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## SEABOARD AIR LINE RR

### *“The Route of Courteous Service”*



↑ **BIG POWER FOR THE LITTLE “LOCAL”** — On a chilly February morning in 1966, SDP35 #1108 departs Birmingham Terminal “on time” at 7:30 a.m. with #6, the “Seaboard Local,” and a heavy consist of mail and express. (*J. David Ingles*)

As one of the last major railroads to build into Birmingham and one of the first to lose its identity, Seaboard Air Line Railroad (“SAL” or “Seaboard”) added a distinct Southern charm to the local railroad scene. Though never comparable in size or service to rival Southern or other larger railroads that served the Magic City, SAL’s relatively small footprint still made a large impression with the quality of its passenger and freight service during the “last golden era.”

Seaboard’s line into Birmingham was conceived by SAL President John Skelton Williams to compete with rivals Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company (“ACL”), which was attempting to gain control of Louisville and Nashville Railroad Company (“L&N”), and Southern Railway (“SR” or “Southern”). A resourceful Virginia entrepreneur, Williams had obtained a foothold in Alabama through his Georgia & Alabama Railway, connecting Montgomery to the port of Savannah and SAL’s primary north-south route to the Carolinas and Florida.

Buoyed by his recent success in central Alabama, Williams began piecing together a route to Birmingham. SAL already owned the former Seaboard Air-Line System’s route from Portsmouth, Virginia to Atlanta, Georgia, and connecting Birmingham with Atlanta would give Williams’ line important

access to the area’s vast mineral resources and iron and steel manufacturing, as well as through connections to the west.

What was to become the centerpiece for Williams’ plan was East & West Railroad (“E&W”), a 117-mile line operating from Cartersville, Georgia, through Rockmart and Cedartown to Pell City, Alabama and connecting with Southern Railway into Birmingham. Williams constructed a 43-mile connection between Howells (just west of Atlanta) and E&W at Rockmart, and then built 37 miles westward from Coal City, Alabama into Birmingham. This provided SAL with a 165-mile main line from Atlanta to Birmingham, plus several branches to coal and ore mines used to supply the Magic City’s growing iron and steel industry.

Arriving in Birmingham in 1904 as Seaboard Air Line Railway, SAL established a yard at 32nd Street and First Avenue, South. From there, the line was extended west another 1.2 miles to a terminus at 18th Street, South, serving various local businesses and SAL’s freight depot at 20th Street, South. Double track extended two miles eastward from 32nd Street Yard through Avondale, and was used jointly by SAL and Birmingham Belt Railroad, a local switching road owned by St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad (“Frisco”).