

The General (cut from Wikipedia)

Western & Atlantic Railroad #3 *General* is a 4-4-0 "American" type [steam locomotive](#) built in 1855 by the [Rogers, Ketchum & Grosvenor](#) in [Paterson, New Jersey](#) for the [Western & Atlantic Railroad](#), best known as the engine stolen by [Union](#) spies in the [Great Locomotive Chase](#), an attempt to cripple the [Confederate](#) rail network during the [American Civil War](#). Today, the locomotive is preserved at the [Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History](#) in [Kennesaw, Georgia](#), and is listed on the [National Register of Historic Places](#).

During the Civil War on April 12, 1862, *The General* was commandeered by Northerners led by [James J. Andrews](#) at Big Shanty (now [Kennesaw, Georgia](#)), and abandoned north of [Ringgold](#), after being pursued by [William Allen Fuller](#) and the [Texas](#). Low on water and wood, the *General* eventually lost steam pressure and speed, and slowed to a halt two miles north of Ringgold, where Andrews and his raiders abandoned the locomotive and tried to flee.

In 1864, the [Battle of Atlanta](#) had forced the withdrawal of General [John Bell Hood](#)'s forces from the city. Hood ordered the ordnance depot destroyed as he left Atlanta on September 1, 1864. To this end, the *General* was severely damaged by being run into boxcars of ammunition and the locomotive *Missouri*. This was done deliberately so as to render the engine unusable for the approaching Union forces.

It had been speculated by some that, after the *General* had been damaged, the invading Union army restored the engine and operated it. However, many historians believe that the engine was left untouched for the remainder of the war. The Union army had based its repair shops in Nashville, and there is no evidence to suggest the engine was moved there. The [United States Military Railroad Service](#) had many new or like-new engines, so they had no need to restore captured ones such as the *General*. The USMRR had often left the damaged equipment of a captured railroad undisturbed, and its records, having listed the *General* as "captured and returned," further suggest such was the case of the *General*.



After the war ended, the *General* was repaired and continued service on the Western and Atlantic. In the 1870s, the *General* was completely rebuilt, it had received a new pilot, boiler, and other components. Most notably, its three dome configuration was reduced to two domes, and its Radley-Hunter style balloon stack was replaced with a diamond stack, as the engine had been converted to burn coal. Indeed, the rebuilt engine had little resemblance to its original form.

Before the Civil War, most railways in the south, including the W&A, did not give their engines numbers. Rather, they were simply named, such as the *General*. When the railroad began numbering engines after the war, the *General* was the 39th engine to be acquired by the road, and was numbered accordingly. Locomotives came and went as years progressed, and by 1880, a renumbering was necessary. At this time, the *General* was given the number "3," being the third oldest engine that the railroad had at the time. The engine continues to carry this number today.^[4]

In the mid-1880s, the [Atlanta and Florida Railroad](#) began construction. During this time, the W&A had a locomotive surplus after buying several more modern engines, so they leased the *General* to the A&F from 1887 to 1888 to assist in construction.

The locomotive was originally built to the southern states standard rail gauge of 5 ft (1,524 mm). After a [change to the northern states gauge](#) was mandated by June 1, 1886, *The General* was converted to be compatible with the U.S. Standard Gauge of 4 ft 8½ in (1,435 mm)

The *General* was retired from service in 1891 and stored on a siding in Vinings, GA where it awaited its final fate. Early the next year, E. Warren Clark, a professional photographer, discovered the engine in Vinings, and approached John W. Thomas, president of the [Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway](#) (which had won the lease on the Western and Atlantic Railroad of the State of Georgia in 1890), with the proposal of restoring the *General* for exhibition at the upcoming [World's Columbian Exposition](#) in Chicago. Thomas approved of the idea, and the *General* was soon taken to the NC&StL Ry Shops at West Nashville to be restored. At this time, the engine was given a Radley-Hunter style balloon stack similar to the engine's original, and was reverted to a wood burner. The engine had been restored by 1892, a year before the exposition. During this time, the engine traveled to Chattanooga to attend a reunion of the [Army of the Cumberland](#) veterans. This trip made apparent the difficulties associated with wood burning, so the engine was returned to a coal burner by the end of the year. The engine was given a unique new stack at this time, one that, while designed for coal burning, was styled like the original so as to give the appearance of a wood burner.

In 1901, the *General* was placed on display in the [Chattanooga Union Depot](#). There, it remained on display for nearly fifty years, only being removed for short periods for exhibitions. In particular, the engine was taken to Baltimore in 1927 to participate in the [Baltimore and Ohio Railroad's "Fair of the Iron Horse"](#), then in 1933 to [Chicago's "Century of Progress" Exhibition](#), the [1939 New York World's Fair](#), and finally, the [Chicago Railroad Fair](#) in 1948.

In 1957, the [Louisville and Nashville Railroad](#) had acquired the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis, including its lease of the Western and Atlantic, and began planning to restore the *General* to operation for the [American Civil War](#) Centennial. In 1959, the *General* was removed from the Chattanooga Union Depot and taken to the railroad's South Louisville Shops to be restored. As part of the restoration, the *General* was given modern air brakes, a modern coupler (only on the tender, the older style coupler on the engine's front pilot remained), and was converted to burn oil. Throughout the 1960s, the engine pulled [Louisville and Nashville Combine Car Number 665](#) as it traveled to various places across the eastern US, including the [1964 New York World's Fair](#) under its own power.

After the L&N won the legal dispute concerning the engine's custody in 1970, they brought the engine to Atlanta via the former [Atlanta, Knoxville and Northern Railway](#) line from Knoxville through [Etowah](#), to [Marietta](#), bypassing Chattanooga. In February 1972, a ceremony was held in Atlanta where L&N president Kendall formally presented the *General* to then state governor (and later President of the United States) [Jimmy Carter](#). Afterwards, the engine was moved to Kennesaw where a museum site was prepared. On April 12, 1972, the Big Shanty Museum (later known as the [Southern Museum of Civil War and Locomotive History](#)) opened, and the *General* remained on display there since.