

[Petersburg's Railroads - The Petersburg \(Weldon\) Railroad](#)

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Last Monday evening I was honored to speak to a local group of history enthusiasts about Petersburg's railroads. I covered the antebellum as well as their Civil War history. It was after all the railroads which placed Petersburg in the crosshairs of Gen. Grant's sights.

I've not shared much on Petersburg's railroads on this forum, so I thought I'd take some of the material that I covered in the history talk by making a handful of posts. The first one will cover the Petersburg Railroad.

The Cockade City's oldest railroad was the Petersburg Railroad, also sometimes known as the Petersburg and Weldon Railroad. It ran from its depot on Washington Street (shown on the right side of the image above) to Garysburg, North Carolina, on the north side of the Roanoke River and then to the adjacent town of Weldon, on the south side of

the Roanoke River.
From Weldon, other
connector lines ran to
the coastal city of
Wilmington, North
Carolina.

The Petersburg Railroad
received its charter
from the Virginia
legislature in 1830, and
opened in 1833, making
it one of the early

railroads in the United States. Although
the line served both commercial as well as
passenger use, it figured more
prominently into the former than the later.
However, a traveler remarked that "a
journey which formerly required two days,
is now performed between breakfast and
dinner, and may be retraced by tea time."
The sixty mile trip now only took four
hours!

The Petersburg Railroad evolved partly
out of a rivalry with Norfolk for the
tobacco business of northern North
Carolina. After its opening in 1833, its
effect on Petersburg was almost
immediate. The railroad brought in new
businesses and spurred the creation of
more rail lines that will be discussed in



PETERSBURG RAILROAD.

Summer Arrangement—To take Effect Saturday, July 28th, 1855.

THE EXPRESS TRAIN will leave Petersburg daily at 7.30 A. M., arriving in Weldon at 30 minutes past 10 A. M. Returning, leave Weldon at 2 P. M., arriving in Petersburg at 5 P. M. This train connects both ways with the Mail train on the Greenville Road for Gaston, and the Raleigh Road.

The **Night Mail Train** will leave Petersburg daily (Sunday excepted) at 4.50 P. M., arriving in Weldon at 8 P. M.

Returning, leave Weldon daily (Monday excepted) at 1.30 A. M., arriving in Petersburg at 4.30 A. M.

The **Freight Trains** for Gaston and the Raleigh Road, will leave Petersburg daily (except Sundays) at 7.40, and arrive daily (except Mondays) at 12 M. The Weldon Freight Trains will leave Petersburg Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 5.30 A. M., and arrive the alternate days at 11.45 A. M.

PASSENGERS FARE.

From Petersburg to	Oak Grove	50
do do	do Stony Creek	51 1/2
do do	do St. Michaels Turnout	1 1/2
do do	do Jarratt's	2 1/2
do do	do Bellfield	2 1/2
do do	do Pleasant Hill at Byland's	2 1/2
do do	do Weldon, Garysburg,	
do do	do Kernan and Gaston	0 1/2
From Weldon, Garysburg, Gaston or Summit	to	
do do	do Garysburg	50
do do	do Pleasant Hill	50
do do	do Bellfield	50
do do	do Jarratt's	50
do do	do Stony Creek	50
do do	do Oak Grove	50

future posts.

During the Civil War, and due to the Petersburg Railroad's Deep-South connections, it became a primary focus for the Union army. Grant and Meade made two separate efforts to attain the line. The first, what has become known as Grant's Second Offensive (June 22-23) ended in a failed attempt to cut the line when troops of the II and VI Corps moved west from their lodgement on the Jerusalem Plank Road. The II Corps ran into a furious counterattack by Gen. William Mahone's Division, which resulted in over 2000 captured Union soldiers and which left the VI Corps unsupported and vulnerable, causing both corps to retreat after briefly reaching the rail line near where Richard Bland College is today.

The other significant military actions along the line occurred during Grant's Fourth Offensive (August 1864). The first of that fighting occurred where the June actions happened and became known by a couple of names: The Battle of Weldon Railroad, or the Battle of Globe Tavern. Fighting broke out on August 18 as Gen. Gouverneur K. Warren V Corps secured a section of the track and held on tenaciously as the Confederates counterattacked for three days trying to recapture the vital rail line. With reinforcements from the IX Corps, the federals held on and extended their earthworks west of the railroad.

A few days later on August 25, Gen. Winfield Scott Hancock's II Corps, just returned to the Petersburg front after a tour of duty fighting north of the James River at Deep Bottom, was attacked by Confederates just about five miles south of Globe Tavern on the rail line at Ream's Station. In the savage combat that resulted, Hancock was forced to relinquish the field and the railroad to the Southerners. However, since the federals had control of the rail line south of Petersburg at Globe Tavern, the Union defeat did not significantly alter the situation.

By capturing the Petersburg Railroad south of the city, the federals forced the Confederates to seek an alternate route to get their supplies to their troops at Petersburg and Richmond. What the Southerners devised worked, but proved to be an inefficient alternative. They unloaded their entrained north-bound supplies at Stoney Creek Station, about 18 miles south of Petersburg, onto horse and mule-drawn wagons that

then went cross-country to the west to Dinwiddie Courthouse and then finally up the Boydton Plank Road into Petersburg.

With the Petersburg Railroad under control in August 1864, Grant set his sights on capturing the Boydton Plank Road and the Southside Railroad farther to the west. Those two goals would prove to be a hard road to travel, as they would not be attained until late March and early April 1865.