

The Kings Mountain Railroad

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■ Line was built in 1850s to help bring goods to Charleston.

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



Nearby history

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

The first president was Col. William Wright of Yorkville and the first directors were John Adams, W.C. Beatty, Dr. John Hunter, Dr. John 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 residents.

The contract for the building was let in 1851. As with the CC&A railroad, slave labor was used and a number of contractors were hired. The tracks were laid on the 22-mile ridge between watersheds so that no creeks had to be crossed from Chesterville to Yorkville.

Maj. J.Y. Mills of Chesterville was chief engineer. Encouraging rapid building of the rail bed, 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 Kings 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 ready for use in 1852.

In early February 1865, when Sherman was ready to leave Georgia for Columbia, a January "fresher" 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 two miles of track a day until they got to Guthriesville, where they received word 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 Aug. 29, 1867, but it placed a high financial burden on the company.

The Kings Mountain Railway was put up for sale in Charleston in 1872, when George Melton of Chester purchased the controlling interest. The next year the Kings Mountain Railway and Carolina Narrow Gauge Railroad company merged and were renamed the Chester and Lenoir Railroad Company.