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ILLINOIS CENTRAL RR

“The Main Line of Mid-America”



↑ SWITCHING THE *SEMINOLE* – Two E-units normally sufficed for the *Seminole*, but heavy head-end traffic sometimes necessitated the addition of a third locomotive. When Jim Thorington took this picture on a beautiful fall morning in 1964, the southbound *Seminole* had just pulled into Terminal Station, and Frisco NW2 #262 had gone to work switching the train in preparation for its departure on Central of Georgia. The switching chores probably included setting out one of the E-units, which would head back to Chicago that evening on the northbound *Seminole*. (*Jim Thorington*)

In 1899, Illinois Central Railroad (“IC” or “Illinois Central”) made an unusual initial foray into Alabama. During that era, it obviously was critical for railroads to have reliable sources of coal for their steam locomotives and other needs, and toward that end, IC built an eight-mile branch from Winfield, Alabama to the Brilliant Coal Mine. Since the Brilliant Branch was isolated from the rest of the IC rail system, IC obtained trackage rights over Kansas City, Ft. Scott & Memphis Railroad, a Frisco predecessor, from Aberdeen, Mississippi to Winfield. The Brilliant Coal Mine supplied coal for IC’s lines in the South as well as New Orleans. This little “island railroad” came to be known as “The Orphan.”

Ten years later, in the spring of 1908, IC finished cobbling together a 215-mile extension from Jackson, Tennessee to Birmingham. IC laid 83 route miles of new line between Jackson and Birmingham, but the rest of the route was made up of trackage rights over other railroads. Leaving Jackson, IC’s Birmingham-bound trains would traverse three miles of new IC trackage from Jackson to Perry, Tennessee, 51 miles of Mobile and Ohio Railroad Company (“M&O”) trackage from Perry to Corinth, Mississippi,

80 miles of new IC trackage from Corinth to Haleyville, Alabama, 41 miles of Southern Railway trackage from Haleyville to Jasper, and 40 miles of Frisco trackage from Jasper to Birmingham.

IC initially joined the rest of Birmingham’s railroads in Union Station, and on May 30, 1908, it inaugurated through passenger service between Chicago and Savannah in conjunction with Central of Georgia Railway (“CofG”). Less than one year later, in April of 1909, it joined the mass exodus from Union Station to the brand new Terminal Station. Illinois Central moved its freight operations into East Thomas Yard along with St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad (“Frisco”), but the two railroads occupied separate parts of the yard and maintained separate roundhouses.

On June 16, 1909, IC purchased a controlling interest in CofG. CofG also utilized the classification yard and shops at East Thomas. On November 15, 1909, IC and CofG participated in the inaugural run of the popular *Seminole Limited*, which operated through Birmingham on its run between Chicago, St. Louis, and Jacksonville, Florida.