

Warrenton's Railroad: Still Chugging, Destination Unknown

A century ago the idea of a railroad for Warrenton got on track, thanks to a blend of government-citizen cooperation, much hard work, and the investment potential of two unknown Connecticut old maids. The start of the Warrenton Railroad, its up-and-down history, and the hopes of its operators are provided in the following article. Much of the information was provided by Howard Oakley, the energetic engineer-brakeman-custodian of the railroad, who, even in his mid-seventies, feels at home while at the throttle of Warrenton's main locomotive.—Editor.

By HELEN HOWARD Staff Writer

The Warrenton Railroad Company was chartered on April 21, 1876 with Sheriff Nat Jones as the first president. Money was raised in a town meeting in early 1876 when the town pledged to buy 75 percent of the stock and others in the county pledged the additional 25 percent.

According to Mrs. W. A. Montgomery's book, "Sketches of Old Warrenton," about 1877, "three of the most impractical citizens of the Town of Warrenton" started a movement for a railroad from Warren Plains to Warrenton. Two thousand dollars was subscribed and the railroad bed was started, which proved to be an easy task with the good terrain and no streams to cross.

After approximately \$20,000 was subscribed locally, W. A. Montgomery was sent to New York to acquire additional money from the bonds. A New York banker Montgomery contacted had about \$20,000 in money belonging to two spinsters in Connecticut which was to be used for investment and the New York developer invested in the company.

It took from 1876 to 1884 to obtain all the rights-of-way and to connect to the main line.

In 1884, the railroad committee consisted of B. L. Long, W. J. Norwood, George A. Foote, C. A. Cook, Jim Draper and Joel H. Hill.

W. J. Norwood and Joel Hill were selected to find a place for a depot but were unable to decide. B. F. Long chose a lot belonging to J. Andur Johnson and Richard Falkner. (This was on Main Street close to the Old Eaton residence.)

O. P. Shell offered to build the depot and provide an engine. On October 2, 1884, the board approved purchase of a locomotive from the Richmond and Potomac Railroad for \$1,500.

The railroad was completed on the 8th day of November, 1884. O. P. Shell was employed as agent and conductor at \$38 per month; B. E. Cook was fireman for \$15 per month and the engineer was paid \$40 per month.

The train track was laid and the train ran into Warrenton to the depot, to the Robert Alston home formerly owned by Faulk Alston. C. W. Bolton was civil engineer. The road was laid from the town limits of Warrenton to Warren Plains Station, a total of 14,200 feet. This connected with the Raleigh-Gaston Railroad. The agreement was signed by Richard Kingshaw, president; B. F. Long, secretary, and M. A. Reynolds.

On Thursday, November 20, 1884, the Warrenton Gazette had an article which read: "Thursday will be marked with a white stone in Warrenton's history. The railroad has been completed to the corporate limits and yesterday our citizens heard for the first time the shrill and lively shrieks of the locomotive whistle, as Engineer Lawrence drove the first locomotive into town, arriving at one o'clock. Warrenton is at last connected with the outside world by both rail and telegraph. We can hope that it is the dawn of a returning and continuing prosperity."

The board set the first freight tariffs and passenger rates at a meeting on February 17, 1885. Passengers could make the trip for 25 cents with children from five to 10 at one-half fare and children under five, free. Combination tickets could also be purchased: 10 trips, \$1.25; 30 trips, \$3.50.

Packages containing money carried a charge of 25 cents; those weighing up to 25 pounds, 15 cents; 25 to 50 pounds, 20 cents; and 50 to 100 pounds, 25 cents. Delivery to residence or place of business cost 10 cents extra.

Cotton per bale had a charge of 10 cents and fertilizer per car load, \$2.50. Special rates could be made by the president.

In May, 1885, the first run was made. During these days the only road to Warren Plains was a cow path and the only way to get there, save by horseback, was the train. Mrs. Montgomery's book says speeches, fireworks and much celebration accompanied the first run.

The first coach was purchased from the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad in July, 1885, for \$925.

A contract to carry the mail from Warren Plains to Warrenton and meet the schedule of the Raleigh and Gaston Railroad was signed in February, 1887. The mail, freight and passengers were means of support.

In May of that year the directors had a proposal to purchase a new locomotive and in June approved the purchase. The locomotive, complete with headlights and hand brakes, was bought for \$4,500.

In 1907 the old depot was sold for \$550 and a new one was built at the town limits on North Main Street where it now stands. The property was purchased from Dr. J. M. Parker for \$1,200.

The Town of Warrenton obtained 396 shares at \$25 per share and private citizens bought 132 for the initial investment in 1876. The railroad was started with 528 shares for \$13,200. The town's investment was \$9,900. The first dividend was received in 1909. With the railroad paying dividends, the county gained new confidence.

A contract was approved for the Peck Manufacturing Company siding in 1909. Warrenton was to furnish the rail and track material and to lay it for a price not to exceed \$2,000. Peck was to pay \$5 per year for 50 years as a rental charge. The track was completed in April, 1910.

The Board sold one acre of the land at the depot to the Town of Warrenton in 1915 for \$150 so the town could build a deep well for part of the municipal water supply. (The brick pump house can be seen now near the depot, which has been leased and restored by the Warrenton Woman's Club.

The onset of the automobile caused the passenger car service to be discontinued in 1923. The only trips made

then were the special trips made each year to take the National Guard unit from Warrenton to Warren Plains so they could meet a train to take them to summer camp and back.

As the area grew plants were built and sidings built to serve them. This increased revenue. In 1920 a four-to-one stock split was approved. The value of the dividends was \$39,600 with an average share worth \$18.75.

Later new shares were issued, although the exact date is unknown, and the town purchased 1,584 shares, giving it a total of 1,980. Private citizens bought 528 new shares, for a total of 2,640 private and public shares in the Warrenton Railroad.

Dividends were paid for 50 years, lasting until 1959. No dividends have been paid since because of declining revenues.

During the period dividends were being paid, the Town of Warrenton received \$200,945.25, while \$66,979 was paid individuals.

This would mean that the Town of Warrenton and others gained 2,029 percent on their original investment. The town has been given \$191,045.25, while others received \$63,679 on profits alone.

Sidings were added along the railroad. In 1965 one was built for Warren Cotton and Fertilizer Company; 1967, a Warren Plains run-around was built; 1968 siding for General Box Company and Warren FCX Service were added; and in 1970 a siding for Cochrane Furniture Company was completed.

Early in 1971 the back traction motor and the diesel motor quit operating. The Warrenton Railroad was at a (Continued on page 3)



WARRENTON'S LAST STEAM LOCOMOTIVE Iron Horse Went To Scrap Heap In 1946

Grant Of \$997,000 Approved To Consolidate Warren Schools

Plant Construction To Begin In 90 Days

By HOWARD JONES

Consolidation of Warrenton and Norlina high schools appears to be here following notification that the Warren County Board of Education meeting in special session Tuesday night sought to have deeds for a 42-acre site on the U. S. 158 bypass midway between the two towns in school possession by week's end.

Announcement of the approval of the \$997,000 grant from the Economic Development Administration came in the form of a telegram to school officials and The Warren Record dispatched by Second District Congressman L. H. Fountain.

As a public works grant, designed to stimulate the local economy, expenditure of funds must begin within 90 days of official notification.

The new grant, coupled with a million dollars the Warren Board of Education has in reserve from a state school bond issue, will provide sufficient money to begin construction of the new facility. Supt. of Schools J. R. Peeler told the board Tuesday night.

Peeler told board members, all of whom were present except Leigh Traylor, who was out of the country, that he felt the available state and federal funds would be adequate to build the new school, except for a gymnasium.

Meeting with the board was Frank Ballance, Warrenton (Continued on page 10)

Newcomers Join Town Board Race

Three new hopefuls for a seat on the Warrenton Town Board have joined three incumbents in filing for the municipal positions to be decided in the November 8 election.

Mrs. Miriam Coleman reported that Eddie Clayton, A. C. Fair, and A. A. Wood, all of whom served previously on the board, along with incumbents B. G. White, Gordon Haithecock and W. K. Lanier, Jr., have thrown their hats into the ring.

Mayor W. A. Miles has also filed again, according to Mrs. Coleman.

No one has filed for the Norlina municipal elections as yet, according to Mrs. Mae Gums, town clerk.

The filing period will end on October 7. Registration to vote will be closed on October 10.

Hamburger Chain Eyeing Site Here

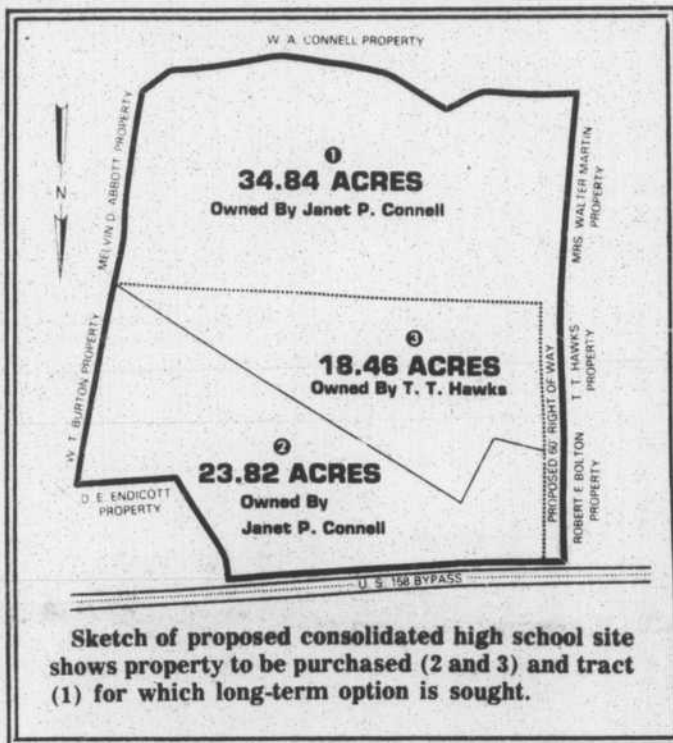
A major national fast-food distributor is eyeing Warrenton as a possible location.

Hardees, a Rocky Mount based firm which has 1,021 outlets across the nation, is considering a site in Warrenton.

Larry Zimmerman of the Hardees headquarters in Rocky Mount said Tuesday that the company is "considering a site" at present and will probably decide within the next 30 days.

Zimmerman said that if a suitable site could be obtained, the fast-food operation could be opened in early 1978.

A second spokesman for the franchise division said legal matters and other approvals could be completed by the end of the year and that the Warrenton location would be company-owned instead of franchise business.



Sketch of proposed consolidated high school site shows property to be purchased (2 and 3) and tract (1) for which long-term option is sought.

Has Anybody Seen Lawmen's Meal?

Doomed Cow Eludes Posse

A 900-pound cow being fattened for its role as the main dish at a two-state meeting of law enforcement officers here bolted from custody Monday and remains at large, despite efforts of a mounted posse to track it down.

The black angus jumped over the side of a pickup truck owned by a Warren County deputy sheriff and raced to freedom. The escape occurred on a farm near Warren Plains.

Sheriff Clarence Davis, host for the October 4 meeting of criminal intelli-

gence agents from North Carolina and Virginia, was dejected at the loss of the animal.

"Unless we find it, we can't feed the people," he said. About 200 persons were scheduled to eat barbecued beef at the Warrenton Lions

Den. Their menu now is uncertain, the sheriff indicated.

The cow had been bought earlier in the day at the South Hill Livestock Market and was being unloaded at the Lucas Allen Hawks Farm by Deputy Dorsey

Capps. After the cow tore free, local lawmen, some on horseback, scoured the countryside for the missing animal. Walkie-talkies linked the searchers but no trace of the missing animal had been found at noon Wednesday.

Job, Back Pay Given Fired Cop

Warrenton commissioners, meeting in executive session, have agreed to reinstate a fired black policeman and provide him

with \$6,200 in back pay.

The agreement to settle a pending discrimination suit against the town came after the regular September meeting of the board, held September 12. Notification given news media that action had been taken was received too late for last week's issue.

During the session, board minutes show, commissioners voted to rehire James Fitts as of October 15, if he still wishes to be a Warrenton policeman. Fitts told this newspaper Tuesday night that he plans to rejoin the local force.

The matter was heard in executive session after two agents of the U. S. Office of Revenue Sharing had appeared to determine if Fitts had been discriminated against. Fitts had written a letter to Revenue Sharing using discrimination as a reason for his suspension from the police department.

A search by Revenue Sharing representatives of police records indicated that Fitts had not been properly warned of charges against him, Town Manager Bill Davis said.

Commissioner Leary made a motion to rehire

Fitts, seconded by Commissioner Cliborne. The board decided to make amends in the monetary settlement by paying Fitts \$2000 on October 15; \$2000 on November 15; and \$2200 on December 15.

Fitts has not worked on the police force since June, 1976. The board, in a June 14, 1976, board meeting, was told by Police Chief Freddie Robinson that officer James Fitts had been put on suspension without pay for conduct not becoming an officer.

Robinson said Fitts has recently issued a total of nine worthless checks valued at \$297.18 to Warrenton merchants but that he had repaid most of the checks (by the date of the meeting.) Bill Neal, water superintendent, also said he had seen Fitts doing "donuts" in the gravel near Hawkins Junior High School while on a police vehicle.

Robinson told the board that when he put Fitts on suspension, Fitts said he would not resign and wanted a written statement as to the reasons for his suspension.

Fitts later appeared at the board with his attorney, Frank Ballance.

Prominent Evangelist To Lead Methodist Revival

Dr. A. Purnell Bailey will be the guest speaker for a revival at Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church from Sept. 25 through Sept. 28.

Dr. Bailey is currently the Director of the Division of Chaplains for the United Methodist Church with headquarters in Washington, D. C.

He is the author of many books and articles and writes a column which is well known to many North Carolinians under the title, "Daily Bread."

Dr. Bailey has served the church in many capacities and has frequently been an instructor at the N. C. Conference Pastors School at Duke University.

He has preached in many North Carolina churches and several years ago preached in a series of

meetings in Warrenton.

Services will begin each evening at 7:30. A nursery is available so that families with young children can attend the worship services.



DR. A. PURNELL BAILEY