**Railroads**

By the 1820s, there was growing demand throughout the United States for a more efficient system of transportation. What was needed was a reliable, fast, and inexpensive form of transportation that worked on land, not water.

Work on steam-powered locomotives had been under way in England for several decades. There the world’s first steam powered railroad began operation in 1825. In America, port cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston were excited about the possibilities of rail transportation. In 1830, the new Baltimore and Ohio Railroad demonstrated its first steam-powered locomotive, the *Tom Thumb.*

In Georgia, cotton-marketing towns such as Athens and Forsyth were far from navigable rivers. Shopping cotton by wagon over rough dirt roads was slow and expensive. In periods of low rain, rivers, sometimes became too shallow for riverboats.

The invention of the railroad boosted Georgia’s development. Georgia’s first railroads were private businesses. Building rail transportation was very expensive, and the companies were limited by how much money they could borrow from investors. Because of this, Georgia’s General Assembly decided that they state should step in and become a partner in railroad building.

**The Coming of the Railroad to Georgia**

On Christmas Day of 1830, residents of Charleston, South Carolina, cheered as the small locomotive *Best Friend of Charleston* chugged off pulling two cars of passengers. This event marked the first regular train service in America.

In 1833, the track was completed from Charleston to Hamburg, South Carolina, just across the river from Augusta. But Augusta officials would not allow the line to continue across the bridge into Georgia. After all, this would give Charleston merchants and shippers direct access to Georgia’s rich cotton markets, by passing Augusta and Savannah.

Georgia needed its own rail transportation. In December 1833, Georgia General Assembly chartered two railroads. The Georgia Railroad Company was to build a railroad westward from Augusta to Madison, Eatonton, and Athens. The Central of Georgia Railroad was to extend from Savannah to Macon.

By 1838, track was completed from Augusta to Greensboro, and on to Madison and Athens three years later. The rail line from Savannah progressed more slowly, finally reached Macon in 1843.

**Atlanta and the Railroad**

In 1836, the General Assembly passed a law for building a state-owned railroad from Chattahoochee River in DeKalb County, north through Cherokee country to Ross’s Landing (Chattanooga) on the Tennessee River. Known as the Western and Atlantic (W&A) Railroad, this line would connect railroads from Augusta, Macon, Milledgeville, and Columbus with American’s interior.

The next year, surveyors determined the 138 mile route of the W&A. They located its southern end a few miles southeast of the Chattahoochee Rover. There they drove a stake into the ground and marked it “Terminus” (meaning “end”). This was the beginning of what one day would be the city of Atlanta. At the other end of the line, another great city developed- Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Terminus began to grow as construction of the W& Railroad began. On Christmas Eve 1842, a locomotive made the first urn, from Terminus to Marietta.

In 1845, the Georgia Railroad arrived from Augusta. Terminus was renamed “Marthasville” in honor of the daughter of ex-governor Wilson Lumpkin, a strong backer of the W&A. A year later, the Macon and Western Railroad linked Marthasville with the Central of Georgia Railroad from Savannah.

By 1847, town population reached 400. It was no longer a frontier village, and the name “Marthasville” didn’t’ seem like a food name for a big-time railroad center. The chief engineer of the Georgia Railroad suggested the name “Atlanta” (from “Atlantic” in W&A’s name). The inhabitants agreed and the General Assembly made it official.

In 1853 a fourth line, the Atlanta and West Point, was completed, linking Georgia’s rail system to Alabama. By 1860, Atlanta was a major railroad venter in the Deep South. The main link between the Atlantic seaboard and the Middle West, it was nicknamed the “Gate City.”