

Rival Lines to Seacoast: Bitter Railroad War in East Tennessee Coming

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*Note: the **South and Western Railroad** was a prior name for the Carolina, Clinchfield and Ohio Railroad known prominently as the Clinchfield. Historians have recounted that George L. Carter, the leader in its development did not initially want his main competitor, the **Southern Railway** to know the route of the new railroad across the Blue Ridge Mountains, thus the generic name "South & Western" was chosen rather than listing city or regional names as was a more common naming convention. In retaliation for the threat that this new shortcut through the mountains represented to Southern Railway's freight rates and territory, the Southern announced plans for a competing railway extension paralleling the route announced by Carter. This is the context for the story that follows.*

Probably never before in the history of Tennessee has there ever been a railroad war waged as is about to commence in upper East Tennessee between the Southern and South and Western (Clinchfield) systems.

These two systems have undertaken the construction of rival lines from Johnson City, Tennessee to points in North Carolina, where connections will be made giving a direct line from the heart of the iron and coal fields of East Tennessee to the ports of the Atlantic Coast line. The Southern's line will extend to Marion, NC, where connections will be made to the main line of the Southern while the South and Western line will run to Spruce Pine, where connections will be made to the Chester and Lenoir Railroad.

President Samuel Spencer announced several days ago that the Southern would shortly commence the construction of the line from Johnson City to Marion. At Marion this line will connect with the Southern main line and not only will give another direct link to the east, but will afford an opportunity for the development of the coal and iron resources of Upper East Tennessee and Southwest Virginia and will offer a direct line from that section to Charleston, South Carolina and other points on the Atlantic ocean.

The South and Western system is the reorganization of the old "Three C's" line which was started about fifteen years ago with the intention of building a great railway system, which would connect the cities of Chicago, Cincinnati, and Charleston. About one hundred miles of railroad was finished and put in operation and then the scheme fell through. For years a portion of the road extending from a point in Virginia above Bristol to Unaka Springs, TN was operated. (Note: the financial Panic of 1893 forced the Three C's Railway into bankruptcy).

Recently the road has been placed in the hands of a new company and with the intention of affording an outlet for the resources of Southwest Virginia

and East Tennessee to the Atlantic Ocean. Work was again started on the right-of-way. So far the road has been constructed and is in operation a distance of about sixty-eight miles southwest of Johnson City. The work is being done by the Carolina Company – a railroad contracting company, which was recently organized for the special purpose of finishing the job. A great deal of the work has been sublet and as a result the construction of the road has been progressing rapidly.

It is stated that the Southern Railway will start work within the next thirty days on its line. A preliminary survey of the route was made a couple of weeks ago but recently W. B. Crenshaw, one of the Southern's best engineers, was called to Johnson City and with two large surveying corps his men are going over the proposed line in the hope of reducing the grade.

It was stated sometime ago that the new line of the Southern and that of the South and Western would parallel one another through the mountains. A gentleman who recently went up the South and Western as far as it had been completed and who is now in the city, stated yesterday it would be impossible for the Southern to follow that route, in the event it was so desired, as the line was for a long distance in a deep gorge which was just wide enough to allow the one track. There are other natural obstacles and it is generally believed that Engineer Crenshaw and his corps will find a new route through the mountains.

In the route that was passed several weeks ago and which was thought to be accepted by the officials of the Southern, there were no less than nine tunnels to be bored through the Blue Ridge Mountains between Johnson City and Marion. Whether Mr. Crenshaw will change this or not is a question, but at any rate it is evident that the road will be rough and that there will be a good deal of heavy work on it.

Just what contractors will secure the work on it is not known. When Mr. Crenshaw makes his survey and reports to Chief Engineer Wells, bids for the work will probably be advertised for W. J. Oliver, the well known railroad contractor from Knoxville. Oliver has done a great deal of the Southern's work the past few years, but there will be some especially heavy work on this job. It is probable that other contractors will try and get into the game. A line of railway less than 100 miles in length with nine or more tunnels to erect would be considered a fine piece of work and when the bids for the job are opened every contractor of prominence in the south will no doubt be represented.

The construction of the two lines means much for Johnson City and the surrounding country. The South and Western line will enter the town over

the old “Three C’s” tracks between the city and the Carnegie Furnace, while the Southern’s line will come into the Southern’s mail line about a mile below the town or just opposite the new Soldier’s Home (*present VA Center – College of Medicine*).

Rich Mineral Section

The Southern has a connecting line at Johnson City from Embreeville, where there is a large furnace and iron and coal are found in abundance. There is much mineral property through that immediate section and it is thought that within the next two years the country will be opened up very similarly to the manner in which the Birmingham district was opened twenty or twenty-five years ago.

Washington County is one of the oldest counties in the state, is covered with mountains, which contain nearly every species of mineral. Jonesborough, the oldest town in Tennessee and which was at one time the capital of Tennessee, is the county seat, and is noted for its old and aristocratic citizens. It is in the center of the county and within a radius of fifteen miles of the little town there has been found minerals of every description which are being mined in paying quantities.

Those who have followed the history of other famous iron and coal districts predict great things for that section of East Tennessee which is soon to be penetrated by the new lines of railroad.