



BRANCHVILLE RAILROAD SHRINE & MUSEUM

The railroad has brought many firsts to the town of Branchville. The town, chartered in December of 1858, owes much of its beginnings to the development of the transportation industry.

The railroad, America's first, began operations on Christmas Day, 1830, when the Best Friend of Charleston speeded along, as some passengers described, "on the wings of the wind at a speed of 20 miles per hour, annihilating both time and space, and leaving all the world behind." By 1833, the railroad had extended 136 miles from Charleston.

In 1877, a new railroad depot was erected across the street from the original station, vastly increasing capabilities. The dining room was among the finest of its kind anywhere, and in the heyday of railroad travel, it was famous for its bountiful table. Summoned to dinner by a bell on the platform, travelers that included past presidents William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft were regaled with authentic Southern cooking.

The last scheduled passenger train passed through Branchville in October of 1962, when the Carolina Special made its final run to Cincinnati. This signaled the end of an era for Branchville and many other railroad communities, though railroads continue in some respects to be a vital part of the transportation system of the United States.

With the non-use and neglect, the depot began to show signs of decay. When rumors spread of possible demolition, a group of citizens organized to preserve it. With the help of W. Graham Claytor, president of Southern Railway at the time, the building was donated to the Town of Branchville and placed in custody of a museum committee. In 1969, with the first Rayroad Daze Festival, the dining room and museum reopened, once again serving travelers.

In July of 1995, the Depot was destroyed by an early morning fire. Although some of the antiques and artifacts store inside were lost, the memories remained—and with those memories remained a promise to rebuild.

By securing grant funding and fundraising through membership drives, the Railroad Shrine and Museum was rebuilt in 2000. Many antiques and artifacts were donated and the museum and dining room are open for business.

For 135 years this structure has stood as a symbol of Branchville's rich railroad history. Through the commitment of townspeople, fellow county residents and regional supporters, the Railroad Shrine and Museum has once again become a site that will interpret the historical and cultural importance of the railroad in South Carolina and preserve Branchville's history for future generations.

For information on joining Branchville's Railroad Shrine and Museum, Inc., call John Norris at (803) 274-8104.