

# I Remember Old Tuscaloosa

By Fred Maxwell

AFTER "helping" construct the Mobile & Ohio Railroad through the City of Tuscaloosa as a seven-year-old boy, it was several years later before I learned how and why this project was undertaken.

(Much of the following material was obtained from a report by Col. Woolsey Finnell, one of the engineers for the project) written for the Gulf, Mobile and Ohio Railroad.)

The M.&O. Railroad, which ran from Mobile to St. Louis, had a clause in their Mississippi franchise that gave them the right to construct branch lines not over 30 miles long. Under this permit they ran a spur track from Artesia (on the main line) to Columbus, a distance of 14 miles. Later it was extended 12 miles to the Alabama state line.

It was desired to extend this branch line on to Montgomery. To do so, in 1890 J.L. Wolfalk (of Columbus, Ga., and later of Connecticut) and associates chartered the Montgomery, Tuscaloosa and Memphis Railroad. This company made surveys from Montgomery to Tuscaloosa and made contracts to construct this part of the proposed railroad. Work was begun on all of this part and by 1891 about 50 per cent

of the work was completed. Lack of money caused this company to fail and the work was abandoned.

In about 1896 Mr. Wolfalk and his associates organized the Hanover Construction Co. which took over the above defunct company and made a contract with the M&O R.R. to build and deliver a completed railroad from Montgomery to Columbus. This contract included all structures from depots to "Chic Sales" structures, side tracks, yards and shops.

The company opened headquarters in Tuscaloosa in the old City Hall with Mr. Wolfalk and his staff in charge of the project.

It is interesting that Mr. Wolfalk, who was the developer and principal owner of the Tuscaloosa Belt R.R., gave the track and franchise owned by the "Dummy Line" from both the M&O and the AGS depots to the downtown spur track to individual businesses in the City of Tuscaloosa. This was done to assure the M&O that no interference or boycott would ever prevent the railroad's handling carload shipments into the city's business district.

When the plans for the new highway route from I-59 through the city to

Highway 82 over the new bridge now under construction were completed it was observed that they called for the removal of the railroad track on 25th Ave. which served several business firms. This will terminate all railroad freight car delivery to the downtown area. Many interested parties were surprised to learn that the GM&O owned both the track and franchise for the involved route from the depots and the business district of the city.

On June 1898 the line was opened from Columbus, Miss., to Montgomery 167.2 miles. It was then turned over to the M&O for operating.

For the construction period Mr.

7 GRAPHIC October 21, 1971

Wolfalk's engineering staff included Capt. H.P. Farrow, chief engineer, who had been borrowed from the M&O; three division engineers; 18 resident engineers; and other personnel. Tuscaloosa contributed William R. Burns, B.A. Wood and Woolsey Finnell as resident engineers. Col. W.A. McCalla was assistant to Mr. Woods.

Several years before president I.B. Tigret of the Gulf, Mobile and Ohio R.R. bought the M&O, he married a Tuscaloosa native, Miss Mary Sue Kennedy. This gave an additional tie of affection between the City of Tuscaloosa and the GM&O.