

THE ROUGH AND READY TURNOUT 1838 - 1851

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As the Louisa Railroad Company pushed westward through Louisa county they built only a few depots along the way such as Frederick Hall, Louisa Court House, Trevilian and Gordonsville. Each of these depots also served as a supply station to provide water and wood fuel for the engines.

Between these depots some large landowners who had in many cases given land to the railroad company for its track right of way, had requested that a side track be built at a point convenient for their use as it passed through their property. The sidings were known as turnouts and took the name of the landowner who had requested it. In return for this favor from the railroad company the landowner was required to properly maintain the sidetrack to the satisfaction of the railroad engineering department. Some of the early turnouts in Louisa County were the Bumpass turnout, Buckner turnout, Meltons turnout, (built for Elias Melton the contractor who built the railroad from Trevilian Depot to Gordonsville), the Greensprings turnout and the Rough and Ready Turnout at Tolersville.

The Rough and Ready Turnout was built at Tolersville in 1838 for the benefit of the Virginia and New England Mining Company at the request of Stephen Dunnington.¹ This company had built their new Rough and Ready iron furnace near Tolersville and the coming of the railroad provided a dependable way to transport their pig iron to the iron foundries in Richmond.

A similar request had been made by Thomas Mayburry who was in the process of setting up another iron furnace about four miles to the north of Tolersville.²

The turnout was built at a point on the east side of the main track where the county road ran parallel to the main track for some 500 feet. A well was dug near the tracks to provide water for the train engines.

The side track ran parallel with the main line track for about 500 feet then on a bearing of N30E ran for some 2,700 feet to within 400 feet of the furnace.

A warehouse was built near the end of the track where the pig iron was stored until there was enough to make up a car load. Another warehouse had been built near the well. This warehouse was to be used by Mr. Mayburry to store his pig iron which had been brought up from his Victoria Furnace on the Tramroad.

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The early railroad tracks were made of wood with a two inch wide iron strap along the inside top surface on which the flanged wheels of the trains ran. A better description of the track from the official contract agreement between the Louisa Railroad Company and the contractor follows.³

“The rails of heart pine or heart white oak are to be of the following dimensions . . . fifteen and twenty-five foot lengths and five inches wide by nine inches deep. They will be of sound timber free from decay, windshakes and knots calculated to impair their strength or durability and they shall be free from sap on three of their edges and on the fourth edge there shall not be more sap than will shew for two inches on either side, thus affording an entire heart surface for the iron to rest on.

The sills of white oak or post oak are to be of sound timber, free from decay or imperfection calculated to impair their strength or durability and shall be of the following dimensions . . . seven feet nine inches long, eleven inches in diameter at the small end before hewing and flatted on one side so as to give a width of eight inches at the small end and a flatted surface gradually increasing towards the large end and shall be barked.

The rails, by planing underneath and on the outside of their bearings are to be brought to the level and to be made to have an equal bearing and then to be properly keyed and secured.

The iron bars are now to be laid on. The upper edge of each bar is to corresponde with a line parallel to the centre line of the track and two feet four and one eighth inches from it. The ends of the bar are to rest on plates of iron and the bars are to be secured by spikes driven through countersinks in the bats, and at the ends also, through the pieces of iron above names. Such a space is to be left between the ends of the iron bars as the Engineer may direct, (the joints being never within less than eighteen inches of a joint between two wooden rails) and such an elevation in curves is to be given to the outer rail of the railroad as he may in each case deem advisable. The iron being laid on the inner edge of the wooden rail is to be hewn away in a neat and workmanlike manner and outside of the iron bar the rail is to be dressed down with an adz, so as to turn any water that may fall on the rail outside of the track.”

This type of track was used until 1849 when they began using the heavier iron strap. At a board meeting at the end of the year 1849 they reported. . . “we are laying the heavier new rail iron, 2½ by ¾ inch on the “old section” between Junction and Gordonsville and has been relaid with new sills. It was also reported that in the year 1849-1850 they had “hailed down” 2,034 tons of pig iron, 6¾ tons of bar iron, 771 tons of iron ore and limestone.⁴ — meaning

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from the iron furnaces at Tolersville to the Tredgar Iron Works at Richmond. Evidently the Rough and Ready Turnout was a very busy place and provided considerable revenue for the railroad company.

The wood rail tracks were replaced with the new all metal "T" rail in the mid fifties. The coming of the "T" rails brought about a large surplus of pine and oak rails, new and used. Of course most of these, especially the used ones, were probably used to fuel their engines. Heart pine especially, would certainly make a very hot fire. Others outside the railroad interests, also had found some ingenious uses for this fine timber.

Bobby Dunn and I were walking over his old home place near Trevilian Depot in search of an old cemetery and passed by his grandfathers old home site. Bobby volunteered the information that his grandfather (Rev. Thomas Rivers Dunn, 1813-1888) had built part of the house which had stood on this site (torn down after WW II) and a smoke house as well, out of the surplus rails from the old Virginia Central Railroad after they had changed over to the new all metal rails.

Several spikes used in the construction of the Rough and Ready siding were found at one of the warehouse sites. These spikes are in good condition . . . have been coated to prevent rusting and will be placed in the Louisa County Historical Museum. These spikes are probably very rare because at the time of the switch over from wood to iron rails all iron scrap was ordered to be collected to help pay for the cost of the new rails.⁵

In 1847 Reuben B. Davis bought 35⁷/₈ acres of what had been part of the Rough and Ready tract.⁶ This tract was on both sides of the main line of the Louisa Railroad where the turnout was located along with the well and the warehouse. This warehouse continued to serve as a collecting and storage point for the pig iron from the Victoria Furnace whose tram road terminated here.

After the Rough and Ready Furnace ceased operation the spur track was taken up in part and was terminated at the grade crossing where the county road crossed over the main line tracks. The remaining part of the siding was known as the "leg track" and was used to serve a cross tie and pulpwood yard for many years until it too fell victim to change and was taken up after WW II.

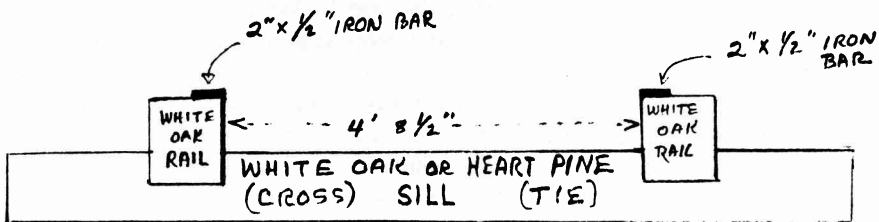
Footnotes

1. Louisa County Deed Book W, Page 208 1 Mar 1838
2. Louisa County Deed Book W, Page 372 27 Jul 1838
3. President's Letter File, Louisa Railroad Company
4. Minutes of the Board, Louisa Railroad Company
5. Minutes of the Board, Louisa Railroad Company
6. Louisa County Deed Book AA, Page 403 11 Nov 1847

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Xerox copy of the embossed official seal of the Louisa Railroad Company from the President's Letter File - Louisa Railroad Company Archives - Virginia State Library.



Sketch to show the construction of early wooden rail railroad tracks as used by the Louisa Railroad Company.