

THE KINGS MOUNTAIN RAILROAD

The Kings Mountain Railroad was chartered by the state of South Carolina, December 19, 1848. The line was to be started at Chesterville, connect with Yorkville, and at the North Carolina line to join with a North Carolina-chartered railroad that would serve western North Carolina and direct goods to the port of Charleston.

The year before construction had begun on the Charlotte, Columbia and Augusta railway (CC&A), the railroad that put down the depots that created Rock Hill and Fort Mill. The plan was for the Kings Mountain Railroad to connect to the CC&A at Chesterville, the courthouse town of Chester District which was the largest commercial center between Charlotte and Columbia.

The first president was Col. William Wright of Yorkville and the first directors were John H. Adams, W. C. Beatty, Dr. John B. Hunter, Dr. John F. Lindsay, Dr. J. M. Lowry, John McGill, Dr. W. J. T. Miller, J. S. Moore, Samuel Rainey, F. H. Simril, George Steele and Dr. Samuel Wright, all Yorkville citizens.

Contract for the building was let in 1851. As was the case with the CC&A railroad, slave labor was used and a number of contractors were hired. The tracks were laid on the 22-mile-long ridge, a divide of watersheds, between Chesterville and Yorkville which meant that no creeks had to be crossed. The CC&A, on the other hand, was having to cross many creeks, plus the formidable Catawba river, so that the price of construction (\$962 per mile) on the Kings Mountain railway was very cheap in comparison.

Maj. J. Y. Mills of Chesterville was hired as the chief engineer. Encouraging rapid building of the roadbed, Major Mills, in the words of the Yorkville Miscellany of Feb. 8, 1851, “. . . desires to compliment the contractor who first finishes his section, with a walking stick cut from the battleground of King’s Mountain. The head of the walking stick is to be of the horn of a buck killed near the mountain. The ferule is to be of iron manufactured in this district, and the gold used in ornamentation is to be dug from our native hills. The name plate is to be suitably engraved, and the entire souvenir to be the work of local mechanics.”

The iron for the railroad was brought to Charleston from England in October and November, 1851. A brick depot at Yorkville was contracted and ready for use in 1852.

Records of the railroad company are non-existent from 1852 until 1858. The 7th annual report in 1858 showed a nice profit amounting to 6 1/2 per dividends to all

investors and a surplus fund, held by the company, of over \$17,000. The report indicated that drought conditions in North Carolina caused the total profits to be less than in the previous year. Also, the crossties were beginning to deteriorate and had to be replaced. Among the debits was listed the death by pneumonia of Jacob, one of the slaves owned by the company.

In early February of 1865, at the same time that Sherman was ready to leave Georgia and head for Columbia, a January "freshet" severely damaged the Kings Mountain Railway's roadbed and track.

In March 1865 a detachment of Confederate Army engineers arrived to take up the railway's track "to transfer to another quarter, where it will be of greater importance to the country." They removed the track at the rate of two miles a day until they got to Guthriesville where they received word that the war was virtually over and further removal was useless. Until the track could be rebuilt, mail and passengers were transferred between Guthriesville and York by a "hack line". The work of relaying the rails was completed August 29, 1867.

The relaying of the rails placed a high financial burden on the company. The Kings Mountain Railway was put up for sale in Charleston in 1872 at which time George W. Melton of Chester purchased the controlling interest. The following year the Kings Mountain Railway was merged with the Carolina Narrow Gauge Railroad company and renamed the Chester and Lenoir Railroad Company. Later it was to become the Carolina and Northwestern Railway.

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