

Tracks Through Time

A Railfan Tour of
Orange County, Virginia



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Tourguide, Ltd., with the special and
invaluable assistance of Bob Johnson,
Paul Alderman, and Bob Lookabill.


VISIT
ORANGE
VIRGINIA



Top photo: Norfolk & Western J-611. Built in 1950 at N&W's Roanoke VA shops, #611 is the only surviving J class locomotive of the 14 built. It weighs 247 tons and develops 5,100 horsepower at 50mph. The wheel configuration is 4-8-4, meaning four front idlers, eight powered 70" driving wheels, and four rear idlers. Designed for fast passenger service, the finely-balanced J-611 could cruise comfortably at 100mph. Image courtesy of the Virginia Museum of Transportation, Roanoke.

Bottom Photo: Norfolk & Western A-1218. Of the 43 Class A locomotives built at N&W's Roanoke VA shops, #1218, built in 1943, is the only one left. Each weighing 287 tons and developing 6,300 horsepower at 45mph, the As could hit speeds of 70mph. They were the key to N&W's famous "fast freight" program. The wheel configuration is 2-6-6-4, meaning that #1218 has two separately powered sets of driving wheels. Image courtesy of the Virginia Museum of Transportation, Roanoke.

Fig. 1 (Cover Art). Buckingham Branch #7 shifting cars in the Warren Street yard, Orange, VA, from the *Trains* collection of local artist Todd Brown. Used with permission. The structure on the hill in the background is the town water tower.

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Welcome to the Orange County Railfan Tour! Between 1840 and 1921, five railroads laid their tracks in Orange County. Three of those rail corridors are still in use today by three national railroads and one regional railroad. It's a mixture of romance and reality as we trace railroads from their days as a century-old "dot-com" to their near total collapse in the 1960s and then to their present-day resurgence as major players in our economy.

To save space, we will often use the shorthand "RR" for "railroad" or "railway" and "R/W" for "right of way."

- A. The 1840 Louisa RR became the Virginia Central, then became part of the CSX. Its R/W is being used by CSX, Buckingham Branch, and Amtrak.
- B. The 1854 Orange & Alexandria (O&A) became part of Norfolk Southern, and its R/W is being used by Buckingham Branch and Amtrak.
- C. The Potomac, Fredericksburg & Piedmont started running from Orange to Fredericksburg in 1877, then in 1926 it converted to standard gauge and renamed itself the Virginia Central. The R/W was abandoned in 1938 and over time portions have been acquired by adjoining landowners.
- D. The 1880 Charlottesville & Rapidan (C&R) became a part of the Washington City, Virginia Midland and Great Southern RR that became a part of Norfolk Southern, and the R/W is being used by Norfolk Southern and Amtrak.
- E. The Rapidan RR ran from Orange to Wolfstown and into mountain logging camps from 1921 to 1924. Its R/W was conveyed back to the adjoining landowners.

I

The Town Of Orange Railroad Avenue Venue

BUT FIRST, words of instruction, admonition, and caution. You will be involved with both road traffic and trains, both demanding your attention and caution.

Do not attempt to take this tour alone. You will need the benefit of a reader/navigator as well as the safety of an additional pair of eyes. Also, when you are pausing or stopping to examine a site or venue, pull well out of the lanes of both vehicle and train traffic. In addition to local law enforcement authorities, RRs have their private police to protect and clear their R/Ws. If turning around, pick a wide place with good visibility. Please respect our information about accessibility. If we say there's no public access to something, please don't go on private property. Not only are you likely to encounter irate landowners and/or their livestock, you could find yourself visiting mosquitoes, ticks, poison ivy, snakes, barbed wire, etc. It's very easy to stay clear of switches, please do so. They are controlled remotely, and can function like steel traps. Please, please watch any children on the tour. Just as trains fascinate us, they can transfix children into ignoring danger. Lastly, don't take trains for granted. Those huge machines can move faster and quieter than you might imagine. If one is in the area, keep an eye out for it and don't let it surprise you. They can't stop for you. A freight train going 50mph can slide well over a mile after its brakes are locked. Remember that Orange County will not be responsible or liable for accidents, injuries, illnesses, property loss, etc., so please act accordingly.

NOTES ABOUT TOUR TIME AND GPS/SCANNER DATA: Without museum visits or side trips, this tour should take between four and five hours to complete. If you plan to visit museums and take side trips, please set aside the entire day so that you won't have to hurry. References to waypoints are being shown by [bracketed] numbers. Railfans using scanners will find relevant frequency information on the same page as the GPS waypoints. Now, on with the tour!

- A. Park at the train station/visitors center on Short Street [1] and go to the Short Street/Church Street (south) end of Robertson Fountain Park [2]. The Park is the greenspace area between Short Street and the tracks. Directly across Church Street from you is the 1926 station of the Potomac, Fredericksburg & Piedmont RR. It was a narrow gauge short line affair, chartered in 1853, and it ran from Orange to Fredericksburg from 1877 to 1938. In 1926 the management rebuilt it to standard gauge (4'8.5"), built the station you see, and changed its name to the Virginia Central RR. No other evidence of that railroad exists right here, but you will see much more elsewhere.
- B. Now move to your right to the fence corner where you see the two sets of tracks. The set nearest you is running on the R/W of the Orange & Alexandria, the first railroad to come through the Town of Orange. That was 1854. Commercial development along that R/W began almost immediately, and the first version of Railroad Avenue appeared. This R/W is now owned by the Norfolk Southern Corporation, who has leased it to the CSX Corp., who in turn has subleased it to the Buckingham Branch RR. Buckingham Branch, originally a 17mi. short line operation, has now leased over 250mi. of CSX R/W.
- C. The set of tracks farther away from you is on the R/W of the Charlottesville & Rapidan RR that came through Orange in 1880. This R/W comes through Barboursville, Somerset and Montpelier, bypassing Gordonsville. You see it curving to run alongside the older R/W through town. With the arrival of the C&R, Orange began to replace Gordonsville as the commercial center of the region. This R/W is now owned and used by the Norfolk Southern Corp.
- D. Note the small latticework tower with an arm hanging over the CSX/BB R/W supporting a set of colored signal lights. This is a signal bridge. RR R/Ws are divided into "blocks" several miles in length with signals at the beginning of each block. If the signal is red, there is a train in the block just ahead, and no additional train is authorized to enter it. If the signal is yellow, there is a train two blocks ahead, and an engineer must proceed with caution.

- E. Where the tracks and Church Street meet, there is a “grade crossing,” meaning that the two travel ways meet on the same level, or grade. Later in the tour, you will see grade separations. The whistle sequence upon approaching a grade crossing is two longs, a short, and another long. There are three grade crossings close together here, and that seems to confuse some engineers.
- F. A final note about tracks. There are various weights of rail, measured in so many pounds per yard (3’) of length. Much of the main line rail in use here is 140# rail, meaning that it can handle heavy loads at high speeds. In our area, that would be 300-ton locomotives traveling at 60mph. The rails can actually handle vastly more than that. Most of the rail is welded, meaning that it is seamless without joints. Keep in mind that steel rails expand and contract with heat and cold, so designing a track layout is not as easy as it might seem.
- G. By moving about 50 paces along the fence toward the train station, you will put yourself almost directly across the tracks from the site of the 1854 O&A passenger station. Its freight depot would have been at your right shoulder. Those structures, as well as everything else on Railroad Avenue, were consumed in the Great Fire of 1908. The avenue was so commercially important that business people began rebuilding almost before the embers cooled. The old station witnessed a grisly scene on 23 July 1861, two days after the Civil War Battle of First Manassas. Local diarist Fanny Page Hume wrote: *“Such a horrid sight! A long car [train] loaded with dead and wounded was at the depot, the latter were being carried to the hospital [the old 1803 court house that once stood across the tracks from you]. Everyone was so anxious and excited. Depot completely crowded...Another train came up whilst we were there and our noble president, Jefferson Davis, was on board.”* Another Civil War incident involving Railroad Avenue comes out of the 2 August 1862 cavalry battle in Main Street. Colonel William “Grumble” Jones, commander of the Confederate cavalry reported: *“Finding Main Street filled with cavalry, a flank attack under Major Marshall was ordered by the railroad depot, while under my direction, the head of the enemy’s column was assailed in front. Both attacks were successful.”* Major Marshall was a grandson of the late Chief Justice John Marshall. The Federal cavalry outnumbered the Confederates by several multiples, however, and ultimately succeeded in temporarily occupying the town.
- H. As you move along the fence toward the station, you will pass the Robertson Fountain. Mr. & Mrs. Robertson, long-term residents of the town, had three daughters, two of whom died at early ages. The fountain was built in their memory. The statue is of the surviving third daughter, who is holding a puppy belonging to Tammy, the family pet.
- I. As you approach the station, you see the Main Street grade crossing. That crossing tells the story of why railroads came to Orange. Orange is in the midst of the Southwest Mountains, a band of low ridges extending through Nelson and Albemarle counties and ending in eastern Orange County. Orange itself is built on several of those ridges, but right at the Main Street grade crossing, there is a pass through the ridges, a pass that attracted the railroads and their commerce.
- J. When the O&A was preparing to develop its R/W, the town leaders offered to allow it to come through the town’s Public Lot, free of charge. As a result, the county jail was on one side of the tracks, and the clerk’s office and court house on the other. Fortunately, those public services were relocated prior to the Great Fire.
- K. In the distance beyond the Main Street grade crossing, you can spot the May-Fray Avenue grade crossing. That grade crossing was the scene of Orange County’s first fatal train wreck. On 25 May 1861, three Confederate troop trains were leaving for Manassas, and one train rammed another. Fanny Page Hume reported: *“A terrible accident occurred on the railroad just in front of Aunt Sarah’s. Two or three men are killed and eight or nine wounded. A kind Providence prevented a greater loss of life.”* “Aunt Sarah” was Sarah Bull, who lived at “Rebel Hall,” right beside the grade crossing.
- L. In the R/W and between you and the Main Street grade crossing are two rather inconspicuous short metal posts, or pedestals, one beside the outside rail of each R/W. They are sensors, and they do more than just tell dispatchers hundreds of miles away that a train is going by. Depending upon its make and programming, a sensor can send information on the speed of the train, the performance of its engines, the presence of hot wheel bearings, and for cars with readable panels, information on those specific cars, such as interior temperatures. You will see sensors at various locations during your tour.

- M. You are now at the station. It was built in 1910 by Southern Railroad to replace the one destroyed in the Great Fire. By then, the Southern owned both R/Ws. On 1 February 1965, several flatcars hauling steel bar joists lost their loads as they rolled through town, and bar joists flew everywhere. At least a couple punched through the station walls and landed in Short Street on the other side. Fortunately, no one was injured. The last train stopped here in 1970, and the town eventually bought the station and remodeled it into a very nice visitors center. If you are here during operating hours, consider going in and looking. If you can't stop now, make plans to return.
- N. This concludes the tour of the Railroad Avenue venue. We will now begin touring the R/Ws that extend out into the county. If you wish to see only the remaining sites in the Town of Orange, refer to IIB, IIC, IIE, VB&C, and VIIB in this guide.

II

From the Orange Railroad Avenue Venue South to Gordonsville, following the Route of the Orange & Alexandria R.R. (O&A/CSX/BB)

- A. From the Visitors Center, drive to Main Street. Turn left (west) onto Main Street, proceed to the first traffic signal and turn left. At the next signal, turn left, go under the RR overpass and pull off into the business parking lot on the right [3].
- B. The Caroline Street overpass behind you is actually a site on a different R/W, but since the tour route takes us to it, we'll talk about it now. When the Charlottesville & Rapidan laid its tracks to Orange in 1880, this was a grade crossing. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Works Projects Administration (WPA) workers created a grade separation by digging down the road and creating an underpass. This is a common practice, but not every road dipping under an overpass denotes an old grade crossing. For some, the road has simply been lowered to accommodate taller trucks. Reference Fig. 2.

- C. Turn right out of the parking lot and take the left turn lane to the stop light directly ahead. When you turn left, you will be looking at the R/W of the O&A passing over Berry Hill Road [4]. There was no road here when the tracks were laid in 1854, but they were still raised above the surrounding grade on an earth fill. In 1955, a whole century later, the decision was made to bypass a portion of Route 20 going through town, and the first job for the highway department was to burrow through that fill and take advantage of an existing grade separation. The bridge you see is the original, built in 1955.
- D. You will need to turn around and return to the stop light. This is best done by turning into one of the parking areas on the left, turning around and returning to Berry Hill Road. When approaching the stop light, stay in the left turn lane.
- E. At the light, turn left onto Rte. 15/Caroline Street, proceed about 0.2mi., and make a left turn onto Rte. 647 (Old Gordonsville Road). Directly in front of you is a grade crossing [5]. Sadly, this is the site of Orange County's first fatal train/auto collision. In 1913 a young man named Paul Oddenino, who was running a taxi service, decided to race a train. The "contest" began in Culpeper County, and

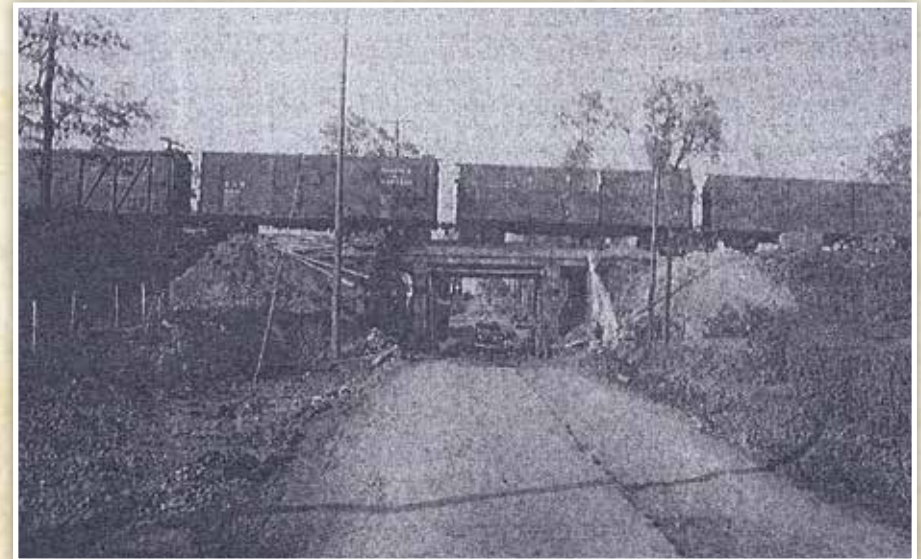


Fig. 2. WPA workers have almost finished lowering Caroline Street and turning its grade crossing into an underpass. The year is 1935. Photo courtesy of Duff Green and the *Orange County Review*.

as Paul raced through the streets of Orange, he evidently thought he had gotten far enough ahead of the train to cross in front of it. Unfortunately, he had miscalculated.

- F. Continue on Rte. 647. At this point, you are on the nineteenth century road to Gordonsville and paralleling the tracks that are on your right. You will cross Tomahawk Creek and then Poor House Run. Just past Poor House Run, there is a grade crossing as the R/W shifts to your left [6]. Note the Orange County Fairgrounds on your right and plan to revisit during fair season.
- G. Rte. 647 terminates at an intersection with Rte. 639 (Madison Run Road) [7]. Turn left and drive to the Madison Run grade crossing, former site of a station of the same name. As the “Madison” namings imply, you are in an area strongly influenced by the Madison family of nearby Montpelier, the best known of whom was James Madison, Jr., fourth president of the United States, “Father of the Constitution,” and architect of the Bill of Rights. The nearby residence once housed Harlow’s Country Store that served the small settlement around the station.
- H. Turn around and proceed on Rte. 639 to Rte. 15. In the overgrown area to your right just before you reach the intersection is the former site of the Montpelier grist mill. In the winter some foundation stones may still be visible.
- I. Note that Rte. 15 is a divided highway in this area. Turn left and proceed toward Gordonsville.
- J. Prior to reaching Gordonsville, Rte. 690 intersects from the left. Taking that road will bring you to the Black Level grade crossing [8]. Black Level was the name of a tract of land that the Madisons bought from Col. Henry Willis, who in 1734 had helped create Orange County. Visually, this grade crossing is a repeat of the one at Madison Run. If you choose to view this crossing, when done return to Rte. 15 and continue to Gordonsville.
- K. Drive to the traffic circle, and take combined Rtes. 15/33 South (Main Street). You will see it at your left, but of course, you will have to go around the circle to access it. Vehicles in the circle have the right of way, but it pays to stay alert for folks who might not know that.

III

The Gordonsville CSX/Buckingham Branch Sites and Venue

- A. As you drive up Main Street, you will see a RR bridge over Main Street [9]. When the Louisa Railroad received permission from the Virginia legislature to extend its tracks to Charlottesville and beyond, it most likely had a grade crossing here. That railroad went into the Civil War calling itself the Virginia Central, the first of two Orange County RRs to bear that name. Following the war, it merged with the Covington & Ohio, and a few years later the merged system renamed itself the Chesapeake & Ohio (C&O). It was during the C&O era that we believe the first bridge was built at this site. The present bridge was built in 1931.
- B. Go under the bridge, then proceed about 200 yards and turn left onto Depot Street. In a few moments, you will be at several sets of tracks. You are at the Gordonsville wye [10]. A wye is a track layout often used by RRs when main lines are intersecting. In this case, lines from Orange, Charlottesville, and Richmond are all meeting here. Rather than attempt to verbally describe the wye, an illustration is provided in Fig. 3 that shows its function and versatility. A wye in the middle of a town yields multiple grade crossings, but you are at the best one.
- C. To your left beside the wye is a small two-story brick tower. It is known as G Cabin. Historically, railroads were fond of using the terms “cabin” and “shack,” the difference apparently being whether or not the building was to be occupied by people. In its heyday, G Cabin housed the railroad employees who controlled all the switching for the wye. That switching is now done from several states away. Before leaving the wye, check to see if a Buckingham Branch caboose is in sight. At one time every train had at its end a caboose, or “cabin car,” that served as the office of the train’s conductor. Caboose are rarely used today, but Buckingham Branch restored several, and one is usually spotted (railroad for “parked”) near the wye.
- D. Continue a short distance on Depot Street and turn right onto Cobb Street. Cobb Street terminates at South Main Street. Turn right, and before you get to the tracks up ahead, turn right into the parking lot of The Civil War Museum at the Exchange Hotel [11].

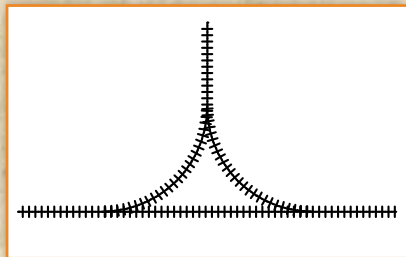


Fig. 3. A typical wye rail layout. This provides smooth connections between main lines as well as to local yards and maintenance facilities. It also permits a train to “turn around” for a return trip. Because the Gordonsville wye is more complicated and in the middle of the town, it has not been expanded to accommodate the speed and size of modern trains, and it has a speed limit of 10mph. Drawn by James Luther and used with permission.

- E. The Louisa RR built to Gordonsville in 1840, became the first RR in Orange County. In 1854 when the Orange & Alexandria connected with the Virginia Central, formerly the Louisa RR, Gordonsville became the commercial hub for a region bounded roughly by Charlottesville, Culpeper, Fredericksburg, and Louisa. Railroads were the “dot-coms” of the era, and Gordonsville boomed. Two turnpikes were built to connect the Valley of Virginia to Gordonsville. In the town, the railroads built and staffed offices, shops, train yards, warehouses, and other rail-related facilities. Local entrepreneurs added taverns, hotels, auction houses, more shops, and numerous stores. The only station on the Virginia Central busier than Gordonsville was the one in Richmond. A tavern stood on the site in front of you, serving the traveling public until it burned in 1859. Work began immediately to replace the tavern with a grand hotel, and the new Exchange Hotel was completed in 1860. As its name implies, a major function of the hotel was to accommodate travelers who were changing from one transportation carrier to another.
- F. In the spring of 1862, the Confederate government took over the Exchange Hotel and made it the headquarters of the Gordonsville Receiving Hospital, a tent city complex that sprawled over what were then the fields around you. Receiving hospitals received sick and wounded from camps and battlefield aid stations, and the staff evaluated their condition and treatment, supplied such additional medical attention as seemed necessary, and determined whether to send the patients (a) home to recuperate, (b) to a convalescent hospital elsewhere in the state, or (c) back to their units. The average stay of a patient was three days. Receiving hospitals had to be near transportation centers, and the Gordonsville facility was perfectly positioned. For the entire war, over 70,000 patients, Union and Confederate, went through this hospital, 23,000 in one year, 7,000 in one month.

Waypoint	Label	Coordinates	Elevation
1	01 OC train station	N38.24493 W78.11012	509 ft
2	02 1926 PF&P station	N38.24408 W78.10939	509 ft
3	03 Caroline Street overpass	N38.24090 W78.11333	496 ft
4	04 O&A Berry Hill overpass	N38.24000 W78.11067	465 ft
5	05 Rte. 647 BB grade xing	N38.23589 W78.11100	521 ft
6	06 Poorhouse Run	N38.20313 W78.12276	465 ft
7	07 Rte. 647 & 639	N38.19035 W78.12826	405 ft
8	08 Black Level grade xing	N38.14564 W78.17452	455 ft
9	09 Main Street overpass	N38.13630 W78.18729	504 ft
10	10 Gordonsville Wye	N38.13386 W78.18545	512 ft
11	11 Exchange Hotel	N38.13248 W78.18558	515 ft
12	12 Barboursville grade xing	N38.17197 W78.28090	501 ft
13	13 Tibbstown & grade xing	N38.17889 W78.26492	500 ft
14	14 Somerset grade xing	N38.20813 W78.21806	431 ft
15	15 Chicken Mt. Road	N38.22154 W78.18922	492 ft
16	16 Montpelier train station	N38.22875 W78.17643	537 ft
17	17 Wreck at the Fat Nancy	N38.23926 W78.14955	451 ft
18	18 Nasons station	N38.25685 W78.02838	481 ft
19	19 Grassland station (not used)	N38.26185 W77.98616	473 ft
20	20 Fill dam near Unionville station	N38.26188 W77.96375	511 ft
21	21 Rapidan River Bridge	N38.31025 W78.06554	317 ft
22	22 Rose Hill xing	N38.30572 W78.07429	360 ft
23	23 Rte. 673 & 700	N38.28879 W78.09243	556 ft
24	24 Trimmers xing	N38.28895 W78.08764	442 ft
25	25 Spotswood station	N38.26342 W78.11046	474 ft
26	26 Sheets-Rapidan RR	N38.25241 W78.11499	464 ft
27	27 Spicer’s grist mill	N38.26549 W78.15776	376 ft

Railfans with scanners:

- The primary channel is 160.950
- The secondary channel is 160.245

There are two talking defect detectors in our region, one at MP 79.2 at Rapidan and the other at MP 91.5 at Weyburn. They are both on 160.950.

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LEGEND
Railroads & Railways —

- G. Walk to the front. The R/W in front of you is the main line from Richmond, the wye is to your right, and the Main Street bridge carries the main line to Charlottesville. To your right and near the tracks is the 1841 Louisa Railroad station that is being restored. The interpretive panel to your left tells you about the famous Fried Chicken Ladies who for years met trains and fed their hungry passengers. If time allows, you are going to want to visit the excellent museum. If you have to keep going, you must plan to return.
- H. Return to your vehicle and proceed back up Main Street to the traffic circle. This time take Rte. 33 West, which is the road directly across the circle from you. Rte. 33 follows the corridor of the Rockingham Turnpike, one of the two turnpikes built to connect the commercial interests in the Valley to the Gordonsville rail facilities.
- I. As you travel Rte. 33 to Barboursville, you will pass Maplewood Cemetery on your right. This is where the some 700 Civil War dead originally buried at the receiving hospital were relocated when that facility was returned to peacetime uses. In a few minutes on your left, you will see a historical marker referring to the birthplace of U.S. President Zachary Taylor, a cousin of James Madison. Then, on your right, you will pass the Horton Winery. Horton and nearby Barboursville are two of the top wineries in Virginia. Roughly a mile past the Horton Winery, you will see a railroad bridge over the road. You are nearing the 1880 R/W of the Charlottesville & Rapidan, now Norfolk Southern. That particular bridge dates from 1941 [12].



Fig. 4. The original frame Weyburn coaling tower that went into operation in 1905. In the 1930s, it was replaced by an even bigger concrete tower. In 1953, with railroads switching to diesel-electric locomotives, that tower was removed with explosives. Photo courtesy of Duff Green and the *Orange County Review*.



Fig. 5. The Blue Run RR bridge adjacent to Weyburn Road. Blue Run flows under one portal, and Pump House Road used to go under the other. The construction is typical of the early 1900s. Water from the run was pumped the approximate half-mile to the Weyburn coaling station. Photo courtesy of Ann Miller and Zach Barlow.

IV

From Barboursville East to the Orange Railroad Avenue Venue (C&R/NS)

- A. Pass under the bridge; take the next public road to the left (Rte. 678), then turn left again. You are now on the Main Street of the village of Barboursville and heading toward the grade crossing in its center. The village's location at the junction of the turnpike and the railroad turned it into a boomtown for a time. Back then, the large building on your right at the tracks was a hotel. As late as 1900, the village still had five stores. It now has a number of the shops and studios of Orange County's extensive arts and crafts community as well as being the home of the Four County Players. When you are ready to proceed, continue forward to Rte. 20, turn left, go to Rte. 33 and turn left. Pass under the bridge again and turn right onto Rte. 20.
- B. You will see signs indicating that you are nearing Rte. 738 on the right with a grade crossing almost right at the intersection. The settlement in the area is Tibbstown, one of the 15 Freedman's Villages that appeared in Orange County after the Civil War, as former slaves found places to live after emancipation. If you stop at this crossing [13], make sure to drive east toward Orange when you resume your tour.
- C. Turn right onto Rte. 655 (Weyburn Road). At an earlier time, you would have seen the enormous coaling tower of Weyburn Station ahead on your right. Reference Fig. 4. That station served the water,

sand, and coal needs of steam locomotives. The station had a wye (see IIIB), a small yard, and a huge building that straddled the double-tracked R/W. Engines stopped under the building, and the engines' sand domes and their tenders' water tanks and coal bins were re-filled. When the SR started converting to diesel-electric locomotives, Weyburn Station was obsolete. The building was demolished with explosives in 1953, and all but the main line tracks were pulled up. Nothing remains.

- D. You will go over a sidetrack grade crossing that once served a large brick making plant. Look to the right as you cross the Blue Run Bridge just ahead. Depending on leaf cover, you may see the RR bridge on the right. It is not publicly accessible from Weyburn Road. Reference Fig. 5.
- E. At the intersection of Rtes. 655 and 231, you will see a grade crossing to your right [14]. It marks the center of what was the RR boomtown of Somerset. Rte. 231 is the Blue Ridge Turnpike that connected New Market in the Valley to Gordonsville. Like Barboursville, the RR/turnpike intersection brought great commercial activity and prosperity for a time. You are looking over the former sites of a RR station, livestock pens, barns, a large wagon park, an auction house, warehouse, and several stores and taverns. One of the nearby farm fields was subdivided into house lots and streets. By 1940, however, the Golden Era for RRs was over. The speed and convenience of motor vehicles and the miles of good roads available to them had caught up with the reliability and efficiency of RRs. World War II delayed the collapse of the RR industry a few more years, then it was really over. Even the Somerset RR station is gone – sold, dismantled, and reassembled elsewhere. Turn right onto Rte. 231.
- F. In a few hundred yards turn left onto Rte. 655 (called Jacksontown Road this time). We trust that the scenery will make the next 2.8mi. seem short. You will come to a fork with Rte. 639 (Chicken Mountain Road) [15]. Bear left. In a few moments, you will be on a bridge over the tracks. Please do not attempt to exit your vehicle; it's just too dangerous at that spot, and there's another bridge coming up that's safer. Proceed the short distance to Rte. 20. On your right is a monument erected in 1930 by the Daughters of the American Revolution calling attention to the fact that James and Dolley

Madison are buried nearby. The monument reflects the years when the Montpelier cemetery was not publicly accessible. Turn right. In a few moments, you will pass the entrance to James Madison's Montpelier. (There's no entrance fee, and if you have the time, drive in and take a look around. Impressive.) Just beyond that is the Montpelier train station and a good spot to pull off and take in the Montpelier station venue [16].

- G. When you face the tracks, about a hundred yards to your left is a hopper car trestle. Reference Fig. 6. A trestle is a type of RR bridge. In the summer, it may be hard to find in all the weeds. Well into the twentieth century, such commodities as sand, gravel, coal, etc., were carried in special railroad cars that had trap doors ("hoppers") along their underside. A car would be spotted on a trestle like the one you see, and the hoppers opened, dumping the load into trucks or wagons below. During the duPont era, Montpelier had a coal-fired heating/generating plant, and the need for bulk loads of coal, plus an occasional load of lime or fertilizer, created a corresponding need for a trestle. Norfolk Southern still owns the R/W to the trestle. Closer to you on the left is a small frame warehouse



Fig. 6. The Montpelier hopper car trestle, all that is left of the small rail yard that once existed here. The Detrick & Bradley fertilizer warehouse is in the right background. The NS main line runs along the edge of the trees. Photo courtesy of Bernice Walker.

that predates Montpelier's duPont era. Between 1881 and 1900, Montpelier was owned by Louis Detrick of Baltimore and William Bradley of Boston. They were in the fertilizer business, and they built this small warehouse as a place to house and distribute some of their product. William duPont [Sr.] acquired the title to Montpelier in 1901. His business interests had him traveling to Wilmington, Delaware, virtually every week, and in 1910, he built the station in order to be able to catch the train at his front gate. The Norfolk Southern stopped using the station in the 1950s, and left it as a racially segregated facility. The Montpelier Foundation elected to restore it as such to serve as an African-American heritage exhibit. The R/W was double-tracked from 1917 to the 1950s. You see a new bridge over the tracks. It was built in 2007. This bridge is also not a safe place to stand or even stop your vehicle. There's a better bridge site coming up. Behind you is the former Montpelier "company store" and employee housing, most of which has been remodeled to other uses. The Esso sign reflects the brand name of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey before its government-ordered breakup.

- H. When ready, continue on Rte. 20 to a right turn onto Rte. 675 (Dolley Madison Lane). When you come to an apparent fork, bear left. This road will take you to a view of the R/W from a relatively quiet bridge.
- I. Return to Rte. 20 and turn right. Your next stop will be a pull-off on the left at the site of two roadside historic markers. When there, you are at the site of the Wreck at the Fat Nancy [17].
- J. From its initial development in 1880 until the early 1900s, the RR R/W ran just to your left. By 1888 it was owned and used by the Washington City, Virginia Midland & Great Southern RR. The low area to your left front was spanned by a trestle, which is a type of continuous bridge with no significant clear spans. This trestle was known as the Fat Nancy Trestle, named for a lady of generous proportions who lived nearby. It was over 400 feet long, and in 1888 it was in the process of being replaced with an earth fill. In the early morning hours of 12 July, the trestle collapsed as a passenger train was crossing it. Eight men and one woman were killed. One of the men was Cornelius Cox, the man in charge of the crew replacing the trestle. He was headed home for a brief visit. The wreck remains as one of the deadliest in Virginia railroading history, and local

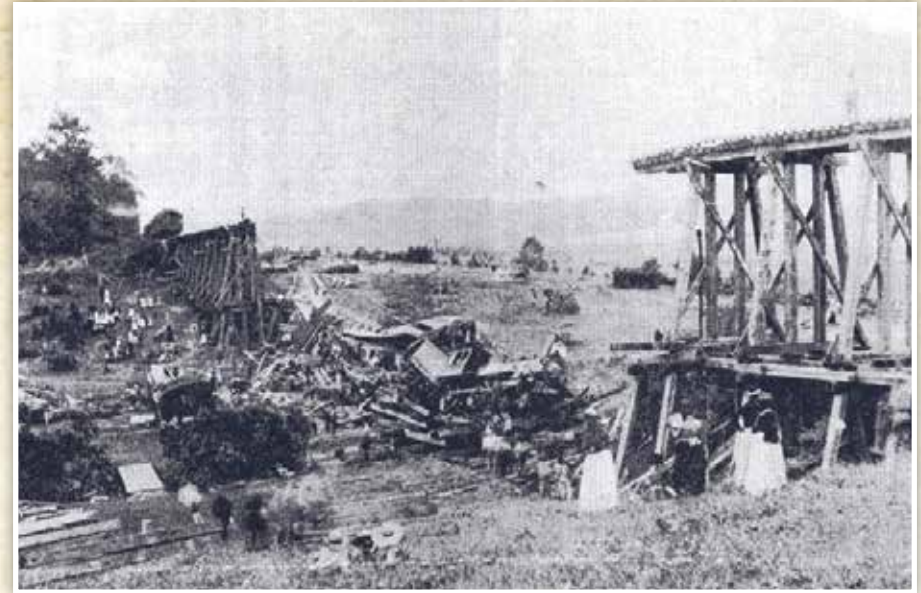


Fig. 7. The Wreck at the Fat Nancy. By the late 1880s, some trestle designs were failing under the heavier post-Civil War engines and rolling stock. Looking east toward Orange. Note the footbridge over Laurel Run in the left foreground. Photo courtesy of the Orange County Historical Society.

historian/musician Phil Audibert has memorialized the event in a ballad (www.audibertphoto.com). Reference Fig. 7. In the process of completing the earth fill, a tunnel culvert was built to accommodate Laurel Run, and Cornelius Cox's name is engraved into the keystone of the culvert arch that faces Rte. 20.

- K. As you proceed toward Orange, you will follow the R/W to your right. At the Rte. 635 intersection, you will see Williston, a grand home built ca. 1867. In 1914, 8.73 acres of the Williston land was sold to Southern Railway, and the R/W was relocated from the ridge to your left. The relationship of the Willis family with the RR was marred by a fatal horse-and-buggy/train collision in the early 1900s.
- L. Several of the dead from the Wreck at the Fat Nancy are buried in Graham Cemetery on your left.
- M. Continue into the Town of Orange. You are now on Main Street, and unless you would like to revisit the Caroline Street underpass that is a part of this R/W (Site IIB), simply continue driving to the train station/Visitors Center. Cross the tracks and immediately turn right onto Short Street for the next leg of your tour.

V

From the Orange Railroad Avenue Venue East - The Route of the PF&P, AKA Virginia Central (VC)

- A. At the Short Street/Church Street intersection, to your right front you will see the 1926 station presented as Site IA of the Railroad Avenue venue. Remember it was built at the time the Potomac, Fredericksburg & Piedmont converted to standard gauge and changed its name to the Virginia Central RR. Remember also that this is a different Virginia Central from the one at Gordonsville. Turn left, proceed to Byrd Street and turn right.
- B. You will shortly come to the intersection of Byrd Street with Warren Street on the right. In its waning years, the VC was reduced to a single, gas-engine powered railcar, called a “Doodlebug.” In the vicinity of this intersection there was a turntable upon which the Doodlebug was turned around for its return trip to Fredericksburg.
- C. The next building on the right was the passenger station for the PF&P/VC. The RR came to Orange in 1877, and we believe that this is the original station building. The railroad stopped using this station soon after building the one near Church Street in 1926. There were extensive yard facilities here at one time. Continue to Rte. 20 and turn left.
- D. As you leave the residential development on your left, Rte. 20 curves to the right. At this point, you are traveling in the corridor of the old Plank Road, the RR R/W was about where the fence is to your left, and the Orange Turnpike ran along that ridge farther to your left. It was at this conjunction of travelways that Confederate General Robert E. Lee located his headquarters and a signal station when his Army of Northern Virginia spent the winter of 1863-64 in Orange County. At the time of that encampment, the RR R/W was clear and graded, but without tracks. It was used as another road.
- E. In a few minutes, you will pass the Rte. 629 intersection with its country store on your right. In a moment there will be an open field on your left. Glance at the clump of evergreens just a short distance out into the field. In there is a difficult-to-see fill and culvert bridge site for the RR. If you wish, you can take the next left onto Bloomsbury Road and look down the R/W. There is no closer public access to it. You are in the vicinity of the East Orange station, better known as Mugler’s station, recognizing Henri Jean Mugler who had a store nearby.
- F. Continue to the Rte. 600 intersection on the left. Turn onto that road, and note the brick building ahead of you on the right. It is the RR station for Nasons, VA, named for the Nason family who owned property in the area for years [18]. You can see the old R/W running along the north side of the building. This is all private property. A brick station for this RR was an oddity. Most of its 16 stations were small frame country stores or dilapidated boxcars set down off their wheels. Turn around in the trace of the old turnpike in front of you and return to Rte. 20, turning left (east).
- G. Turn right onto Rte. 671 and proceed, checking mailbox/house numbers on the left as you go. Just after #23363, there is a small pond. The “dam” for that pond is actually a fill portion of the RR R/W [20]. Proceed to Rte. 522. As soon as you turn left onto 522, be prepared to turn left again at the traffic signal directly in front of you.
- H. Turn left at the Rtes. 522/20 traffic signal and promptly take Rte. 617 to the right. You are now headed cross-country to pick up the Norfolk Southern at Rapidan and trace it back to Orange. Shortly after you pass the gas pipeline pumping station, bear left onto Rte. 627.
- I. In a few moments you will be going by the Battlefield Farms plant growing operation. Is it as big as it looks? Bigger. With some 45 acres under roof and another 20 in outdoor production, the operation can be seen from space. Check them out on the web (www.battlefieldfarms.com) and come back when a tour is offered. It’s spectacular.
- J. As you continue on Rte. 627, you will become aware of Clark Mountain on your right with its tower. While only 1,082 feet high, it is at the far eastern end of the Southwest Mountains. There is no taller mountain directly east of it this side of the Atlantic Ocean. There is no general public access to the mountain top.

VI

From Rapidan To Orange (O&A/NS)

- A. Rte. 627 terminates at Rte. 615. Turn right and proceed to Rapidan. On your way, you will pass Waddell Memorial Presbyterian Church on the left. Built in 1874, it is considered the finest example of “Carpenter Gothic” in Virginia. The Rapidan Heritage Foundation has done a great deal to preserve this charming little village. Pick up one of their brochures at the visitors center and come back at your next opportunity for a longer visit.
- B. As you cross the Rapidan River bridge [21] and follow the curve to the right, you will be driving on the original 1854 O&A R/W. The tracks were not relocated further north until 1903. As you continue, you will see first a passenger station on your left, then just across from Emanuel Episcopal Church, the freight station. Pull into the church parking area. The originals of these structures were burned by Union cavalry in 1863, and what you see is believed to be the third version of those stations.
- C. Note that the church is on stilts. This small valley is prone to severe flooding, and following epic floods in both 1995 and 1996, the congregation had their historic 1874 church picked up, moved away from the river, and up onto stilts. During one of those floods, the water came up to the top of the windows of the freight station across the road.
- D. Turn around at the church and head back to the bridge. As you cross the intersection with Rte. 614 (Locust Dale Rd.), you can see the 1903 bridge for the relocated R/W. Of the several reasons for the presence of the remains of the caboose that you see, the most reasonable is the one stating that at one time it was supposed to become a railroad museum. Not likely now, unfortunately.
- E. As soon as you leave the bridge, turn right onto Rte. 673. You will be on dirt/gravel roads for a while, so prepare to be patient. Shortly after you clear the mill building, you will see both the modern Norfolk Southern bridge and the abutments and piers for the 1854 Orange & Alexandria Bridge. The latter was burned and rebuilt at least four times during the Civil War.

- F. Approximately 0.7mi. from the Rtes. 615/673 intersection, you will come to the Rose Hill grade crossing [22]. Just south of it, the R/W is double-tracked to create a sidetrack that extends to the outskirts of Orange. Photographers are particularly fond of this site with the “Rapidan” sign, signals, and double-tracking. Norfolk Southern is installing Positive Train Control (PTC) technology system-wide, a project scheduled to be completed in 2016 at a cost exceeding \$700 million. Looking toward the double track, you see the “house” on the left that contains the necessary electronics, and nearby is sophisticated sensing and switching equipment. When PTC becomes operational, visible block signals will be removed, and long-haul trains will be largely controlled by operators hundreds of miles away.
- G. After another roughly 1.7 of bumpy, scenic miles, Rte. 673 terminates at Rte. 700 [23]. Turn left and drive the short distance to Trimmer’s Crossing [24]. This grade crossing appears on almost all maps and GPS devices. It’s not especially remarkable, but now you’ve seen what everybody’s heard about.
- H. Turn around and proceed approx. 2.9mi. to Rte. 15. The last 2/3 of the distance is hard-surface road. At about the 2.5mi. mark, Rte. 632 merges in from the left. Pause and note the overpass to your left. You are in the vicinity of Spotswood Station [25], of which nothing remains but a signal bridge. On 17 October 1917, a wreck here claimed the life of veteran SR engineer Frank Larmond, at the time a resident of Orange. Continue on Rte. 632 to Rte. 15. Turn left and head into Orange.

VII

Echoes Of The Rapidan Railroad

- A. As soon as you pass through the first traffic signal (beside Sheetz) [26], pick any place to pull over and stop. There is so little evidence of the Rapidan RR left in Orange County that it just makes sense to tell you about it right here. Vastly more evidence of that RR exists in Madison County.
- B. From 1921 to 1924, the Rapidan RR operated a narrow gauge (36”) short line railroad from Wolfstown in Madison County (then known

as “Rapidan”) to the Town of Orange. Reference Fig. 8. The RR was a subsidiary of the West Virginia Timber Company and was built to haul saw logs from the Blue Ridge Mountains. On the Wolfstown end, spur lines were built to logging camps far up into the hollows. On the Orange end, facilities were built to receive the timber.

- C. About where the KFC/Long John Silver’s eatery is located, there was a station building for the RR. Across the street where the large brick silk mill building stands today, Baylor Run (now underground) was dammed to create a large, shallow lake (railroaders say “pond”). On the east side of the lake, a sawmill/lumber curing operation was built. The logs were dumped into the lake, making them easier to move around. Employee housing was built on Belleview Avenue in the town. In sum, massive preparations were made for an extended operation that was expected to be correspondingly profitable.
- D. After less than four years of operation, the company announced that the timber was not of the expected quality. The RR tracks and ties were removed, the dam breached, and the sawmill, station, and houses sold. The station stood until the 1950s when it was demolished to make way for a restaurant.



Fig. 8. Looking across the Rapidan River at the Rapidan Railroad bridge abutment on the Madison County side of the river, just upstream of Spicer’s Mill. Photo courtesy of Doug Graves.

- E. The 33’ R/W was returned to the adjoining landowners, and over time, development and farming has erased the Orange County portion of it.
- F. The sawmill operation survives as the American Woodmark Corporation, located on East Nelson Street at the rear of the silk mill building. It is the oldest continuously operating non-farm industry in the county. Its water tower dates from 1921.
- G. If you travel 2.7mi. on Rte. 633 from the Rte. 15/633 (Spicer Mill Road/Sheetz) intersection in the winter when leaves are down, you can see the bridge abutments where the RR crossed the Rapidan just above James Albert Spicer’s old grist mill [27].

VIII Amtrak and Orange

- A. Amtrak is a passenger RR service operated by the federal government. When the RR industry collapsed shortly after World War II, the U.S. Congress passed an act authorizing the government to take over the passenger hauling responsibilities of the private RR companies and leave them as freight carriers. With the benefit of government subsidies, Amtrak has done a great deal to modernize RR passenger hauling equipment and improve customer service. While the overall system remains unprofitable, some of its lines are now both popular and profitable.
- B. No Amtrak train stops in Orange. Charlottesville, Culpeper, & Fredericksburg are the nearest stations.
- C. Trains and schedules as of 2014:
 - 1. *The Crescent* (on the CSX/BB tracks).
 - a) North through Orange a/b 7:50a; South a/b 8:10p.
 - 2. *The Northeast Corridor/Lynchburger* (on the NS tracks).
 - a) North through Orange a/b 9:20a; South a/b 6:35p.
 - 3. *The Cardinal* (on the CSX/BB tracks).
 - a) Wed, Fri & Sun.
 - b) North through Orange a/b 4:00p; South a/b 12:45p.



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