

A History of The Fields' Rail Trail

Tim Russell, May 2022

The Old Carthage Railroad

Long-time residents are undoubtedly familiar with the "Rail Trail". As the centerpiece of The Fields' trail network, this long, flat and straight trail runs from behind the Davidson's to the Powell's and separates Phase I and Phase II of the Fields. Flanked by hardwoods, it's a beautiful trail especially in the autumn when the leaves are changing, and is the perfect spot for an uninterrupted canter or gallop.

The Rail Trail may seem little different from any of the other trails in the community, but it has a long and important role in the history and development of Cameron and Carthage. It owes its name to its provenance: the old railroad that once ran between Cameron and Carthage from 1886 until 1948. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Carthage Railroad provided an essential commercial link between Carthage and the main rail line running north to Raleigh and south to Florida. The line allowed people, commerce and investment to spread westward from the coast towards Asheville. Timber, lime, dewberries and new carriages direct from the Tyson Buggy Company's Carthage assembly plant were the railroad's main cargo.



Figure 1: Location of former Carthage Railroad through The Fields

The Plank Road

The Carthage Railroad and the town of Carthage's genealogy can be traced back to grandiose plans for North Carolina development before the Civil War, due to the "Plank Road Movement". In 1842, Governor John Morehead had proposed the construction of a road providing transportation from Fayetteville into western North Carolina along the route of the proposed (and eventually, failed) Fayetteville and Western Railroad. Plank roads had first

been used in Canada in 1836 and had gained popularity in the Northern states. Subsequently in a message to the legislature in 1848, Governor William A. Graham argued for the "indispensable necessity of improving our public roads," claiming the state's existing system was so bad that "that we labor under greater disadvantages than any State in the Union." Shortly after Graham's appeal to the legislature, North Carolina chartered its first plank road along a route stretching from Fayetteville to Raleigh in 1849.

At the time, plank roads generated significant enthusiasm. With a plank road came a semblance of permanence which often was the catalyst for additional investment along its path. Residents and businesses in Moore and surrounding counties used this as an opportunity to invest in regional infrastructure.

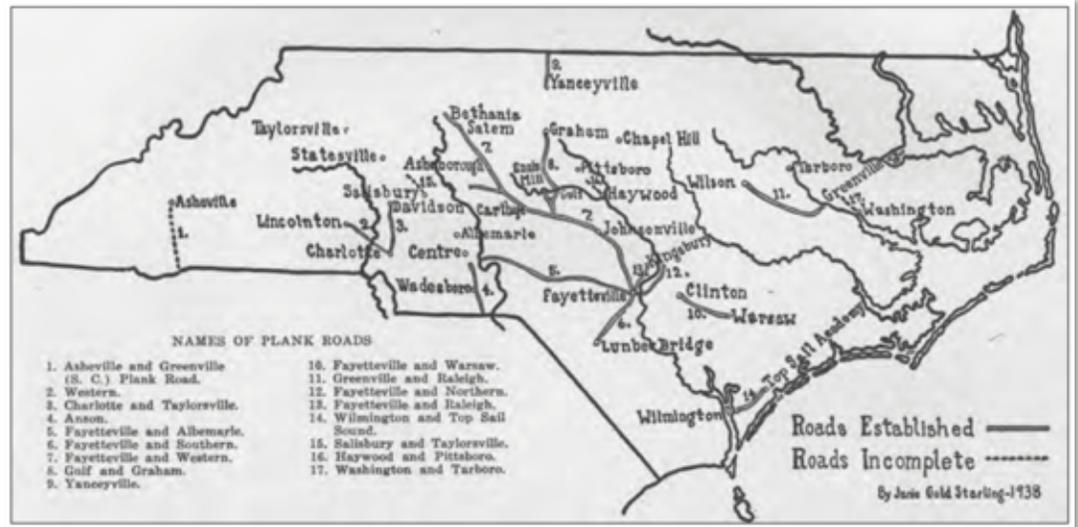


Figure 2: Plank Road construction in North Carolina, 1850-1860

Roadways were constructed of 8" thick pine and oak support beams placed on a drained roadbed and covered crosswise with 8"x4" pine planks. The planks were then covered with gravel or sand, which was hardened by horse manure into a firm surface. NC state law required the roads to be a minimum of eight feet and a maximum of sixty feet wide, and that a secondary maintained dirt road run alongside. On average, a team could lay 650 feet a day, or about one mile a week.

By 1860, nearly 500 miles of plank road had been laid in North Carolina. Fayetteville served as a central hub for the state's plank road system, with five outgoing branches. The Fayetteville & Western Plank Road ran along present-day 15/501 to Carthage and has the distinction of being the longest wooden highway ever constructed (a memorial sign exists in Carthage near the courthouse). Proposed to provide a highway for heavy freight wagons, fast passenger and mail traffic, the line ran between Fayetteville and Bethania (in Forsyth County) covering 129 miles. Tollbooths were established in Fayetteville, Cameron and Carthage.



Figure 3: Fayetteville, 1984: Discovery of the old Western Plank Road to Carthage during street excavations

One rider on horseback paid one-half cent per mile, a rider with two horses paid two cents per mile, a rider with three horses three cents, and one with six horses four cents.

Despite the initial enthusiasm however, the plank roads were doomed from their very beginnings. Companies never were able to raise enough funds from the use of tolls, as travelers would simply use country paths to go around them. Then the expansion of railroads in the mid-1850s meant heavy cargo could be moved faster and cheaper by rail, rather than by road. The high costs of wood maintenance, combined with the nationwide economic panics of 1854 and 1857, also forced potential investors away. The outbreak of the Civil War eliminated any further state efforts to support their construction, and Plank Roads decayed. The Plank Road may have been a commercial failure at the time, but it laid the infrastructure for the growth that would become Cameron and Carthage today.

Dewberries, Timber and Carriages, oh my!

Named for a now-unknown railroad official, Cameron was incorporated in 1867 and officially planned in 1875. The town was in a unique position as the Plank Road terminus and the end of the Raleigh & Augusta Railroad line. As such, the town of Cameron quickly became a bustling commercial center.

Entrepreneurs settled and made a substantial living in various businesses including timber, turpentine distilleries, hotels and saloons (all of which have since been destroyed by fire or demolition) catering to rail passengers. As timber clearing left large swathes of land empty, the town turned to growing berries and general agriculture when the pine forests vanished. One such berry was the Lucretia dewberry, introduced to Cameron in 1892. At the time, dewberries were considered an exotic luxury fruit, similar to what raspberries are to us today. Farmers who planted its bushes unloaded big yields for auction at the railroad tracks, and Cameron was named "The Dewberry Capital of the World." From 1910 to 1920, nearly 100,000 crates of dewberries were shipped out in refrigerated boxcars each season.

Meanwhile, as Moore county's most populous town, Carthage soon became the center of commerce, government and social life for Moore County. New industries spurred by the industrial revolution were taking shape, the largest of which was the Tyson Buggy Company. Founded in 1856, Thomas B. Tyson and landowner Alexander Kelly formed a partnership to convert a small wagon wheel repair shop into building carriages. The company was eventually renamed the Tyson & Jones Buggy Company and in 1876, the company was producing 400 buggies per year. Carthage was a rare success story for the post-Civil War southern reconstruction.



Anchored by these two major industries on both sides of the Plank Road, the route between Cameron and Carthage was an attractive and obvious location for a railway. Carthage leaders, not wanting to fall behind the newer growing towns of Southern Pines and Pinehurst, decided that the town needed a railroad to make it more attractive to new industries and businesses. It was felt that, among other benefits to Carthage, "The Tyson and Jones carriage factory, which had done increasingly well since its reactivation after the Civil War, would flourish even more strongly with this rail transportation to the big railroad, and other industries would profit without the added burden of shipping by freight wagon along those miles of clogging sandy roads." [Wellman – p.99]¹

The initial lobbying for investment came from a coalition of the Tyson & Jones Buggy Company, Carthage town managers, Cameron town managers and individual shareholders looking for solid investment opportunities in railway development.



1885 - 1906: The Carthage Railroad: Cameron to Carthage

Line Name	Year Incorporated	Original Start Point	Original End Point	Stations
Carthage Railroad	1885	Cameron, NC	Carthage, NC	Cameron
				Stone's Crossing
				Kelly Family
				Carthage

The Carthage Railroad Company was established in 1895 and legally organized April 29th, 1886. Completed in October of 1888 and running 10.32 miles, the line opened to great fanfare and made an immediate impact on the speed and convenience of people and cargo between Cameron and Carthage. It was soon leased to The Raleigh & Augusta Air Line Railroad, who operated the line under a 99 year lease, until it was subleased to Mr. W. C. Petty on the 1st day of June, 1890, for term of 97 years.

¹ Wellman, Manly Wade. *The County of Moore, 1847-1947*. Southern Pines: Moore County Historical Association, 1962.

The local economy was relatively stable during this period, with the carriage works remaining a major employer. The railroad had a huge impact on the Tyson Buggy Company. With a convenient rail link connecting Cameron to points north and South, the company's ability to receive raw materials and ship completed buggies exploded. By the 1890s the company was the largest buggy and carriage manufacturer in the country, producing more than 3,000 buggies per year. That success and innovation with line production reportedly attracted Henry Ford to town in the early 1900s. Rumors exist that Ford wanted to buy the factory to produce his Model T but Tyson, Kelly and Jones rebuffed him, writing off the automobile as 'a passing fancy'.

The Carthage Furniture Company and the town's first bank, the Bank of Carthage, opened in 1904. Later in the decade, the first public school for white children, the Carthage Graded School, began holding classes in a large, two-story brick structure on McReynolds Street.

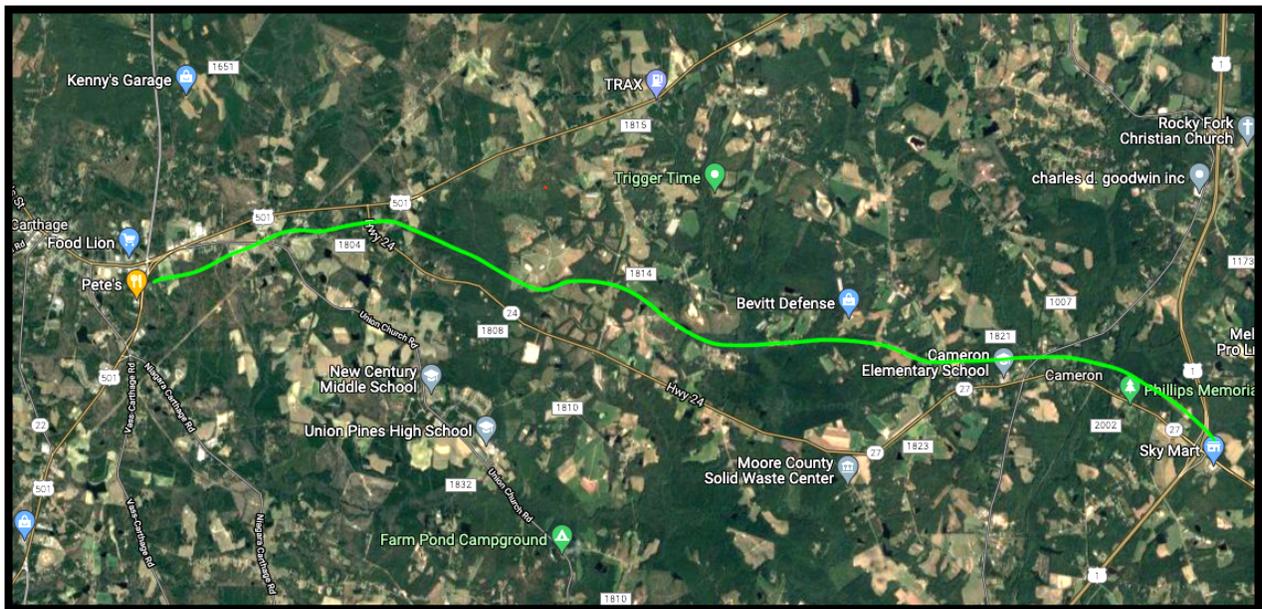


Figure 4: Site of the original Carthage Railroad, starting approximately near Cameron's Sky Mart gas station and terminating near what is now Pete's Restaurant in Carthage

The original 10-mile line from Carthage to Cameron was extended to Hallison (now known as Parkwood), 29.5 miles in total. The remaining 18.5-mile line from Cameron to Hallison was purchased by Randolph and Cumberland Railroad company and then renamed Central Moore Railroad.

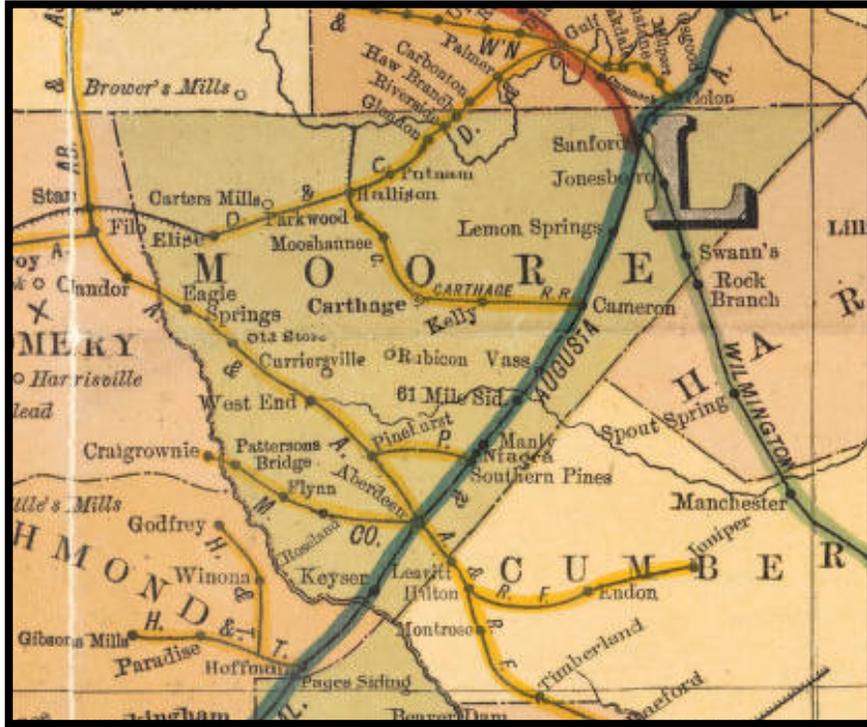


Figure 5: Moore county railroad map 1900 (Railroad map of North Carolina 1900, n.d.)

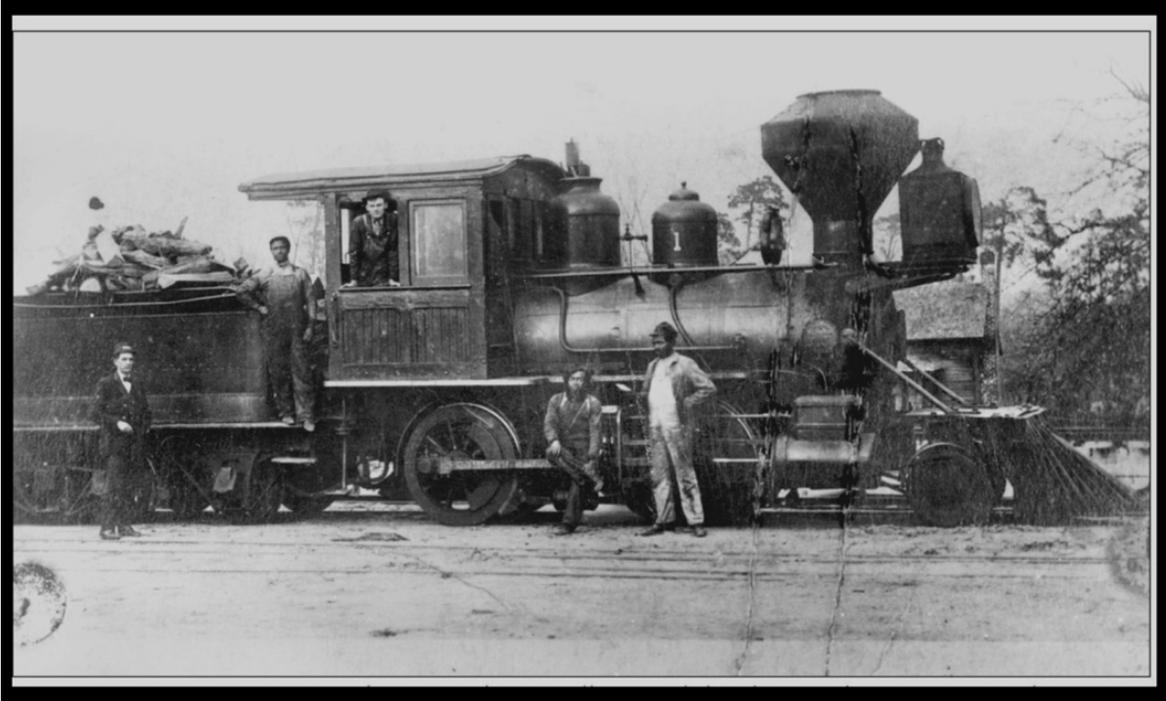


Figure 6: Carthage Railroad locomotive, 1892

1906 - 1924: The Randolph & Cumberland Railroad: Cameron to Hallison

	Year Incorporated	Original Start Point	Original End Point	Stations
The Randolph & Cumberland Railroad	1906	Cameron, NC	Hallison, NC	Cameron
				Stone's Crossing
				Kelly Family
				Carthage
				Mooshaunee
				Parkwood
				Hallison & McConnell

The Carthage Railroad was acquired by the Randolph & Cumberland Railroad at a time of massive speculation and investment in railroads. The first decade of the 20th century was full of optimism and growth, and the new line owners had no reason to doubt the region's growth would continue well into the future. But World War I impacted the region. Wartime production stimulated a need for machinery and raw materials; goods Carthage produced in abundance. However, with many able-bodied men off to fighting in Europe, industrial production lagged and businesses changed. The advent and mass production of the automobile quickly proved to be much more than "a passing fancy" - it quickly devastated the Tyson Buggy Company and sales soon plummeted. Along with declining buggy sales came a sharp decline in the need to import raw materials and send outbound freight of new carriages. By 1924, the Randolph & Cumberland Railway was failing.

Bankruptcy seemed inevitable. But proud Carthage town officials couldn't bring themselves to allow the main artery to points north and west sever altogether, knowing that would destroy the town. Despite it being a risky investment, Carthage officials thought it would be easier to raise money for the line's continued operation from town and state funds, rather than operate as a private enterprise and be beholden to shareholder performance. So on August 21, 1924, the NC State Legislature passed an act authorizing the town of Carthage to purchase the Randolph & Cumberland Railroad in what was viewed at the time as a "desperate bid to stave off bankruptcy". On the same date, the Legislature authorized the town to abandon two miles of the line and sell the land to help Carthage raise enough funds to preserve the main line between Carthage and Cameron. Renamed The Moore Central Railway, the new company charter was organized on October 1, 1924.



Figure 6.5: Moore Central Railway locomotive

1924 - 1945: The Moore Central Railway

	Year Incorporated	Original Start Point	Original End Point	Stations
Moore Central Railway	1924	Cameron, NC	Harrison, NC	Cameron Stone's Crossing Kelly Family Carthage Mooshaunee Parkwood Harrison & McConnell

Despite grand hopes and expectations for new local ownership, the line failed to be profitable. Tyson & Jones buggy business was in steep decline. The last buggy reportedly was delivered in 1925 to Neil S. Blue of Raeford, who was in his 80s and had declared that he would never operate a car.

The company was sold in 1926 and the new owners tried to re-establish it as a furniture manufacturer, but growth was soon cut short by the Depression of 1929. Furniture

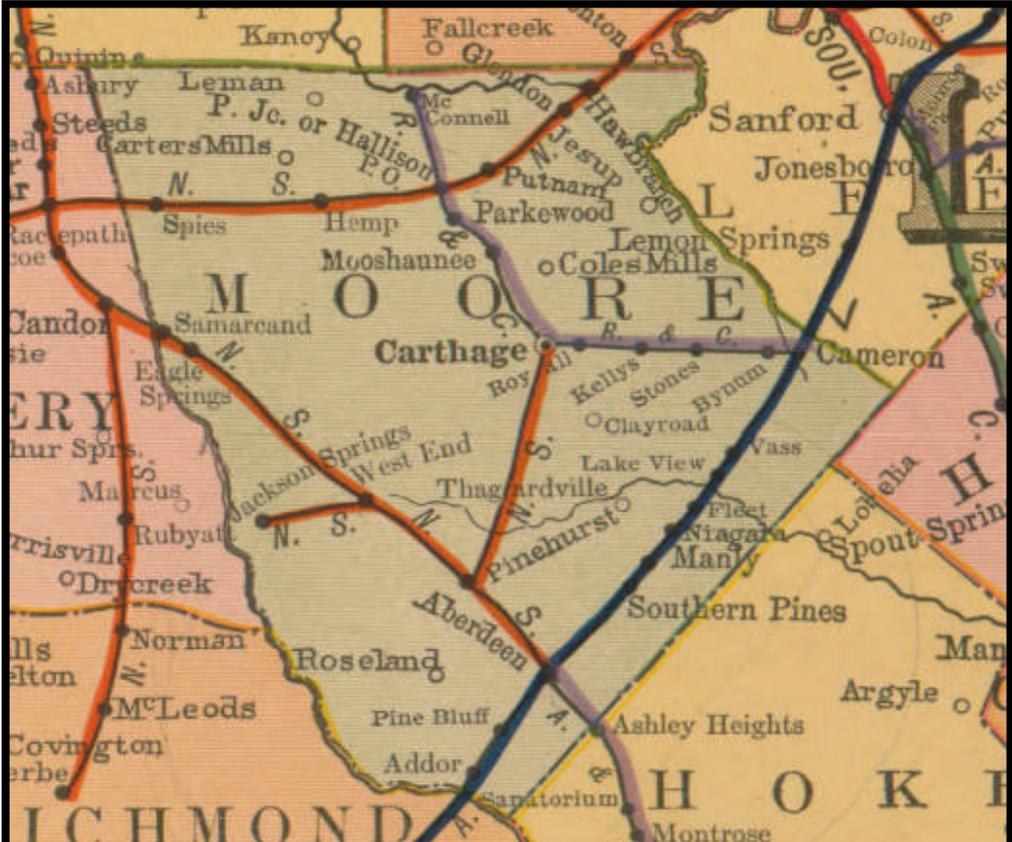


Figure 7: Railroad map of No Carolina, 1924: Note the "Stones" stop, which was just north of the present-day "Stone Family Cemetary" on Bryant Road (Railroad maps of North Carolina, n.d.)

operations floundered for ten years, and the buildings were eventually abandoned. Carthage continued to sporadically operate the line for passenger traffic. But with the railroad's major source of revenue in decline, most maintenance was deferred, locomotives fell into disrepair, tracks weren't maintained and became overgrown.

World War II gave a brief respite to the region. The Carthage Weaving Company was established in some of the old buggy factory buildings to manufacture supplies for the war effort. Carthage Weaving started off making uniform parts and canvas that was shipped off to Michigan for finishing into stretchers, webbing, netting and other military needs. Then in 1943, the company won a large and secured government contract to provide camouflage netting to be used by the US military.

For two years, the company remained busy, churning out netting that was shipped on Carthage's Moore Central Railway to allied forces across Europe and Asia. Carthage Weaving was the largest employer in the region and helped support not only the railroad, but the other restaurants, shops and repair facilities in the region.

The town however, had little interest in maintaining the line. The war had taken a toll on interest, experience and funds needed to adequately operate a railroad. Industrial decline in other

local industries weak local politics and a lack of able-bodied local men to work the railroads all contributed to the line's decline. So on January 4, 1945, the town put the railroad up for auction. The Carthage Weaving Company was the highest bidder, who bought the entire operation (minus one engine) for \$7,750 (\$123,000 in today's dollars). The Moore Central Railway became the Moore Central Railroad in 1945, but locals called it the "Weaving Line".

WANTED
TO REPORT FOR WORK
At Once
at Our Plant in Carthage
12 Colored Men
With Some Sewing Machine Experience
at 75c per hour
for Day or Night Shift
100 PERCENT WAR WORK
Those employed in war work need not apply
Carthage Weaving Co.
CARTHAGE, N. C.

Carthage Railroad Sold at Auction

Van B. Sharp High Bidder for Railroad; Ross, for Motor Car

Many people gathered at the court house door in Carthage Tuesday noon for the sale at public auction of the Moore Central Railway property by W. B. Davis, receiver, but apparently few of the number aspired to be railroad owners. Van B. Sharpe of the Carthage Weaving Company was high bidder for the property exclusive of a gasoline motor used in pulling the cars, which was bid in by Arthur Ross. The entire holdings sold for \$7750, but the sale is to remain open for at least ten days and is subject to the approval of the Court. The railroad extends from Carthage to Cameron.

Although this railroad has been going from bad to worse for a number of years, there was a time when it played an important part in meeting the transportation needs not only of Carthage but of the territory as far as Hallison, ten miles away. In the early days much lumber was hauled over this

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Carthage Railroad Sold at Auction

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road.

Attorney U. L. Spence, who has lived in Carthage since 1894 and who, by reason of his profession, has had an opportunity to know many of the railroad's ups and downs, told THE PILOT a bit of the history of the road, which was in operation when he went to Carthage. His story was, in substance, as follows:

The project was first started by a group of Carthage men who, realizing the importance of railway transportation to the town's progress, formed the Carthage Railroad Company. A bond elec-

tion was held and a sale of bonds in the amount of \$25,000 was approved. The company did a considerable amount of excavating and grading and got the roadbed ready for crossties and rails. Suit was afterwards brought to invalidate the bonds and this was done.

The Carthage Railroad Company leased their holdings to the Raleigh and Augusta AirLine Railroad (which at that time embraced a part of the Seaboard) for 99 years with the privilege of renewing the lease for an additional 99. This company completed the road, and operated it for a short time before sub-leasing it to Major W. C. Petty of Manly, later of Carthage, who extended it to Hallison and operated it until his death. His sons continued the work for a while, but finally sub-leased the road to the Cumberland and Randolph Company, who operated it with indifferent suc-

cess for a number of years, finally getting in debt to the extent that a receiver was appointed and the road sold at public auction under court order. It was purchased by the Moore Central Railroad Company, the recent owner, for around \$30,000.

VASS PLANT OPENS

The Carthage Weaving Company started operating its war plant in Vass Tuesday morning, with a large number of women, white and colored, reporting for duty. The plant is in the old furniture factory building and H. H. Grimm of Carthage is superintendent of the Vass branch.

NEW REFRIGERATORS

Dr. J. W. Willcox is quite happy over the addition of two new refrigerators to the equipment of the Moore County Health Department.

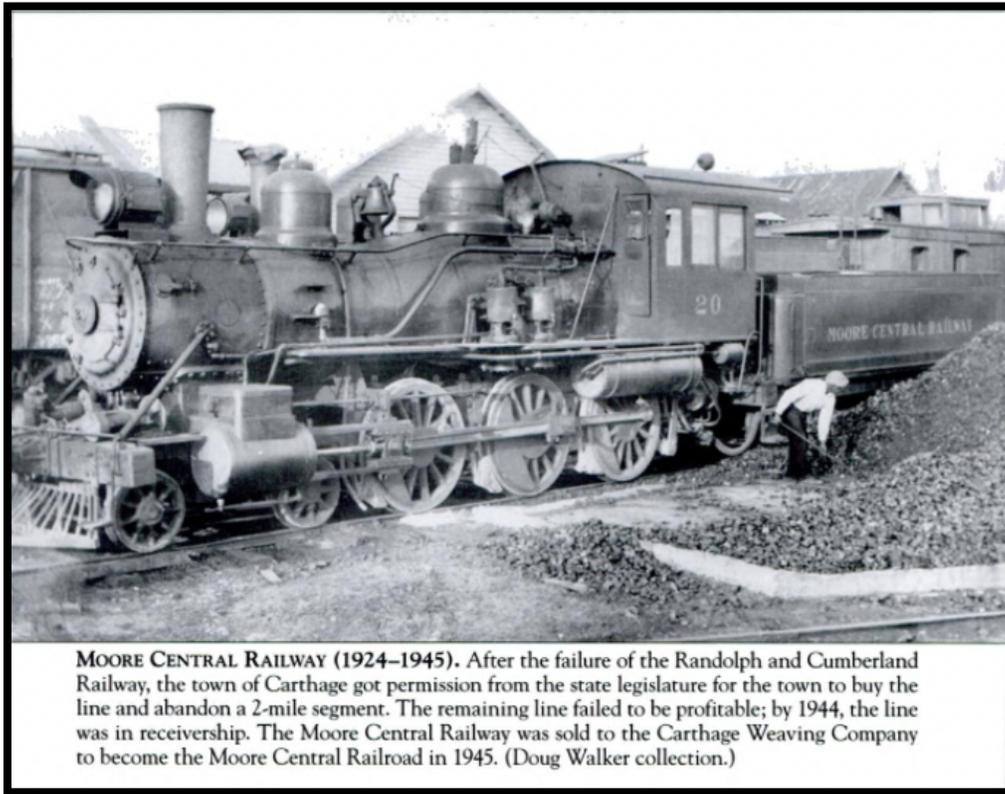


Figure 8: Vintage Moore Central Railway (1924-45) Railroad Train Locomotive #20 Photo— Carthage Historical Society, Carthage North Carolina

1945 - 1948: Carthage Weaving Company / Moore Central Railroad

The original Carthage Railroad was just not meant to be. Victory in Europe was declared on May 8, 1945 and the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan in August of that same year. With the government shifting to post-war reconstruction only 6 months after the line's purchase, demand for camouflage quickly netting dried up.

Coinciding with the demise of netting industry in Carthage, the dewberry industry anchoring the other side of the line in Cameron was experiencing its own demise. A root-rot disease caused by fungus struck the plants in the early 1940s. Within three years no new bushes were planted and the entire dewberry industry collapsed. These two events were the death knell for the railroad. The line was abandoned entirely by 1947. The track was sold for scrap to Republic Steel, and removed entirely in 1949.

By the 1950s, the east coast train running from Florida to Boston no longer stopped as it honked through Cameron.

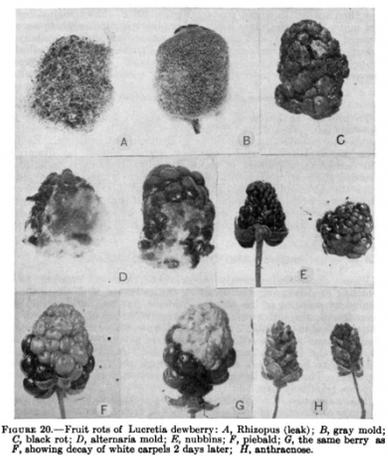


Figure 10: Examples of dewberry root rot from Moore County Journal of Agriculture, 1941

The Pilot, Feb. 5, 1948:

"[The railway] was thereafter operated in a more or less haphazard manner – its one engine from time to time being derailed for as much as 30 days. On 1 February 1947, due to the dilapidated condition of the property, the operation thereof was abandoned. Its one engine had been condemned by the Interstate Commerce Commission. It has no other rolling stock. Its substructure is in a condition of bad repair, at times being underwater. Its small size 40-pound rail "has become bent and warped and unfit for proper use, causing (during its operation) frequent derailment of cars." The crossties "are greatly deteriorated and damaged." The supporting timbers of the trestles are in such condition that a person walking on the trestle will cause them and the rail situate thereon "to wobble and shake." Some of the rail joints are not bolted and "in numerous instances, the rail had not been spiked to the crossties; never more than two bolts were used when four are required." At several places all the crossties have completely deteriorated and in several places along said railroad, at distances of eight or ten feet, there was only one crosstie supporting the rail. The Seaboard Air Line, the connecting line which has furnished the necessary rolling stock for the operation of the road, has placed an embargo on said road and will not permit any of its cars or engines to be used thereon."

Moore Central Railroad is Scrapped; The Pilot, March 2, 1949

"The Moore Central Railroad, storm center of controversy for the past several years, is now but a memory - and not a very happy one at that. Workmen are already busy ripping up the tracks for shipment to the scrap mills. The woodburning locomotive, silent and still since February 1, 1947, still stands forlornly at the depot, but it will soon follow the tracks to the scrapheap. The 10-mile railroad between Carthage and Cameron was purchased by Republic Steel, following authorization by the state utilities commission in July. Purchase price was given at \$60,560.20.

The purchase price, plus the estimated cost of putting the railroad back in shape for operation, I believe was just too much for the local citizens group which fought long and hard to take over the railroad and save it for the town. Economics also appeared to be against it, as informed persons believed that if it were saved, it could only run as a convenience to the townsfolk and never, unless a miracle happened, as a profit maker."

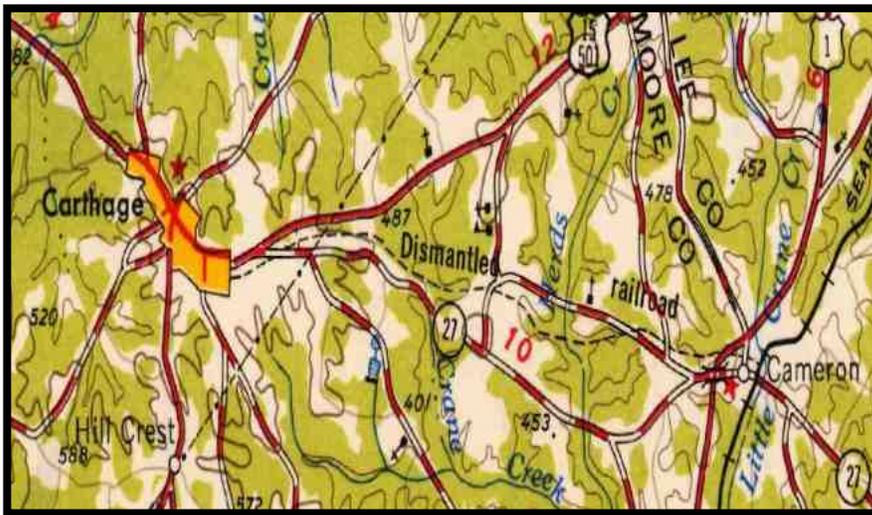


Figure 11: 1954 USGS map showing "Dismantled Railroad" (USGS 1954 Raleigh overlay, 1954)

POSTLOGUE: The Fields, 1948 - TODAY

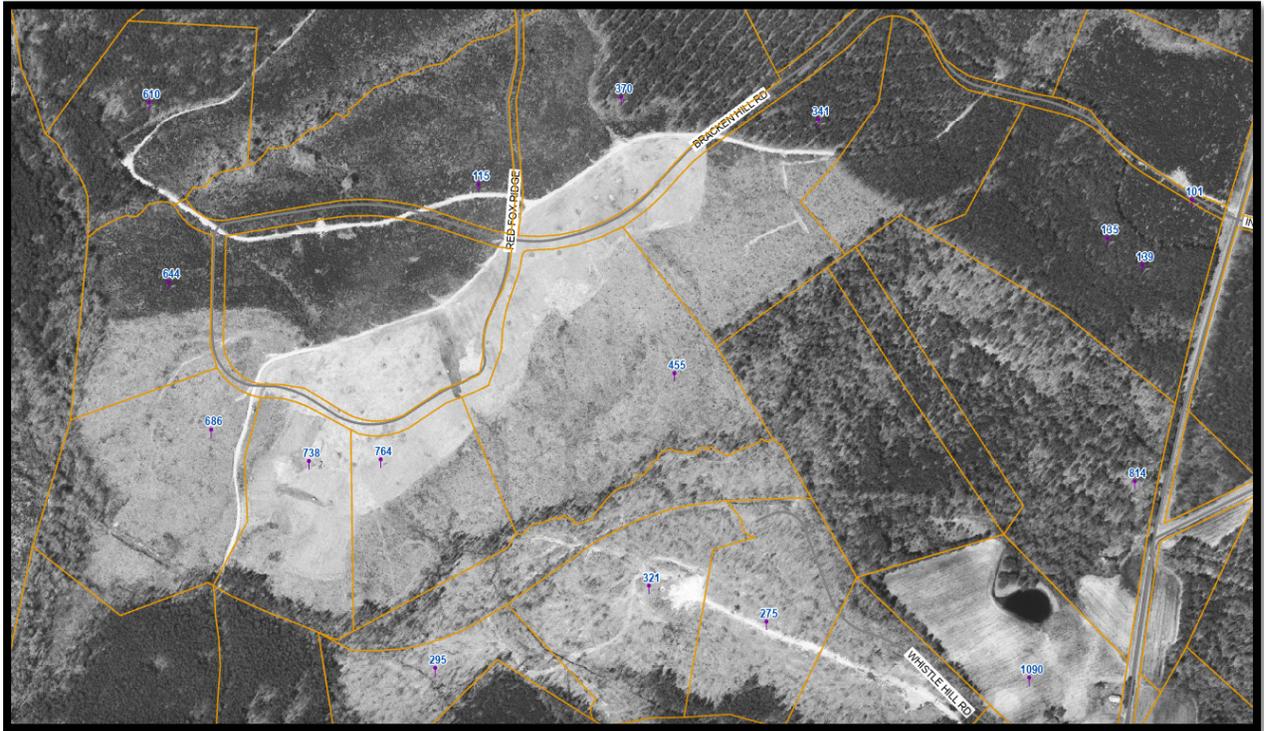
Following the railroad's closure, the easements and rights of way were abandoned and reverted back to the original landowners. The railbed became just another part of the timber farm until OPM Land Management originally developed the area into The Fields Equestrian Community in 2006.

When OPM originally conceived the area as an equestrian community, the former railroad bed was a logical centerpiece of the planned trail network. At the time it was largely overgrown with scrub and pines that had encroached on the elevated sections of the trail. But Rod Lynch and his crew restored the original trail, starting from the connecting trail behind the Davidson's lot until the culvert behind the Powell's house. Just beyond the current large culvert you can still find a remnant of the original 19th century steel culvert that went under the original railbed.

The elevated railbed was flattened to make the Powells' back pasture. The elevated railbed proudly resumes its grandeur just beyond their split rail fence into the former phase 3 area. In here one can really see the remnants of the history of the railroad. The elevated railbed is over 20 feet high, culminating in a concrete embankment at Crane's Creek. The small steel bridge that once spanned the creek was the last of the line to be dismantled in 1949.



The Fields Rail Trail, 2003:



The Fields Rail Trail, 2007:



Evidence of the Carthage Railroad in the Fields Today:

Original steel culvert, behind Powell house:



Elevated railbed (uncleared) in Phase III:



Concrete bridge embankment over Crane's Creek in Phase III:



Original rail spikes discovered on Rail Trail (courtesy of Suzanne Powell & Joe Rausa):



Bonus Prize: Blind Willie McTell: "Will Fox": this audio recording is from 1927 and references "this Moore girl", referring to the locomotive which ran on the Moore Central Railroad:

<https://youtu.be/-Eem3Qqgrc>

Engineer Will Fox has his fireman shovel on a little more coal to get "this Moore girl" going faster and to bring him a little more gin. He says they will stop in a bar at the end of the line. This song was a parody of train wreck songs that were popular in the 1920s. By instructing his engineer to "shovel a little more coal" the song insinuates it will be a fatal mistake.



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