



CENTRAL CROSSINGS
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CENTRAL RAILWAY
 MODEL & HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION, INC.

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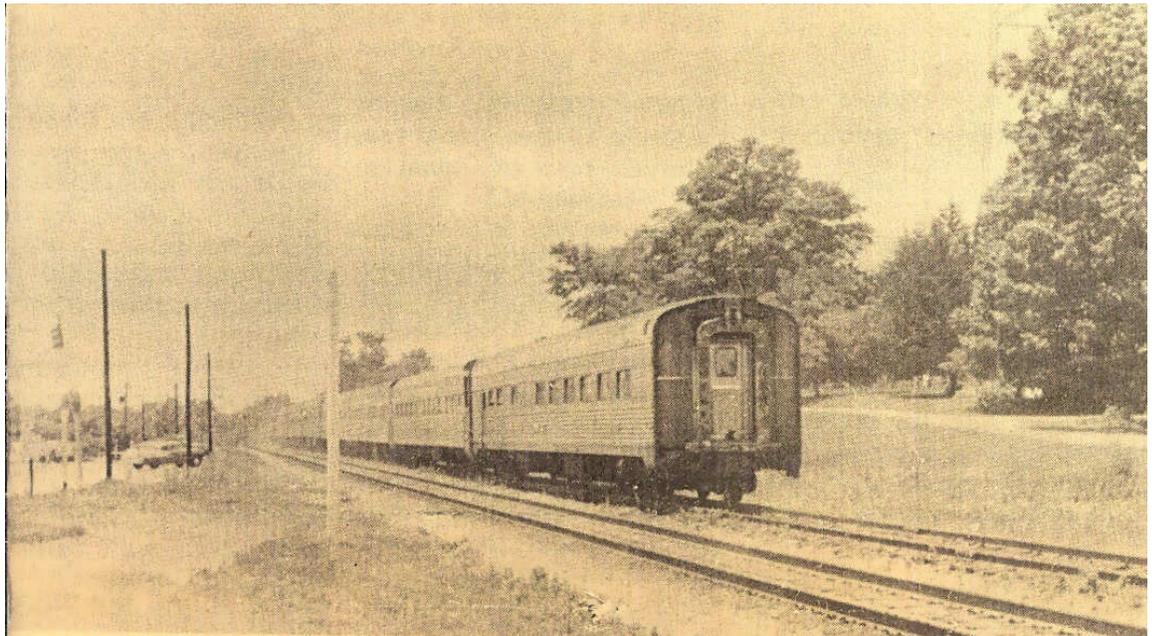
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CLASSIFICATION WHITE
CENTRAL, S.C.
&
THE PEACH QUEEN
 By Rob Seel



The above image is a scan of a front page photograph appearing in *The Messenger* newspaper of July 3, 1969. The original caption read, "Elimination of the "Flag Stop" schedule for the Peach Queen Special is being considered by railroad officials. About one passenger per week waves the train down, according to officials. Here the train goes through Central without stopping." (Photo courtesy of the Central Heritage Society)

Next Meeting:
Nov. 5, 2009
7:15 PM
 ~ ~ ~
CHRISTMAS
DINNER
at Bob Folsom's
House
Dec 3, 2009



In this Running Extra issue we present the CRM&HA's collective research of Central, South Carolina's Official Passenger Train, *The Peach Queen*. By no means exhaustive, what we have may be the most complete history of this particular train. Thanks to the many folks who contributed their insights, research, and memories, including Dale Reynolds, Mac McMillin, Beverly Cureton, the Central Heritage Society, Jim Kimble, Howard Garner, Craig Meyers, Ellis Simon, Martin K. O'Toole, the University of South Carolina, and the Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History.



CLASSIFICATION WHITE / RUNNING EXTRA

By Rob Seel

A few weeks ago I had a request from Tom Cloer, Central's Parks and Recreation Director. As the Town was going to copyright the seal I designed for them, they were

also going to have new entrance road signs made featuring the Seal. He asked me for color references since he wanted to make sure the train depicted was properly rendered.

When I designed the seal I had a generic Southern Railway passenger train in mind. But, somewhere along the way since, someone got the idea that the train depicted was the **Peach Queen** and declared it so. I was a bit surprised when Tom began asking me questions regarding the **Peach Queen**, assuming that was what I had drawn, and telling me that the Town of Central had adopted it as their Official Train. This prompted me to do some research, network mining, and soliciting the collective knowledge of our organization.

Back when several of us built the N-scale display for the Central Heritage Museum we were shown a front page newspaper clipping from *The Messenger* newspaper of July 3, 1969. The article, written by Chuck Whitney and entitled, "Railroad May Eliminate Last Stop in Central," included a photograph of the southbound **Peach Queen** passing through Central. The photograph is a "going away" shot (ironically); the locomotives were not visible, but several coaches are seen with the diner bringing up the markers. We knew that the **Peach Queen** traveled between Atlanta and Washington, DC, so we assumed that the Southern may have cut off the sleepers in Greenville or perhaps even Charlotte. But, by the time Tom's question had reached me the idea had been propagated that the **Peach Queen** was the last Southern passenger train to even pass through town at all.

I knew that was not correct, since the last passenger train for the Southern to relinquish was the **Southern Crescent**, which ran the same DC to Atlanta route. I then set out to find "The Date" on which the **Peach Queen** was discontinued. I found no answer to my question. Instead, here is what I've gathered:



1940's publicity photo for South Carolina peaches, Spartanburg, SC. Photo © courtesy of the Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History, used by permission.

Craig Meyers, our friend with the NRHS Greenville Chapter, contributed information that the **Peach Queen** began its Named Train service in July 1947, as reported in the August 1947 issue of *Ties* magazine. Per Craig's information, July is the beginning of the peach harvest season, and the train was named in honor of Mr. R.C. "Papa Peach" Cotner, who was the Southern's Assistant General Freight and Passenger Agent in Spartanburg. Mr. Cotner began working for the Southern in 1900, moved to Spartanburg in 1911, and began handling peach shipments in 1924. A touch of class like many railroad amenities of the day, Craig mentioned that "The **Peach Queen** offered free peaches in the diner during the summers and featured peaches in recipes." In addition, the Pennsylvania Railroad Technical and Historical Society reports that the Southern's trains 29 and 30 being officially named The **Peach Queen** on August 31, 1947 (Chronology 1947, 2004 edition).



While the familiar route of the **Peach Queen** ran between Atlanta and Washington, DC, the service actually ran all the way up to Boston, MA. Evidence of this extended route appears on a 1967 Southern Railway timetable, as well as Union Station (Washington, DC) arrival schedules from 1947 and 1956. It was a big train too, reported to include at least eight sleepers at times, plus diner, coaches, head-end cars and RPO's.

The **Peach Queen's** extended route to Boston was not uncommon. In fact, the Southern had agreements with other companies such as the Pennsylvania Railroad up to New York City, followed by the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad up to Boston. South of Atlanta, track partnering was with the Atlanta & West Point and the Louisville & Nashville. The town of Central saw many of these inter-city, named trains pass through, including the Southern's flagship **Crescent (Limited)** (New Orleans to New York), the **Southerner** (New Orleans to Boston), the **Washington – Atlanta – New Orleans Express** (Washington to New Orleans), the **New Yorker** (Atlanta to New York), the **Pelican** (New York to New Orleans), and the **Piedmont Limited** (Washington to New Orleans). Add up these flagbearers with assorted local passenger trains and through freights and it's obvious that Central was a very busy and noisy place!

According to a 1946 Southern Railway Passenger Timetable we have at the Central Railway Museum, five trains made stops in Central around that time, each of them flag stops: Northbound trains No. 39 at 3:55 AM and No. 135 at 5:29 AM, and southbound trains No. 136 at 1:33 AM, No 36 (Washington-Atlanta Express) at 4:41 AM, and No. 40 at 5:11 PM.

By the late 1960's, passenger revenues were on sharp decline and once-prestigious named trains were shadows of their former glory. The Southern maintained the **Crescent** (having dropped the Limited name in 1934, but reappearing in 1938 as simply, the **Crescent**) as their premier train, for heritage sake, and relegated the **Peach Queen** to "local" status. The two trains traveled the same route, but the **Crescent** was a limited stop express. The **Peach Queen** would then fill the gaps in the schedule to provide local service several hours opposed. The **Peach Queen's** consists were a mix of stainless steel lightweight cars and older, green heavyweights. The towns of Central and Clemson had not been regularly scheduled stops, but were designated as flag stops if necessary. Our museum also has a loose page from a Southern Railway Timetable of unknown date, possibly either 1968 or 1969. On Table 1, it lists the combined **Peach Queen-Asheville Special** as the only train available for flag stops in Easley (12:53 PM), Liberty (1:00 PM), Central (no time listed),

Clemson (1:14 PM), Seneca (1:31 PM), and Westminster (1:43 PM). It also indicates that by this time the **Peach Queen** was a southbound train only, since it does not appear in the northbound column. It still originated in Boston, was carried by the Penn Central (as PC Train No. 155) to Washington, DC, and picked up by the Southern for the rest of the route. The cars for the **Asheville Special** were set out at Greensboro, NC, and a diner added to the end of the **Peach Queen** for the rest of the run, as seen in the *Messenger* photo. (An interesting note is that both the southbound **Crescent** and **Southerner** appear as separate train numbers on this time table, but with identical stops and schedule, with flag stop in



The *Peach Queen* has just finished its run and is being broken up, as seen here at Atlanta's Terminal Station on December 6, 1968.

Photo © by Martin K. O'Toole, used by permission.



Southern's depot in Central was relocated and is now used as a city utility building and storage shed on the other side of the tracks. Photo © by Ben Roberts, April 1970, courtesy of the University of South Carolina Library.

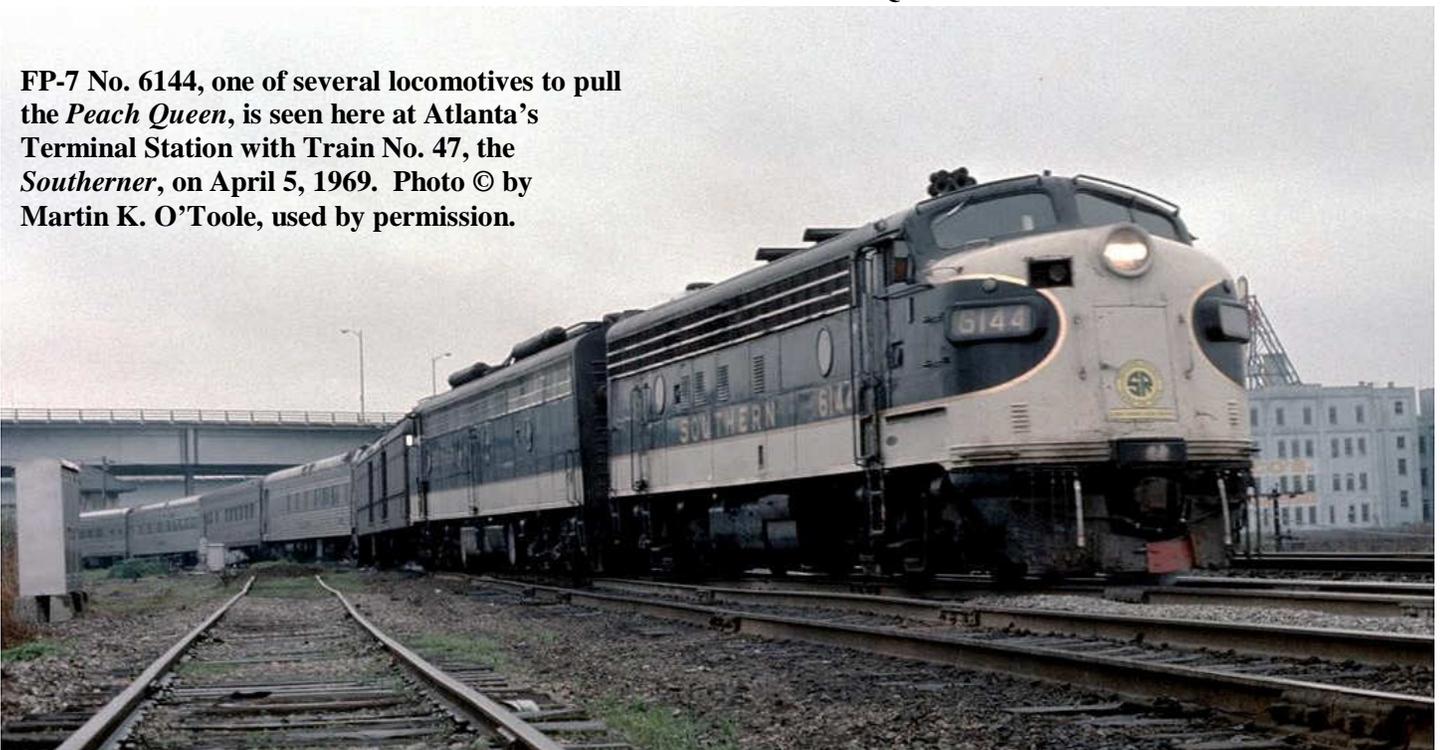
Clemson at 5:24 AM. Northbound, the trains ran separately, with flag stops at Clemson at 2:47 PM (**Crescent** with reclining coaches) and at 9:17 PM (**Southerner**, all reserved sleepers).

It is reasonable, then, that some time between July of 1969 and late 1973 the **Peach Queen** would have been the last Southern passenger train to make a flag stop in Central. The date is unknown, and likely happened

without fanfare or notice. *The Messenger* news article from July 3, 1969 refers to Division Superintendent E.K. Ratliff and Central Mayor L. S. Griffin concurring that stops in Central were infrequent, once per week at most. If any record of such a Last Stop exists it's probably buried in a long-forgotten file drawer somewhere. The Central depot was moved away from the right-of-way in late 1973 or early 1974, so we can narrow the time frame for The Last Stop to within this four-year period.

In the 1970s the Southern Railway consolidated several passenger trains in an effort to maintain rail passenger service against the inevitability of Amtrak. In a brave display of Confederate resistance to Federal encroachment the **Crescent** and the **Southerner** were combined to form the **Southern Crescent**, renumbered as Trains numbers 1 and 2, and equipped with a refurbished stable of green, white, and gold E8 locomotives and a designated fleet matched-up of stainless steel cars. The **Peach Queen** continued to serve as a secondary train until it was likely assimilated into the **Southern Crescent**, according to both Jim Kimble and Dale Reynolds. During the 1970s it is difficult to trace the history of the Southern's trains and routes as consolidations and route swappings and droppings were numerous. In my research I have found references to the Southern's petitioning of the Interstate Commerce Commission to discontinue the **Asheville Special** (on August 8, 1975), as well as the **Pelican** and the **Piedmont** in 1976. Strangely absent, though, are any references to the **Peach Queen**.

FP-7 No. 6144, one of several locomotives to pull the *Peach Queen*, is seen here at Atlanta's Terminal Station with Train No. 47, the *Southerner*, on April 5, 1969. Photo © by Martin K. O'Toole, used by permission.



Occasionally, though, the Southern would add Amtrak through-cars into their regular consists. Legend has it, that when this occurred, the Southern's porters would often encourage passengers to pass through the dimly-lit, dirty, and under-maintained "government cars" before reaching their seat on the Southern's cars.

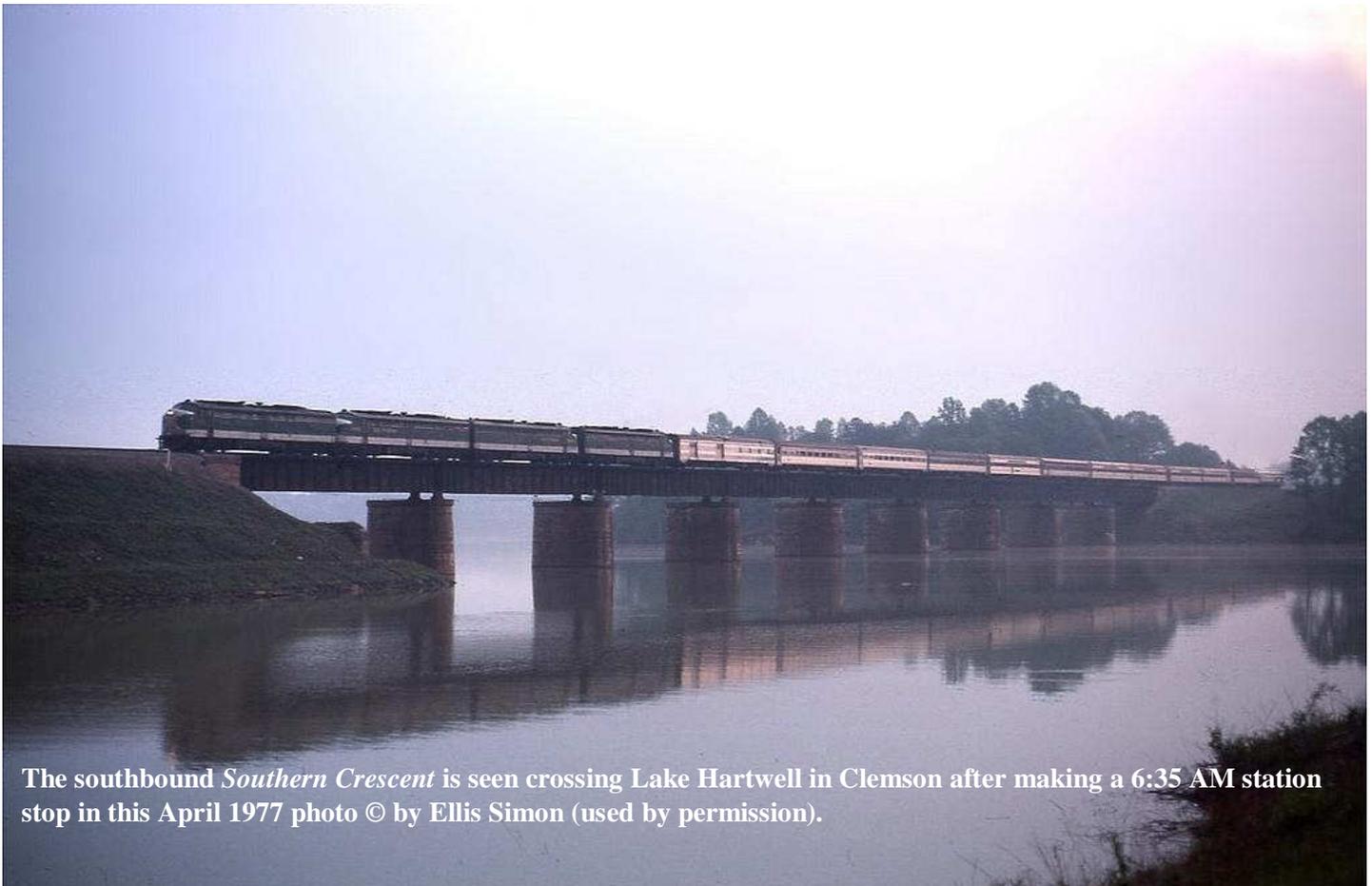
Mac McMillin, who grew up in the Spartanburg-Inman area, is always a good source for information. Mac adds:

*When we lived in Atlanta, 1972-75 we had an Atlanta friend whose father worked for the Southern in Charlotte. She traveled free on a Southern family pass and she frequently took the **Peach Queen** from Charlotte to Atlanta as the schedule was more favorable than the **(Southern) Crescent**. Based on that I know the **Peach Queen** was still running in early 1975 when we left Atlanta.*

*The **Peach Queen** was a "secondary" train to the **(Southern) Crescent** and was looked upon as a local that would stop at every station if necessary. Whereas the limited-stop **(Southern) Crescent** used the newest lightweight streamlined*

*equipment, the **Peach Queen** used mostly older heavyweight equipment with six-wheel trucks.*

*Since much of the service and maintenance on Southern's ALCO diesels was done at their Atlanta Pegasus shop, the **Peach Queen** was used to ferry ALCO RS-2 and RS-3 freight diesels to and from Atlanta. It was not unusual to see several ALCO units leading the train with some F units (A and/or B units) trailing the ALCOs. Some of these F units were freight units. Freight units lacked steam generators that were required for heating and cooling of the passenger cars. To get around this problem Southern converted several FT B units to heater cars by removing the diesel engine and generator and installing steam generators in their place. I personally saw the **Peach Queen** several times with ALCO units, an F unit or two, and the last unit a heater car. Occasionally an E6 A unit would lead the ALCOs but since the ALCOs did not have through steam lines, the steam generator in the E6 was useless, necessitating the use of a heater car behind the ALCOs. I once saw Carolina & North Western RS-3 ALCO # 10 leading the **Peach Queen** in the*



The southbound *Southern Crescent* is seen crossing Lake Hartwell in Clemson after making a 6:35 AM station stop in this April 1977 photo © by Ellis Simon (used by permission).

late 60s. This railroad was a subsidiary of the Southern and its locomotives were painted in Southern colors.

Dale Reynolds also adds:

*I rode the **Peach Queen** as a Clemson student in the mid 60s because it left Clemson in the daylight and had a through car to Boston. It was taken off before Amtrak. So the (Southern) **Crescent**, an all-sleeper night train, was the last Southern train through Central. Southern did not join Amtrak on May 1, 1971 so continued to run the (Southern) **Crescent** as usual until 1979. . . . After Amtrak took it over in 79, Clemson was a flag stop. Several years later Clemson became a regular stop. But the town of Central can still adopt the **Peach Queen** based on it stopping at Clemson four miles away, and that it was a coach train so normal people, not just rich people, could ride it.*

The Southern Railway finally relinquished the **Southern Crescent's** to Amtrak in a brief flag exchange and proclamation ceremony in Atlanta on February 1, 1979. This left the Denver, Rio Grande & Western's **Rio Grande (California) Zephyr** as the last, private railroad, inter-city passenger train remaining until it was discontinued in 1983. 

Photographs courtesy of:

The Central Heritage Society
Central, SC

Simon, Ellis. Atlanta, GA

O'Toole, Martin K. Atlanta, GA

The Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History, Library and Archives. Southern Railway Historical Association Collection. Kennesaw, GA

The University of South Carolina. University Libraries Digital Collections, South Carolina Railroad Photographs Collection. Columbia, SC

Consists for the *Peach Queen* were generally gathered from the Southern's locomotive and passenger car fleets. Since the train was named in 1947, we understand that the *Peach Queen* was always pulled by diesel locomotives. By the 1970s, only the *Southern Crescent* had a designated fleet of locomotives and matching cars. Identifiable photographs of the *Peach Queen* are rare, but four are known to exist in the Southern Railway Historical Associations Collection in Kennesaw, Georgia, with the following locomotives indicated:

2028 RS-3

2913 E-7

4133 F-3

4149 F-3

6137 FP-7

6144 FP-7

FP-7 No. 6133, at right, is restored and operable at the North Carolina Museum of Transportation in Spencer, NC. Photo © by Rob Seel

