

Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways

by Larry Plachno

Photos courtesy of Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways



The Alabama State Capitol in Montgomery has served as a background for photos of Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways buses for decades. This recent photo shows a coach from each fleet in front of the Capitol. Operations go back nearly eight decades and offer an interesting story.

Capital Trailways has been considered a leading member of the bus industry for decades. Founded nearly eight decades ago, the company was originally heavily involved in scheduled service. With a location in Alabama, Capital Trailways was sitting at a major crossroads in the Trailways network. As a result, the company participated in thru routes that extended to Miami, New York and San Francisco. In more current years, Capital Trailways and its long-time sister company Colonial Trailways made the transition to a modern charter operation but still maintain some scheduled service. Here is the story on how these companies got to be where they are today.

Capital Motor Lines

Avery Austin Crow, born in Winston County, Alabama on April 8, 1891, was the son of farmers Warren Baker and Sally Black (Ingram) Crow. He grew up on his father's farm and later served in World War I with the Sixth Army. Returning to civilian life, he found employment with the Bissell Motor

Company in Birmingham, Alabama and was made the sales manager in 1921.

Later, Crow joined Bissell as a partner in the Alabama Bus Company. Bissell died in 1929, prompting the sale of Alabama Bus Company to Teche Greyhound Lines. Shortly thereafter, Crow relocated to Montgomery, Alabama. Here, he acquired the Dixie Stage Lines routes from Montgomery to Mobile, Alabama and from Montgomery to Meridian, Mississippi from Fred B. Caudle of Anniston, Alabama, the owner. Crow was 39 years old at this time.

One route operated southwest out of Montgomery to Mobile via Greenville, Evergreen, Brewton and Bay Minette, following U.S. 31 and close to what later became Interstate 65. The second route operated directly west from Montgomery through Selma, Demopolis and Livingston, Alabama to Meridian, Mississippi, following U.S. 80. Crow took over the lines on November 1, 1930. On December 18, 1930 he incorporated Capital Motor Lines with its principal office in Montgomery. Presumably because of state

laws, the incorporation papers included a provision against the manufacture or transportation of prohibited liquors or beverages.

In the following years, Crow would expand service on existing routes as well as acquire or expand on new routes. By 1934, Capital Motor Lines had expanded service to three daily trips to Meridian, Mississippi and three round trips to Mobile with additional trips daily to Florala, Alabama (just north of the Florida-Alabama state line) and Pensacola, Florida. Capital was also operating a separate east-west line between Florence and Decatur, Alabama in the northern part of the state, west of Huntsville. By 1937, the Florence to Decatur line was extended to Huntsville, Alabama and Chattanooga, Tennessee.

On May 1, 1938, Capital Motor Lines was accepted as a member of the recently formed National Trailways Bus System. This made it one of the early companies to join. Buses were then painted with the Trailways livery and operations were conducted under the name Capital Trailways.



This drawing of a traditional front engine bus lettered for Capital Motor Lines appeared in a 1937 timetable.

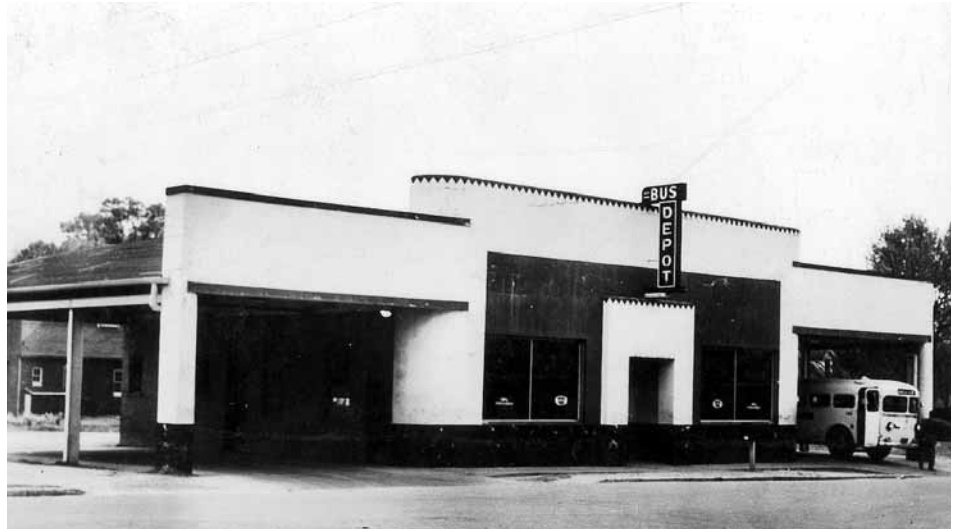
Monroeville Bus Company

The Monroeville Bus Company was incorporated under the laws of Alabama in August of 1935. Its original route started from Selma, Alabama, the next major community west of Montgomery, and ran southwest through Monroeville and Atmore to Mobile. Monroeville was selected as the principal place of business for the corporation. As with Capital Motor Lines, the incorporation papers included prohibitions against the transport of any liquors, wines or beer that are prohibited by the laws of Alabama.

Since the Monroeville route was located west of the original Capital Motor Lines route to Mobile, it prompted interest by the Crow family. In 1941, they acquired the Monroeville Bus Company. While Capital and Monroeville shared ownership, management and even office space over the years, the two companies are still operated separately and were never merged.

Avery Austin Crow died in August of 1942 at the age of 51. In addition to the bus company, his death was also a blow to the community. Over the years he had been active in several community organizations and helped support worthy charities and religious projects. He was well known in Montgomery and throughout the state.

Crow and his wife Mary Agnes (Guthrie) Crow had three daughters: Mrs. Mary Austin (Crow) Montgomery, Sally Ruth (Crow) Baker, and Ann Elizabeth (Crow) Batty. While the three Crow sisters never became active in day-to-day operations of the companies, they were a major influence while on the board of directors for many decades. James A. (Jimmy) Pruett was elected as the new company president in September of 1942. He served the company in this capacity for nearly three



As early as the late 1930s, Capital Motor Lines was operating a route between Florence and Decatur, Alabama in northern Alabama. Apparently dating from the late 1930s or early 1940s, this photo shows the bus depot in Florence, Alabama. That looks like a GM PD 2903 or even an earlier model getting ready to depart.

decades and guided it through expansion and some of its best years of scheduled service operations.

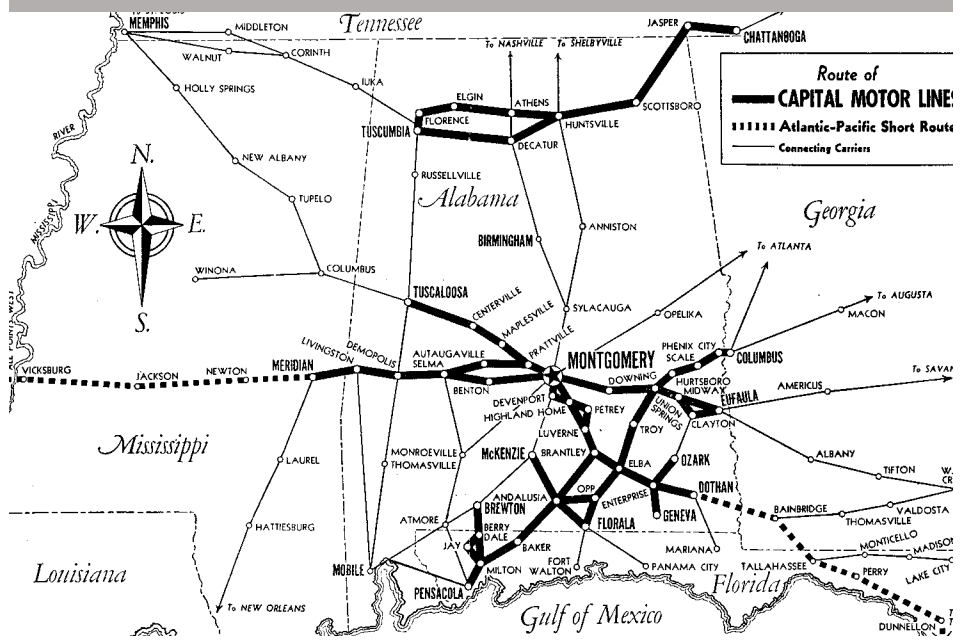
Post-War Prosperity

As with many bus companies, Capital and Monroeville struggled through the War years with increased ridership, special service to military and manufacturing locations, but a lack of supplies and new equipment. The immediate post-War era saw many people purchasing automobiles, a situation that would have a negative impact on scheduled service in future years. However, the immediate post-War prosperity prompted an era of route expansion and new, modern coaches.

In common with several other Trailways operations, Capital turned to Aerocoach in the post-War years for fleet renewal. The post-war Aerocoach, with its modern integral tubular steel frame, was a major improvement over pre-war buses. Moreover, the Aerocoach had the advantage of a different appearance than the Yellow Coach and GMC buses typically operated by Greyhound. Capital Trailways continued to purchase Aerocoaches until that company ceased coach production.

Continued expansion after the War included the purchase of Central Alabama Coaches from G.E. Guthrie in 1950. Capital Trailways took over this route from Butler

Capital Motor Lines originally concentrated in providing scheduled service. Shown here is a map of routes operated in early 1948. Even at this early date, through service was offered from Montgomery to Panama City and Tampa.





Capital Trailways operated several Aerocoaches in the immediate post-war years. Taken at the State Capital in Montgomery, this shows one of the last Aerocoaches delivered, probably in 1952, before Aerocoach production was discontinued.



An earlier model Aerocoach operating for Capital Trailways was photographed in the late 1940s. The company also had some ACF Brillls at this time. The location is the traditional site of the Alabama State Capital building in Montgomery.

to Selma on April 5, 1950 and extended through bus service into Montgomery.

In November of 1950, Monroeville Bus Company filed for operating authority between New Orleans, Louisiana and Pensacola, Florida via Mobile, Alabama, the southern terminal of its original route. At this same time the corporation moved to increase its capital stock to deal with this route expansion. Two years later, in March of 1952, the corporate office of Monroeville Bus Company was moved from Monroeville to Montgomery. At this same time the corporate name was changed to Colonial Trailways. Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways would share management and office space.

Thru Service

In these post-War years, Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways entered an era of connecting schedules and thru service. To make travel more comfortable for passengers and eliminate the need to change buses, members of the Trailways organization began to plan routes and schedules where a single bus could be operated by connecting carriers to provide a "one seat" ride between major cities. With Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways sitting at the crossroads of Alabama, they became involved with several thru services over the following years.

One of the first, and possibly most successful of these thru routes was Trailways thru service from Raleigh to Dallas with Capital Trailways operating the segment from Columbus, Georgia to Meridian, Mississippi. Known as the Dixieland Route, the first through bus started operation on March

7, 1949 and the Capital Trailways board of directors authorized the purchase of an additional A.C.F. bus for this service. The Dixieland Route immediately became so popular that a third thru schedule from Raleigh to Dallas was running by August of 1949 and a fourth thru bus schedule was added in 1950. Some of these thru buses were later extended east to New York City.

By early 1950, Capital Trailways was operating thru service from Montgomery to Panama City and Fort Walton, Florida in

conjunction with Coastal Stages. Thru service from Dallas to Miami started on March 16, 1950. Capital Trailways operated the segment from Meridian, Mississippi to Dothan, Alabama. Members of the board of directors authorized the purchase of two new A.C.F. buses for this route. This service was later extended west to Albuquerque, Los Angeles and San Francisco but a change of bus was required at Dallas.

Colonial Trailways also eventually got involved with thru service. A thru Trail-

After Aerocoaches were no longer available, Capital Trailways began ordering GM coaches. Taken in the early 1950s, this shows a new PD4104 emerging from the Capital Trailways garage at 520 N. Court Street. Those with sharp eyes may be able to see the late model Aerocoach parked behind the fence in the adjacent yard.





This Aerocoach was chartered to go to the Chilton County Peach Festival in Clanton, Alabama. The sign on the side of the coach makes sure we know that the group was the Montgomery Chamber of Commerce. The date was August of 1950 and the opened windows on the coach suggest it must have been a hot day.

ways route was established between New York, Washington, Atlanta, and either Mobile or Houston. Colonial Trailways operated the segment from Montgomery through Mobile to New Orleans. Trailways thru service was also established on a Gulf Coast route from Miami or Jacksonville via Tallahassee, Pensacola, Mobile and New Orleans to Houston. Colonial Trailways operated the segment from Pensacola to New Orleans.

All of the interline business caused Capital Trailways to become the father of some new technology for the bus industry. On a visit to the First National Bank of Montgomery, President James Pruett of Capital Trailways was introduced to the microfilming of checks to be forwarded to other banks. Pruett figured out how to use a similar system for crediting interline ticket coupons between bus operators. The resulting machine was built by Remington Rand and called the Film-a-Record. Several bus companies used them for years until newer technology became available.

When Aerocoach ceased production, Capital Trailways was forced to seek another coach manufacturer. Again, in common with many other Trailways companies, Capital Trailways decided to embrace the General Motors coach. By the early 1950s the company owned several PD4103 coaches, a model that was apparently popular for a while on the Dixieland Route. Later in the decade, Capital Trailways began replacing older coaches with the new GM PD4104 model that featured air ride and optional power steering and restroom.

Moving to Charters and Tours

The decades of the 1950s, 60s and 70s were relatively uneventful. James A. (Jimmy) Pruett remained president of Capital Trailways until December 31, 1971, having served 29 years in that capacity, which is a company record. Randall McRae then served as president until 1978. Then, Thomas R. Hamilton stepped in and remained president until 1994 when he was elected chairman of the board.



A special ceremony on May 7, 1952 highlighted through service on the Dixieland Route to Dallas and the West Coast. The coach appears to be a PD4103.

By 1960, some of the Trailways operators started to embrace the 40-foot Eagle as the coach of choice. Capital Trailways decided to do the same and eventually had 01, 05 and 10 model Eagles in its fleet. Eagles soon became the most popular model for the Trailways thru services.

Typical of many if not most intercity scheduled carriers, the decades of the 60s and 70s were a time of retrenchment and rationalization. Branch lines, feeder lines and rural routes that had survived the War

Through service was a major selling point in the late 1940s and 1950s since it provided a one-seat ride between distant points. This parade down Commerce Street in Montgomery in the 1950s was lead by a pair of PD4103 coaches. Both were conspicuously painted "Dixieland Route."





T.R. Hamilton, M.W. Phillips and W. E. Sunday pose with a new Eagle Model 10 in 1979. Eagles remained the backbone of the fleet until after emphasis was put on charters.



In 1990, the company began to acquire Prevest coaches. Shown here is a 45-foot 195 Prevest XL with 54 seats. These were used exclusively in charter service.

years were no longer carrying passengers in any numbers. Capital Trailways took the logical steps to reduce service and eliminate routes accordingly.

Some of the routes eliminated between 1952 and 1967 included: Benton to Tuscaloosa, service in the Pensacola area southwest of Andalusia, the route from Union Springs to Elba, and Montgomery to Abbeville. The route in the northern part of the state from Florence through Huntsville to Chattanooga had been given up at an earlier date. Capital Trailways did extend service from Florala to Fort Walton, replacing a previous interline connection. However, the main routes continued to do well because of the substantial interline traffic.

Airline deregulation in 1978 reduced air fares and hence had a negative impact on long distance bus ridership. Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways were possibly affected more than most carriers because of their extensive participation in thru routes and long distance services.

By the mid-1980s, President Thomas R. Hamilton saw the proverbial handwriting on the wall for scheduled service and approached the board, consisting primarily of the Crow sisters. In spite of the fact that they had concentrated on scheduled route service for more than five decades, Hamilton recommended that the two companies transition from primarily line haul to primarily charter business.

His recommendation was accepted and work got underway for a major transition in emphasis. The most immediate action was that several new Model 10 Eagle coaches had recently been delivered and placed in scheduled service, as had been past practice. They were now removed from scheduled service and put in the charter pool, marking the first time that charters and tours were given special consideration with equipment.

Hamilton's recommendations were further underscored in 1987 when a newly-independent Greyhound Lines purchased Trailways, Inc., the former Continental Trailways, as well as the Eagle bus factory. This had a major impact on Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways since Trailways, Inc. was the effective backbone of the long distance Trailways routes. Greyhound's subsequent financial problems muddled the waters further and it was 10 years before Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways resolved their scheduled service issues.

The new emphasis on expansion in the charter and tour business prompted the Crow sisters, and select others, to get involved and invest in four other bus companies in the immediate area. These

included Ingram Bus Lines in Tallassee, Alabama and Express in Jacksonville, Florida. They also operated three charter sales branches of Capital in Jackson, Mississippi; Huntsville, Alabama and Dothan, Alabama, and Crow Charters in Birmingham, Alabama, which was a branch of Ingram Bus Lines. The expansion ultimately amounted at its peak to six different companies with 10 different locations, operating approximately 160 coaches. By the early 1990s, the companies were producing a joint tour catalog offering numerous tours to a wide variety of locations.

What with the change of emphasis to charters and tours, and Eagle caught up in Greyhound's financial problems, management began looking for a new source for

Like most of the older Trailways operators, Capital Trailways operated Eagles for years. Taken on February 11, 1974, this photo shows two new Model 05 Eagles that were among the first to be built at Brownsville, Texas. They were purchased for use on the Dixieland Route. That again is the State Capital at Montgomery in the background.



coaches. In 1990, Capital and Colonial made their first purchase of four brand new Prevost LeMirage XL coaches. They were reserved exclusively for charter and tour work and started a relationship with Prevost that would last a decade.

In the next few years, several used LeMirages were purchased along with several MCI coaches including the MC-9, 102A3 and 102C3 models. The first 45-foot coaches came in 1995 with the acquisition of three new 45-foot Prevost XL coaches. However, at about this same time, Capital purchased some used Prevost H3-40 coaches that were well received by the charter and tour customers. As a result, Capital and Colonial began to migrate toward the Prevost H3-45 as their coach of choice and several new and used H3-45 coaches were purchased between 1996 and 1999.

Thomas R. Hamilton stepped down as company president in 1994 after serving in that capacity for 16 years. He was then elected chairman of the board and served in that capacity until his retirement in 1999. Hamilton deserves credit for successfully changing the direction of the companies from scheduled service to charters and tours. M. Wayne Phillips took over the position of president of both Capital and Colonial and remained in that position until December 31, 2004.

Since the acquisition of Trailways, Inc. by Greyhound Lines in 1987, the scheduled service was in an awkward position. Capital and Colonial continued to operate routes but were now connecting with Greyhound Lines. In 1997, Capital and Colonial entered into a revenue sharing pool with Greyhound



A meeting of the Alabama Motorcoach Association in February of 2006 prompted this photograph behind the Capital Trailways garage. From left to right: W. Wayne Phillips, chairman; Everett Johnson, charter sales manager; Frank Montgomery, president; and Shannon Rhodes, vice president. The bus is fleet number 99367, a new 2005 Van Hool C2045.

Lines, effectively ending the competition between the two groups for scheduled service customers.

Problems began to develop with the charter companies acquired in the 1980s. Increasing competition because of deregulation as well as difficulty in finding and retaining competent personnel made these operations less viable. Between 1996 and 2002, President M. Wayne Phillips masterfully and gracefully handled the liquidation of these

companies and at the same time strengthened the two core companies, Capital and Colonial.

In 2000, Capital leased two new 2001 Van Hool C2045 coaches. This model was new to the American market at that time and Capital was looking for a coach well suited to its charter and tour operations. The coaches were an instant success with customers, the drivers and the maintenance team. Thereafter the Van Hool C2045 became the coach of choice for Capital. Several more Van Hool coaches were purchased in following years and today the fleet includes 15 Van Hool C2045 coaches.

Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways Today

On January 1, 2005, Frank E. Montgomery III was elected president of both Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways. Frank is the grandson of Mary Agnes (Crow) Montgomery and the great-grandson of Avery Austin Crow. On July 11, 2006, Frank became the sole owner of both companies after successfully purchasing the interests of 18 other shareholders, most of whom were second and third generation descendants of Avery Austin Crow.

Both Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways no longer operate any independent scheduled service. They are now in a revenue sharing pool with Greyhound Lines, Inc. and all operations are in conjunction with Greyhound.

In 2000, Capital leased two Van Hool C2045 coaches. This was followed by additional Van Hool purchases by both Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways. Shown here is coach 95586, a 2001 Van Hool C2045, one of the early Van Hool coaches to be added to the fleet.



Capital and Colonial drivers handle several Greyhound schedules between Tallahassee, Florida and Birmingham, Alabama; between Mobile, Alabama and New Orleans, Louisiana; and between Mobile, Alabama and Jackson, Mississippi. In most cases these consist of a Capital or Colonial driver on a Greyhound bus but sometimes a Colonial bus operates between Mobile and New Orleans.

A total of 88 buses are currently in operation by Capital and Colonial. These include 46 Prevosts, 19 MCI Coaches, and 18 Van Hools. New coaches purchased since 2000 have all been Van Hool model C2045. In addition, the companies have two ABC M-1235 mini buses, two Barth trolley-themed buses, and one 1960 PD4104.

Capital has three sales and garage locations and one bus terminal. The main garage is in Montgomery with Madison and Richland being smaller sales offices. Capital also owns the terminal in Selma. There is also a small sales office in Auburn, Alabama that has been doing well. Colonial Trailways is located in Mobile and owns the bus terminal in Gulfport. Montgomery serves as the corporate headquarters for both Capital and Colonial with the executive and accounting offices for each.

Capital Trailways today operates more than 8,500 charters annually, transporting



Coach 99367 was recently photographed while on a charter. It is a 45-foot, 57-passenger Van Hool C2045 built in 2005. Today's latest paint scheme is traditional Trailways red and white with the addition of a blue stripe and the company name in blue.

an estimated 390,000 passengers more than 2 million miles each year. Colonial Trailways will operate in excess of 3,000 charters annually and carry approximately 150,000 passengers more than 850,000 miles. Coaches operate primarily in the Southeastern United

States but in the course of a year, Capital and Colonial coaches will be in almost every state and most of the Canadian provinces.

Today, approximately 80 percent of the operations are charters with three percent involving group tours. The remaining 17 percent is scheduled service, operated in conjunction with Greyhound. There is a full time staff to plan and escort tours for many customers, and package tours are planned in both Montgomery and Mobile. Typical tour destinations include Branson, Nashville, Washington D.C., Myrtle Beach, and Orlando. At least one tour each year goes to Alaska.

Capital and Colonial have survived many ups and downs in the past 75 years and continue to do what works best. President Frank Montgomery said: "We are always looking for ways to improve our product, primarily in the charter and tour business, and we have made it a goal to become one of the premier coach companies in the United States and certainly in the Southeast. Our primary goal is to provide consistent, quality service to our customers while increasing operating efficiencies that allow us to generate a profit."

When asked about future plans, Frank Montgomery commented: "There are no immediate plans for expansion, but our minds are always open to possibilities that could compliment our current services. We have recently upgraded our software systems, and now have all locations linked through a remote server. This will hopefully increase our responsiveness to customer needs in all locations and allow for more detail control over daily operations in all cities." □

Shown is a very recent photograph of the company staff at Capital Trailways. They are (left to right): Everett Johnson, sales rep, Capital Trailways, Auburn, Alabama; Tyrone Robinson, director of operations, Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways; Frank Montgomery, president, Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways; Wayne Phillips, chairman, Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways; George Starns, vice president, sales, Colonial Trailways; Debra Montgomery, vice president, accounting and payroll, Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways; Mike Hazard, branch manager, Capital Trailways, Madison (Huntsville), Alabama; Shannon Rhodes, vice president, general manager, Capital Trailways; Curtis Wiggins, vice president, general manager, Colonial Trailways; Doug Cumuze, director of sales, Capital Trailways; and Ed Sunday, vice president, maintenance, Capital Trailways and Colonial Trailways.

