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## History Of Railroading In This Section Of The State

### Branch Line Built To Williamston In 1883 From Tarboro

Railroad Extended to Plymouth in 1889 by Albemarle And Raleigh Company  
By THOS. F. DARDEN  
Vice President of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company

The history of railroading is really a history of the development of the country, and the history of the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad is a history of the development not only of Eastern North Carolina, but of the whole Southeastern section of our country. It may not be amiss, therefore, to outline some of the economic background leading up to the building of this road.

There had been only slight advancement in the economic development of North Carolina from the end of the Colonial period up until the year 1835, conditions being somewhat similar to those in Virginia. The influential portion of the population lived in the eastern section and dominated the policy of the entire State. North Carolina is pre-eminently an agricultural State. Timber has also played an important part in its economic development. Prior to the Civil War turpentine production was an important industry and Wilmington at one time was the largest naval stores depot in the world.

The question of internal improvements and the need for transportation early occupied the attention of the public but very little progress was made. In 1829 the Cape Fear River was included in the list of rivers which were to receive Federal appropriations. For sixteen years it received an annual appropriation of \$20,000.00 and in 1847 a depth of thirteen feet at high water was attained. It now has a depth of thirty-two feet.

Public opinion from the time of the earliest discussion of railroad building in North Carolina had been divided into two hostile camps, the eastern section contending for the building of a road north and south, while the western portion favored an east-west line. E. B. Dudley, later Governor of the State, opposed the east-west line and was of the opinion that such a line would divide the State into two parts, one part being transferred to Virginia and the other to South Carolina. It was evident to most of those interested that the primary market within the State must be Wilmington. As population spread into the back country Wilmington still held its place as the most important trade center of the district. It secured much of its trade from Fayetteville, the focus for the wagon trade of the surrounding country as well as for the river pole boats. Fayetteville had an extensive system of plank roads in the country and thus carried on trade with the country lying west, extending even into Tennessee and southwest Virginia, the old canvas-top wagon being the vehicle which served to bring produce to the head of navigation. Cargoes were unloaded at Fayetteville, shipped to Wilmington

### MARTIN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



Contrary to the general rule existing in public offices throughout the land, the personnel of the Martin County's Board of Commissioners is marked by the absence of law. Recognized mainly as an agricultural county, old Martin turned to the land for its leadership in four out of five cases, the acting giving the 26,111 loyal subjects a well-balanced and able governing body. While their every act has not, as is to be expected, met with general approval, the facts coming out of the administration point to a conscientious and successful leadership. Martin County today, certainly as a result of its able leadership past and present, is recognized as one of the leading units in the State's political system. While it claims no single big advancement, the county has gone far in battling for all its people and when viewed as a whole, it has made a definite progress in all its fields of public endeavor. Holding top ranks in the fields of agriculture and business, the commissioners, reading left to right, C. A. Roberson, R. A. Haislip, Joshua L. Coltrain, C. D. Carstarphen and R. L. Perry, are handling well the duties imposed upon them by their offices of public trust. Mr. Perry is chairman of the group.

and re-shipped from there by means of boat through the Cape Fear river. Before the railroad era much of the produce, especially naval stores, found its way in small vessels to the coast cities of New England. The tonnage of the port at that time exceeded that of Richmond, although the city was not more than a quarter the size of Richmond.

As soon as it was found that railroads were practicable a movement was put on foot to secure them. The idea of building a railroad north from Wilmington seems to have originated with Mr. P. K. Dickinson, a prominent citizen of Wilmington, who had seen a short line in operation in New England. He returned to Wilmington and began the agitation for a railroad. As a result the Wilmington & Raleigh Railroad company was incorporated on January 3rd, 1834, it being the intention at that time to join the principal seaport with the capital, but the people of Raleigh would not subscribe to the undertaking. It was decided, therefore to build the road into the Roanoke River country, and in December, 1835, the charter was amended and the destination changed so as to connect with the Virginia lines at Weldon. At the same time permission was granted to purchase, own and possess steamboats to ply from Wilmington to Charleston and elsewhere.

The building of a railroad from Wilmington to Weldon, 161 miles, was a tremendous undertaking for the citizens of Wilmington, which at that time had a population of about 3,000 including a number of Negro slaves. When twenty public-spirited men assembled at the home of Governor Dudley and made their subscriptions to the road the sum subscribed was larger than the entire taxable property of the town. Governor Dudley's subscription of \$25,000.00 was the largest. The first meeting of the stockholders was held on March 14, 1836, in the Courthouse at Wilmington. Governor E. B. Dudley was elected President and Gen-

### Peanut Prices Are Pegged At \$89 A Ton By the Government

While the 1941 tobacco marketing season is holding the farmer's attention just now, it is encouraging to include in the farm picture even at this time a recent report from the United States Department of Agriculture announcing a new price guarantee to peanut farmers.

The prices, ranging about \$25 a ton higher than the 1940 quotations, were announced as follows: U. S. 1, Class A Virginias, \$94 per ton; 3-A peanuts at \$89 per ton. The first classification includes the very best, and the second classification will include a large portion of the crop produced in this area.

Advised of the new price schedule recently, Harry T. Westcott, marketing specialist of the State Department of Agriculture, said that "no

eral Alex MacRae was elected superintendent.

On account of the many difficulties to overcome, while work was begun in October, 1836, very little was accomplished until the spring of 1837. Although parts of the road were in use from 1838, the main line extending from Wilmington to Weldon, 151 miles, was opened for operation on March 9th, 1840, just one hundred and one years ago. It then had the distinction of being the longest railroad in the world. Its equipment consisted of twelve locomotives, eight passenger cars, four mail cars and fifty freight cars. The locomotives were built in England, in Philadelphia, and in Richmond. The track consisted of flat pieces of iron

attached to wooden string pieces and it was not until 1848 that the first iron rails were purchased in England and placed in the track. This work of placing iron T-rails in the track was completed in the Fifties.

A great celebration was held in Wilmington upon the completion of the road, with guests from the northern part of the State, from Virginia and South Carolina. Barbecue was spread at the depot at which 550 people were served, bells were rung, 161 guns were fired, one for each mile of line, for this was the first time a train of cars was ever pulled 161 miles continuously on a railroad. Toasts were offered, letters of congratulation read, and in the afternoon the ceremony of mingling

the waters of the Roanoke, Tar and Neuse with those of the Cape Fear was celebrated.

At this time the road was also operating a line of steamboats from Wilmington to Charleston, which made daily connections with trains at Wilmington. This rail-water line proved to be popular because it furnished the most direct route between the South and East and greatly shortened the time required for the trip.

Train service in those days was more leisurely and personal than now, as evidenced by the story that it was the custom of certain officials of the railroad on occasions to meet the south-bound passengers on their arrival at Wilmington and to present to every lady a bouquet of flowers. Jenny Lind is said to have been one of those thus favored by the Secretary and Treasurer, Mr. James S. Green. In the case of passengers who remained a few days in Wilmington, this preliminary courtesy was likely to be followed by a series of formal calls by prominent citizens of the town.

The Petersburg Railroad, chartered in 1830 and completed in 1833, and the Richmond and Petersburg Railroad, chartered in 1836 and completed in 1838, formed the connecting railroads to the North.

Many of the earlier railroads were community or sectional enterprises and had their beginnings in the struggle for trade supremacy and advantage between cities and sections dating back to Colonial times. The seaport cities had been built upon the trade of the rich agricultural lands along the coast and inland waterways that had first been put into cultivation. The fertility of these lands was being depleted and the Piedmont sections to the west

and across the mountains, the rich valleys of the rivers (flowing to the Gulf, were attracting an ever growing number of settlers. It was vital to the life of the coastal cities that they should secure the trade of these new sections.

Transportation was of course the

controlling factor in the situation. The history of the roads in North Carolina and Virginia is closely paralleled by that of the roads constructed about the same time in South Carolina and Georgia. Trade competition between Wilmington,

North Carolina, Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia, was responsible for the construction of the Wilmington & Manchester, later known as the Wilmington, Columbia & Augusta, the Northeastern of South Carolina, the Cheraw & Darlington, the Atlantic & Gulf, and other lines now a part of the Atlantic Coast Line System that were pushed out into the fertile back country.

The importance of developing the Eastern section of North Carolina and furnishing it with transportation facilities was realized at an early date, and in 1830-1860 a branch line was constructed by the Wilmington & Weldon Railroad Company from Rocky Mount, N. C. to Tarboro, N. C. a distance of fifteen miles.

In February, 1861, the Wilmington & Tarboro Railroad Company was organized for the purpose of constructing a line from Tarboro to Williamston, N. C., a distance of thirty-one miles. The franchise of this company was conveyed to the Seaboard & Raleigh Railroad Company, which was incorporated in December, 1873. This Company practically completed the line between Tarboro and Williamston, which had been partially constructed by the Wilmington & Tarboro Railroad Company. The name of the Seaboard & Raleigh Railroad Company was changed to the Albemarle & Raleigh Railroad Company.

(Continued on page four)

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