

Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railway Depot

The Liberty Depot is the best preserved of the two remaining Randolph County structures built by the Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railway.

Mac Whatley, in his *The Architectural History of Randolph County*, 1985, wrote:

“The Cape Fear and Yadkin Valley Railway grew out of early 19th century efforts to connect the Cape Fear and Yadkin Rivers by canal, efforts that soon changed in the direction of a railroad. The C.F. Y.V.R.W. was organized in 1879 from the remains of an antebellum railroad company, and ultimately completed its main line from Wilmington to Mt. Airy in 1890. Service on the first part of that line, from Fayetteville to Greensboro, began on March 16, 1884. Construction of that line gave Randolph County its first railroad, founded the town of Staley as a shipping terminal for the Deep River textile factories, and revived the small crossroads town of Liberty.

“The Liberty Depot was built some time before 1905, when photographs of it were made. It is an excellent example of a turn-of-the-century train station and the most elaborate example in Randolph County. The hip-roofed station has both a gabled dormer and an octagonal turret which caps a polygonal window bay at trackside. The eaves of the roof are ‘kicked’ out to overhang at least six feet; this is supported by sawn braces, German siding is now used above an exterior ‘wainscoting’ of beaded vertical paneling.”

In 1992, Norfolk Southern Railway, no longer needing the Liberty depot, offered the building to anyone who would pay to have it moved. There was some interest among Liberty residents to have the Town of Liberty save the historic building, but the Town took no action on the matter. Jim Wilson, a Liberty attorney and railroad buff, paid to have the depot moved and set up on the opposite side of the tracks, thus preserving the old depot.

Wilson had worked for Southern Railway, starting in 1960 at Claremont, first serving to relieve depot agents while they were on vacation, later getting an assigned station in Staley. In all, he worked twelve years with the railway, including a stint in Washington, D.C.

While working at the Staley depot, old time residents of the town told Wilson that the Staley depot was built first in 1884, with the Liberty depot being built in 1885.

When the Staley depot closed, Wilson had it moved to land he owned nearby to save it from demolition. When the Liberty depot became available, Wilson again could not bear to see the landmark destroyed.

The Staley depot was remodeled in the mid 1950's and the outside vertical siding was replaced with asbestos shingles. After Wilson took possession of it, he added a new metal roof.

According to Wilson, the Liberty depot is "fancier" than its Staley neighbor.

In 2003, Wilson decided to make the depot "the center piece for the town." He purchased paint, hired painters and made plans to restore the depot to its former beauty. While at the N.C. Transportation Museum in Spencer, Wilson had seen the Barber Junction depot, a depot in which he had once worked. The museum had restored the depot to its original colors which had been discovered while painters had removed the many old coats of paint from its surface. Museum officials had recovered a portion of the original paint, sent it to Sherwin-Williams who had, in turn, supplied them with the formula.

As painters in Liberty scraped off the old paint from the Liberty depot, they too discovered the same original paint scheme. Wilson returned the paint he had already purchased and procured the original formula from the Transportation Museum. Today, the Liberty depot sports a new metal roof and the colors it was first painted when new and has truly become the center piece for the town.

Sources:

The Architectural History of Randolph County NC, Mac Whatley, 1985.

Interview with Jim Wilson, March 23, 2010.