

## Location of Century's First Depot

ASHS Column for January 31, 2008

Jerry Simmons

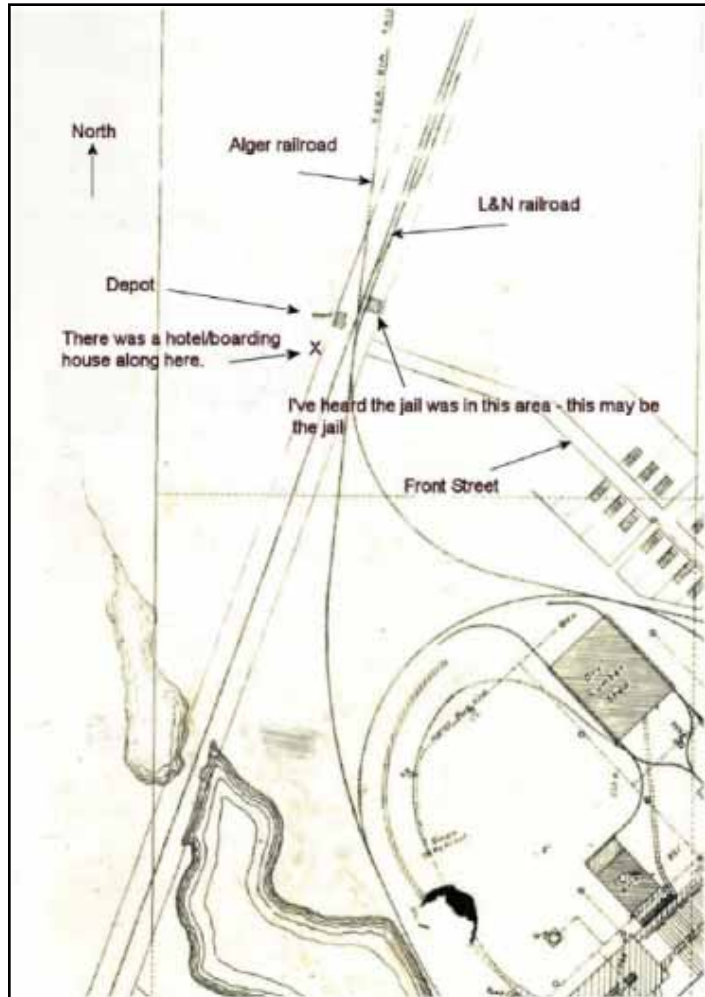
Some discoveries over the past few weeks lead me into the column this week. The Alger-Sullivan Historical Society has a layout of the mill and the railroad tracks in the mill yard hanging on the wall in the Post Office Museum. The map is dated February 1902, a little over a year after construction of the mill began. Some time ago, I took it and scanned it into my computer for future use.

Right before Christmas 2007, a fella from Louisiana called me, asking if we had such a drawing. I told him we did, and that I'd get it to him after the holidays. I located the scanned drawing after searching for what seemed like an hour. My organizational skills were never much good, but lately, they're truly reaching for record lows. It was duly hidden behind some other files on the hard drive, and when I finally put it up on the screen, I unearthed something.

A bit of background: For years, I'd wanted affirmation that I was correct in recalling something my grandfather had told me in the 1950s, that the first depot in Century was located on the west side of the intersection of the railroad and Front Street. Every time I drove that way I'd look at the little house that stands on the south side of the street and faces the railroad and not the street. I'd think of what he'd said. He'd also told me that much of the lumber used to construct that house was from the old depot. For reasons I can't figure out now, I never asked him any more questions about any of that. Plus, I have no idea why this seemingly unimportant exchange stuck with me for so many years.

He also told me there was a boarding house right in that area, too. I found out recently after researching some old newspapers that there was indeed one and that it was called, naturally enough, the "Depot Hotel." That led me to want to know more about just where the depot was.

My breakthrough came when I saw that the layout of the mill property mentioned above shows precisely where that depot was placed. Right there, just past the railroad on Front



Street was a small box labeled “Depot.” It shows it as being on the north side of Front Street and not the south side, as I thought for so long! That makes sense, because the Escambia Railroad crossed the then-L&N Railroad right there.

I’m sure that to many of you readers, that’s not such an important thing, but a detail like that has an impact on me. For one thing, for decades I have not had closure to the exact location of the first depot and this helps to give me that. Secondly, it adds credence to something my grandfather said so many years back. Without some sort of confirmation it seemed there’d be no way I could get the question of whether I may have dreamed up the conversation he had with me.

Okay, so you say I should believe everything I heard Bigdaddy (my grandfather had his grandchildren call him that, because he told us that “grandpa” made him appear to the girls like he was an old man) say. Well, you might believe everything you hear, but I’m like a little like the detectives on CSI: I had to have positive evidence, and the mill layout drawing gave me that.

Another thing the drawing may show: Dickie Dole told me a few years back that the old jail was located somewhere around there. Century needed a jail, you see, because lawlessness got bad in Century after the mill started running. I think some men who were very poor finally got a regular paycheck and maybe they spent it on liquor. Anyway, some time in the early 1900s, the company hired a constable for the town. The first one was John B. Vaughn, Miss Eva Vaughn’s daddy (there’s an interesting story in the works about this man by his grandson).

If they were gonna have a constable to arrest the lawbreakers, they had to have a hoosegow to lock ‘em up in. Don’t you agree? The layout shows a little building on the east side of the railroad right across from where the depot was put. This building has no notation as to what it was, though. I’m not sure whether this was where Dickie meant the jail was. Maybe someone reading this article has an answer for me.

Ya’ll come!