

## A compact history of the Rappahannock Railroad Museum

### The Beginnings – First 25 years

In 1988-89 a small group of railroad history enthusiasts began meeting together in Fredericksburg and planning the start of a formal organization. On April 1989, the group received recognition from the National Railway Historical Society (NRHS) as the Rappahannock Chapter. It was incorporated as a not for profit corporation in Fredericksburg, Virginia and received Internal Revenue Service recognition as a 501c(3) organization that same year. During the period 1989 to 2005, the membership grew and acquired many pieces of railroad equipment, tools, cars, and memorabilia. The cars were restored and plans made to open a museum. The equipment was located on borrowed rail spurs but was not available for touring. Once the equipment was moved to the museum site at 11700 Main Street, Fredericksburg (Spotsylvania County), work began in earnest to make the collection a functioning museum. With little fanfare, the museum began hosting interested railroad enthusiasts. In 2009 to 2010, advertising was stepped up in local media and awareness of the museum grew.

In 2010-2011 the museum was officially leased the current site by Spotsylvania County in exchange for providing a county tourist attraction. Thus the museum began opening every Saturday morning from 9AM to Noon to greet visitors as long as weather permitted at least one member to get there and open up.

### CURRENT OPERATIONS

The highlight of the museum's exhibits has become the Little Yellow Train (LYT), a collection of restored Maintenance of Way (MOW) equipment. The train was restored from salvaged abandoned MOW equipment and took its first official run on July 21, 2007. It consisted at that time of 2 units, former RF&P Motor Car #43 and Former B&O Crew car PCT-501. Since then a second motor car, 2 flat cars, and a crane have been added to the museum's livery. Two additional flat cars were salvaged by a member, restored and/or rebuilt, and modified with seating shells to triple the passenger seating. Other members have stored a reproduction Sheffield Hand Car (Pump Car) and a Canadian National Motor car on site for visitors to see. Other members and friends of the museum owning rail equipment periodically bring their cars to the site on Saturdays as static or operational displays.

In 2014, the museum modified its corporation charter to drop affiliation with NRHS and operate as an independent museum. This opened up membership in the organization to persons not interested in the national membership. The name changed from Railway Workers Museum, Rappahannock Chapter, NRHS to Rappahannock Railroad Museum. The museum continues to be supported solely by its members and the generous donations of visitors. The site has been greatly improved in 2015 and 2016 by local Boy Scouts as part of Eagle Scout and volunteer hours projects. The Passenger Waiting Shed, Boarding Platforms, benches, entrance fencing and parking lot improvements are recent projects completed by the scouts.

## EVENTS:

Up to 2013, the largest single activity of the group was the annual fundraiser “Trains at Christmas” model railroad show with operating layouts and later a show with vendors. Due to scheduling conflicts the show was cancelled in 2014. From 2009 to present, an annual “Fall Leaf Excursion” has been held in late October to signal the end of the operating season for the LYT. However, any Saturday the weather is mild enough and enough crew are present – the train is operated through the winter months

In 2014 a second excursion “Spring Blossom” was added in April to celebrate the return of milder weather. Although, the route is the same for these “excursions” as on any other Saturday, the focus changes from rail history and safety talks to the visitors to quick turnaround trips for pure “ride on the rails” enjoyment. In 2015 our spring excursion was augmented by static displays by the Spotsylvania Sheriff’s Department and Fredericksburg Volunteer Fire Company.

## FUTURE:

More and better exhibits and activities are planned for 2016 and beyond. What is next inside the exhibit cars or on the LYT ???? Make the museum a regular Saturday AM activity several times a year – as we vary some of the displays and activities. One example: In May 2016, Steam returned to Deep Run when a member brought his personally owned steam powered motor car to the museum and made the excursion with the LYT. What might you see next Saturday ??????. Come and find out!

See photos of the past 10 years in our gallery.