

Written By
Michael Smith and Tony Wright

In 1912 a man named S. G. Durant proposed building a railroad line from Rockford to Kankakee. He sold shares of stock with the idea that he would put the money in the Newark Bank, use it to build the railroad, and after it was finished he would take a small sum of the money as a fee, and let the stockholders manage their own affairs.

Durant raised enough money to get things started, hired a crew and began laying track. However, Mr. Durant must have had trouble with measurements because the crew only put down two miles of track stretching from Newark to Millington. He then rented a locomotive, made a few trips down the line, and then withdrew most of the money and skipped town.

With the smaller than advertised railroad built, and Mr. Durant gone, the stockholders decided to form a syndicate, and gather sufficient funds to buy land, build a grain elevator, and operate the railroad. A small saddle-tank locomotive was purchased, the Armour Grain Company built a lumber and coal yard, and the Illinois Midland railroad was soon in business.

The railroad operated under the management of the stockholders until the early 1920's when the Newark Farmers Grain Company bought the lumber and coal yard for \$10,000, leased the track for 20 years, and bought the steam engine Number 4 for \$3,000. In 1943 the Newark Farmers Grain Company purchased the track, and later bought a used diesel locomotive to replace the steam powered one.

The Newark Farmers Grain Company operated the railroad for a number of years. Hauling grain from Newark to Millington, and returning with lumber, feed, and other supplies. However, the revenue from the railroad was not enough to maintain it, and the operators soon had to ask the Illinois Agriculture Association for help. The Illinois Agriculture Association went to Washington, D.C. on behalf of the Illinois Midland, and after negotiations with CB&Q Railroad an agreement was reached. The Illinois Midland Railroad would receive a small portion of the freight charge for hauling grain from Newark to Chicago. This agreement brought in about \$8000 per year, and helped the railroad stay in business.

After the agreement was reached, the railroad continued its daily journey from Newark to Millington and back again. Day after day, and year after year, the railroad was in operation. However, nothing lasts forever. In 1967, two bridges were burned down, and the railroad went out of business. The roadbed went back into private ownership, and the locomotive was sold. So ended the Illinois Midland Railroad.

In 1997 Newark, Illinois was host to the "Newarks' of the World" annual celebration. During this event, the Fern Dell Historical Society sold Newark mementos. Among the items for sale were pieces of the shortest railroad in the world, the Illinois Midland Railroad. The Fern Dell Historical Society had obtained several tons of the old iron rails, and had cut them into various sizes for sale to the community. The sale was a success, everyone who had ever heard the story about the Illinois Midland Railroad wanted a piece of the rail. However, even though the sale was a success, it was not as big as first expected. The rails were stored in a shed prior to being cut into sections, and many some were stolen for their scrap value.