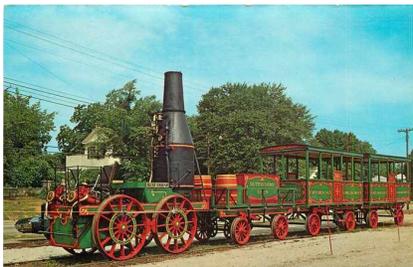


## John Thrasher Everybody's Cousin

### The Story

Before there was an Atlanta, a Marthasville or a place known as Terminus, there was John Thrasher. In 1839, John James "Cousin John" Thrasher came to the north Georgia region that would one day become Atlanta to build a railroad embankment. Upon his death in 1899, John Thrasher would be recognized as one of the three earliest residents of Atlanta, Atlanta's first merchant, a civic-minded leader, a Fulton County representative to the state General Assembly, a philanthropic benefactor and "Everybody's Cousin."

### The Railroads



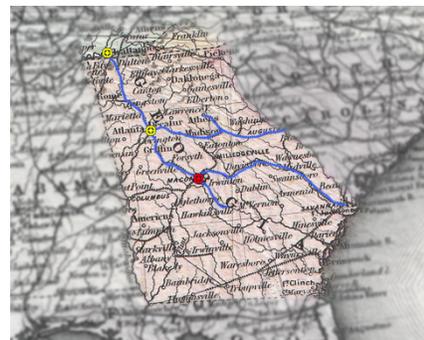
*1Best Friend of Charleston*

In the early 1800s, the fastest mode of transporting cotton to market in South Carolina and Georgia was the Savannah River. While efficient and reliable, transporting cotton on the Savannah meant that revenue from cotton grown in upstate South Carolina would go to the Port of Savannah and not Charleston.

In an effort to funnel that revenue back to South Carolina, the State of South Carolina constructed one of the nation's first railroad lines. Known as "The Best Friend of Charleston," the line ran from the City of Hamburg, across the Savannah River from Augusta, to the Port of Charleston.

Fearing a loss of revenue from the faster mode of transportation, the Georgia General Assembly granted charters to build three railroad lines, one of those charters went to the Monroe Railroad and Banking Company, the company that would give John Thrasher a reason to come to the north Georgia area that would eventually become his home.

The Georgia General Assembly issued a fourth rail charter in 1837 for a railroad to be owned not privately but by the state. Known as the Western and Atlantic, this rail line would run from a point somewhere south of the Chattahoochee River north to Tennessee. That "somewhere" was the area that eventually would become the City of Atlanta.



*Original Rail Lines to Terminus*

With the knowledge of the planned W&A line terminating south of the Chattahoochee, the Georgia Rail Company extended its line coming out of Athens to the terminus point of the Western and Atlantic. The Monroe Rail Company did the same, extending its line from Macon north to the terminus point.

### Thrasher's Embankment

To connect the Monroe rail line to the terminus point of the Western and Atlantic it would be necessary to elevate the tracks as they entered the terminus area. To elevate the tracks, an embankment would need to be built. In 1839, for the sum of \$25,000, 21-year-old, Georgia born John James Thrasher was hired to build the embankment.

When he arrived at the terminus point the area was entirely covered by forest. The closest settlement was a stagecoach station known as White Hall in what is now the West End area of Atlanta.



Marker located on Marietta St.

Thrasher hired Irish construction workers, many of whom had railroad construction experience from their work on the W&A line. They lived in small, dirt-floor shacks in an area just east of the present-day CNN Center. In later years, Thrasher told a story having to install, at the insistence of the wife of his Irish foreman, a wooden floor in her cabin. She wanted to have a party (a ball in Thrasher's words) and refused to do so until the cabin was floored. The event would go down in history as the first ball ever thrown in Atlanta. It also would cost Thrasher additional money because, when the other wives of his

workers realized the foreman's cabin was floored, they insisted the Thrasher floor all of the cabins.

The tiny settlement consisting of the shacks for his laborers and Thrasher's general store came to be known around the region as Thrasher's terminus. On hearing of his good fortune, many of Thrasher's relatives arrived in the region to ask for his help, as did many who claimed to be kin of Thrasher and he never turned away anyone claiming kin. His family called him Cousin John, a nickname that spread throughout the small community and would ultimately become synonymous with John James Thrasher. The exact date of completion for the embankment Thrasher built is unknown but construction was probably finished by late 1840 or early 1841. It is likely that the embankment was probably Atlanta's first man-made construction project.

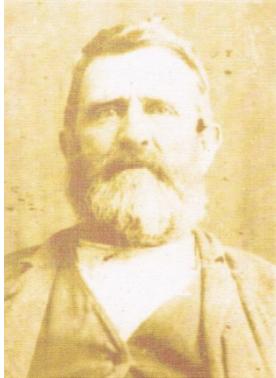
### Leaving Atlanta

Thrasher was a man of many interests, and it is said by Thrasher himself that he made and lost many fortunes in his life. One such instance that cost Thrasher dearly happened in 1842. Realizing that the area around the terminus point would eventually grow and prosper, Thrasher had invested in 100 acres of land not far from the Monroe embankment; land he assumed would one day be very valuable. But in 1842, a new Chief Engineer for the Western and Atlantic railroad decided that the topography of the terminus point area was not suitable and he decreed that the terminus point should be moved, a decision that did not sit well with executives of the Monroe railroad who had already spent \$25,000 to elevate their tracks. It also did not sit well with John Thrasher who in a fit of disgust sold his property for \$4 an acre and moved to Griffin, GA.

### Thrasher's Return

Two years later, Thrasher would come to regret his decision to leave and would return to Atlanta buying cotton on Marietta Street and later moved to a location on Whitehall Street. In the mid-1850s, Thrasher built a large square two-story brick house. In August of 1864, the Thrasher house would serve as the residence of General John B. Hood, commander in chief of all Confederate forces in and around Atlanta.

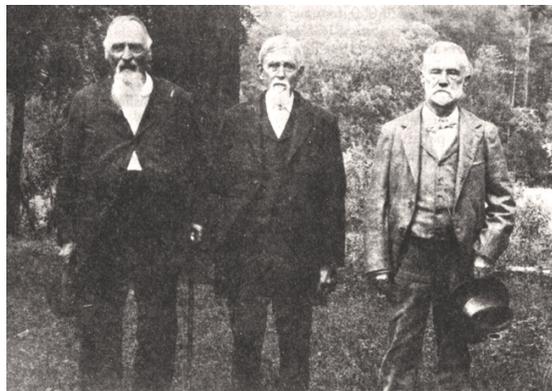
Census records show that Thrasher lived in Atlanta at least until 1870 but, apparently, not in the house he built. He is credited as actively helping to rebuild Atlanta after the war. He was one of the 12-charter members of the Atlanta Street Railway Company, which formed to operate the city's first streetcars. He also helped build a school and a new Fulton County Jail. He bought and sold an Atlanta hotel and represented Fulton County in the General Assembly.



*John James Thrasher, c. 1870*

In 1869, John Thrasher and several associates had been awarded a contract to build the first 20 miles of the Piedmont Air-Line Railroad, chartered to connect Atlanta with Greenville, SC. The area in which the 20 miles of track would run was a heavily wooded area and sparsely populated. Apparently, Thrasher like what he saw in the area enough to buy 250 acres of land, laid out a town and built a hotel. The town that Thrasher laid out eventually became a popular weekend get-a-way location for Atlantans and a popular summer destination. Cousin John named the community for his friend, fellow Atlanta entrepreneur Jonathan Norcross.

In the 1880s, Thrasher and his wife followed two of their sons to Dade City, Florida where Thrasher planted an orange grove and was instrumental in bringing the first railroad to town. He died on November 18, 1899 at the age of 81 leaving behind a large legacy as one of Atlanta's earliest and most accomplished citizens.



A picture of 3-Atlanta pioneers  
John Thrasher on the left – Wash Collier, center and George Adair, right.

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