer's right shoulder. When the signal was in the "stop" position, a switch point derail opened to divert to the ditch any trains that did not heed the signal. The lower-quadrant semaphores at the tower indicated whether or not a passing train needed to pick up train orders. The three men in the middle of the row all worked as operators at VM Tower: from left to right, Ira K. Hall, Calvin Cash, and Fred Redwine (who later became a local attorney). Some time later, possibly in the 1930s, control over movements through the tunnel was transferred to Citico Tower near downtown Chattanooga, and VM Tower was closed. TVRM collection.



Valley Railroad Museum

stock, and featured Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) for more flexible train operation.

The old alignment was part of the East Tennessee & Georgia's Chattanooga Branch. After Southern's formation in 1894, the company straightened many of the ET&G's curves, added a second main track, and constructed stouter bridges. But one serious shortcoming was never remedied: the ante-bellum, single-track, 981-foot "keyhole" tunnel piercing Missionary Ridge. Not only was the tunnel incapable of accommodating equipment exceeding AAR Plate "C" (e.g., a 1950-era standard boxcar or first-generation diesel), but the double-track main line was obliged to revert to single track before traversing the bore. What was an untenable bottleneck for a modern Class I railroad in 1954 became a valuable attraction for TVRM.

This year, 2013, sits squarely in the center of 150th anniversary commemorations of the Civil War. Looking back, 1863 was a sad time for the Confederacy in the Chattanooga area. By the end of the year, the city was occupied by Union forces, which took over all of the area's railroads. The ET&G had been a source of critical transportation for the Confederates, and after 1863, came under control of the United States Military Railroad (USMRR). The ET&G formed part of the vital logistics network supplying Union General W. T. Sherman's army, which began its march to Atlanta from Chattanooga in 1864 (see the "Sherman uses the ET&G" section beginning

on page 11 in the ET&G feature in this issue).

Few have remembered, or are aware of, the role played by the ET&G throughout the hostilities. Civil War scholar, railroad historian, and TVRM volunteer Mark Brainard has amassed a chronology of events that focusses on the ET&G, particularly the three miles operated by TVRM (see "Chronology of Civil War Events 1861-1865", page 14).

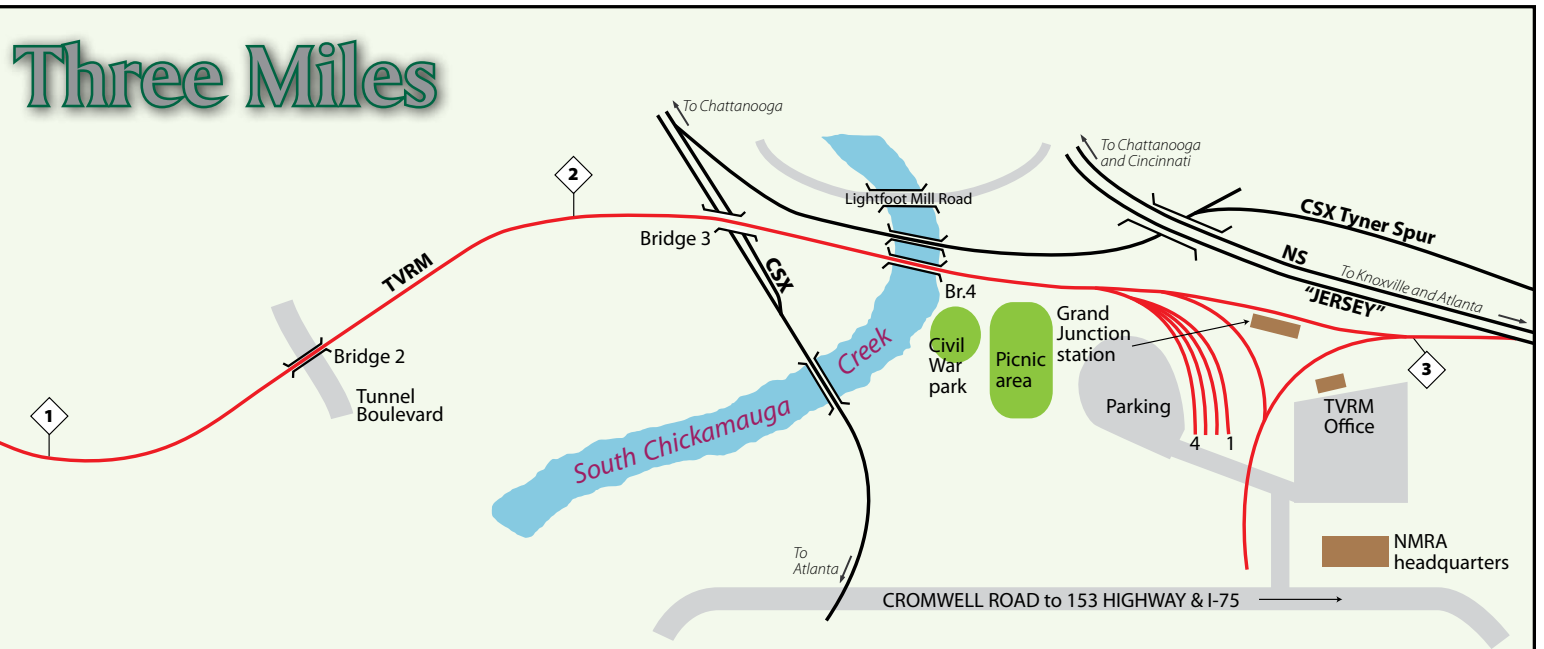
Some orientation (see map on page 12): both the ET&G and Georgia-owned Western & Atlantic approached Chattanooga from the east.

The W&A, having been built first, followed South Chickamauga Creek around the north face of Missionary Ridge before reaching the city. ET&G reached Chattanooga more directly, crossing South Chickamauga Creek on a three-arch stone bridge, passing over the W&A on a shorter stone bridge, and threading Missionary Ridge through the newly-completed Whiteside Tunnel. Just east of downtown, the ET&G once again crossed the W&A on a wood trestle.

Not only was the ET&G line more direct from South Chickamauga Creek to the city (about two miles shorter), it also crossed the creek only once, while the W&A bridged it thrice. In time of war, small efficiencies and elimination of vulnerabilities sometimes count for a lot.



The 4501 is arriving at her new home of Chattanooga on June 6, 1964. Train is crossing Tennessee River at Tenbridge on CNO&TP. JOHN W. CONIGLIO PHOTO





Southern/TVRM 630 crosses South Chickamauga Creek eastbound in spring 2012. Visible beyond the concrete piers supporting 630 and her train are stone piers from an earlier ETV&G bridge that was removed when the Southern modernized and relocated the right-of-way around 1912. The stone pier partially obscured in the center of the picture is believed to rest on the westernmost foundation of the original ET&G stone arch bridge that existed during the Civil War. CASEY THOMASON PHOTO

Discover the Civil War past

On your next visit to the Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum in Chattanooga, Tenn., take a few minutes to check out some vestiges of Civil War railroading.

From the Grand Junction parking lot, walk down the path to the west (when you leave the parking lot you will be very close to the location of "Rover," the junction of the connection track built between the ET&G and W&A in 1861 and again in 1864), parallel to the TVRM main line, to the east bank of South Chickamauga Creek. There, in a clearing, you will find a short segment of track closely resembling that of the East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad circa 1861. The 5-foot-gauge track is also laid on the original ET&G roadbed.

Nearby is a length of rail twisted around the trunk of a tree, demonstrating one of the track-wrecking techniques common to both North and South. By heating the rail and bending it severely, it was no longer useful as track material. The large rolling mill constructed by the Union in Chattanooga near the end of the War was intended to reroll damaged rail such as this.

On the bluff south of the ET&G roadbed, the Union constructed two blockhouses after



The roadbed of the Dalton Junction connection as it appeared in early 2013, looking west. The stakes indicate the location of some timber pilings. The TVRM-ET&G main line is at left; cars are stored on the siding at McCarty. The track at right is CSX Tyner Branch, constructed by NC&StL to serve Volunteer Army Ammunition Plant at Tyner during World War II. MARK BRAINARD PHOTO



The reconstruction of a short segment of Civil War-era track on original roadbed of East Tennessee & Georgia Railroad is just one of many historical presentations found at TVRM. This one is on the east bank of South Chickamauga Creek (visible in background). Laid to 5-foot gauge, the rail is appropriate for the Civil War era and is spiked directly to untreated cross-ties. Behind the trees to the left is a small bluff overlooking the location of the ET&G bridge and Dalton Junction. This view from the TVRM main line was taken in March 2013. BILL SCHAFFER PHOTO

the Battle of Chattanooga (Nov. 25, 1863). The blockhouses were manned by Union soldiers, one with a clear view of the W&A bridge spanning Chickamauga Creek, and the other a clear view of the ET&G bridge as well as Dalton Junction across the creek (see photo, page 18). The purpose of the blockhouses and troops was to prevent damage to these important rail facilities by Confederate saboteurs.

Also note the high-water mark from the flood of 1867, well above the level of the ET&G track.

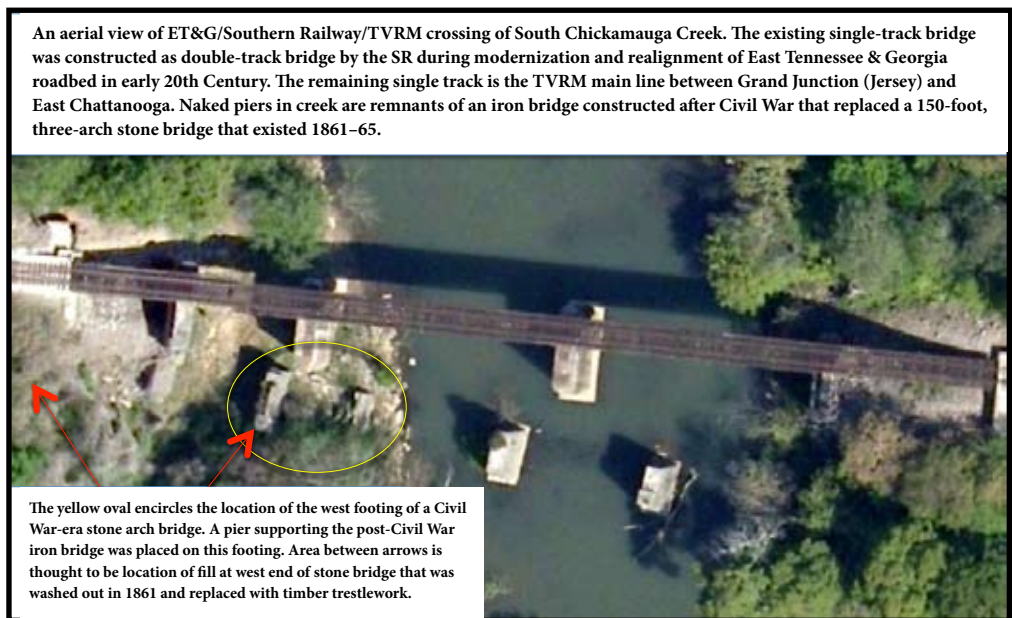
If you walk to the bank of the creek, you will notice several naked stone piers that once supported the iron railroad bridge that replaced the Civil War era stone arch bridge sometime after the War. At the far (west) side of the creek, you should be able to discern an outsize footing for the westernmost pier. This footing is believed to be where the west end of the original stone arch bridge was situated. The distance between the footing and the existing embankment to the west was originally an earthen fill that was washed out in 1861, derailling an eastbound passenger train. The fill was replaced with timber trestlework, which was damaged by retreating Confederate forces after the Battle of Chattanooga (Nov. 25, 1863), only to be hastily repaired the next day by Union troops so that General Ulysses Grant and his entourage could cross the creek on horseback.

Although inaccessible to the public,

much of the roadbed of the Dalton Junction connection is still visible. When riding the westbound *Missionary Ridge Local*, look for the roadbed north of the TVRM main line just after crossing South Chickamauga Creek Bridge. Mark Brainard has cleared undergrowth to make the roadbed more evident and has placed wooden stakes in some of the locations where timber pilings supported the track structure constructed by the USMRR in early 1864. The Dalton Junction connection was short-lived. It was an inefficient switchback operation, and the crush of rail traffic feeding General Sherman's army in north Georgia

spurred the USMRR to build the connection to the W&A at Rover later that year. Unfortunately, in the 150 years since the Civil War, the land between TVRM and the W&A has been modified so that identifying the exact location of the Rover connection is not feasible.

Mark Brainard and Bill Schaffer would like to recognize and thank James H. Ogden III, historian at Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park, for all his research assistance, shared knowledge and friendship, without which these articles on the Civil War in the vicinity of the Tennessee Valley Railroad Museum would not have been possible.



An aerial view of ET&G/Southern Railway/TVRM crossing of South Chickamauga Creek. The existing single-track bridge was constructed as double-track bridge by the SR during modernization and realignment of East Tennessee & Georgia roadbed in early 20th Century. The remaining single track is the TVRM main line between Grand Junction (Jersey) and East Chattanooga. Naked piers in creek are remnants of an iron bridge constructed after Civil War that replaced a 150-foot, three-arch stone bridge that existed 1861-65.

The yellow oval circles the location of the west footing of a Civil War-era stone arch bridge. A pier supporting the post-Civil War iron bridge was placed on this footing. Area between arrows is thought to be location of fill at west end of stone bridge that was washed out in 1861 and replaced with timber trestlework.