

## Western North Carolina Railroad <sup>[1]</sup>

Share it now!



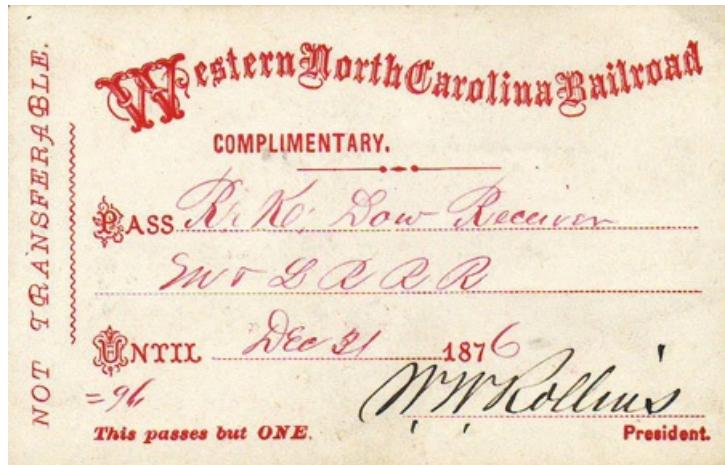
## Western North Carolina Railroad

by Vincent Castano and Donald W. Kern, 2006

See also: [Transportation: Air and Rail \(from NC Atlas Revisited\)](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

Before the North Carolina Railroad was completed in 1856, a crop failure in the west prompted citizens to push for a railroad to connect the eastern and central counties with Asheville. In response, the legislature agreed to build two important extensions of the [North Carolina Railroad](#) <sup>[3]</sup>—the Atlantic & North Carolina Railroad from Goldsboro to Beaufort and the Western North Carolina Railroad from Salisbury to Morganton. The route from Goldsboro to Beaufort was finished in 1858, but work on the Salisbury-to-Morganton track was very slow and costly.

After the [Civil War](#) <sup>[4]</sup>, which virtually halted construction, the state in 1866 subscribed \$4 million to the Western North



Boarding pass for the Western North Carolina Railroad, 1876.

Carolina Railroad to continue the project. John A. Image from North Carolina Historic Sites.

<sup>[5]</sup>Hunt finished the rest of [Charles F. Fisher](#) <sup>[6]</sup>'s work east of Morganton, and plans were made for completion of the next section from Morganton to Old Fort. With no ready cash on hand, the railroad's president and stockholders were eager for governmental aid. The state [constitutional convention of 1868](#) <sup>[7]</sup> and the [Republican](#) <sup>[8]</sup> State Convention authorized the issuance of bonds totaling \$6.4 million to extend the road from Morganton to Asheville. In the same year [George W. Swepson](#) <sup>[9]</sup> and Gen. [Milton S. Littlefield](#) <sup>[10]</sup> secured absolute control of the Western North Carolina Railroad by purchasing 2,000 of the 3,080 bonds issued.

The railroad then became a victim of Swepson and Littlefield's corruption. During the administration of Governor [William W. Holden](#) <sup>[11]</sup>, the two men issued worthless securities, participated in fraudulent stock subscriptions, and built a huge debt. The road was pillaged, Littlefield and his cronies fled the state, and Holden was impeached.

After the so-called Littlefield scandal, the state bought the Western North Carolina Railroad for \$665,000 in 1870. The same year the [Democratic](#) <sup>[12]</sup>-controlled legislature cut off financial support to the railroads and leased the Western North Carolina to other companies such as the Richmond & Danville Railroad. Construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad stopped in Murphy in 1891 before an extension to Ducktown, Tenn., could be completed. In 1894 the railroad was reorganized as the [Southern Railway Company](#) <sup>[13]</sup>.

### References:

William Hutson Abrams Jr., "The Western North Carolina Railroad" (M.A. thesis, [Western Carolina University](#) <sup>[14]</sup>, 1976).

Cecil Kenneth Brown, *A State Movement in Railroad Development: The Story of North Carolina's First Effort to Establish an East and West Trunk Line Railroad* (1928).

Hugh T. Lefler and Albert R. Newsome, *North Carolina: The History of a Southern State* (1963).

### Additional Resources:

"The Case Of Milton S. Littlefield." *The New York Times*. July 29, 1879. <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?>

res=F20616FA345B137B93CBAB178CD85F4D8784F9 [15] (accessed August 1, 2012).

*A Bill to Incorporate the Western North Carolina Railroad Company* Raleigh, N.C.: Seaton Gales. 1852.  
<https://archive.org/stream/billtoincorporatewester#page/n1/mode/2up> [16] (accessed August 1, 2012).

Western North Carolina Railroad Company. *Proceedings of the General Meeting of Stockholders of the Western North Carolina Railroad Company*. Salisbury, N.C.: The Banner Office. 1855. <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/u/?p249901coll22,28096> [17] (accessed August 1, 2012).

Western North Carolina Railroad Company. *Second Annual Report of the Presidents and Directors to the Stockholders of the Western North Carolina Rail Road Company Together with the Proceedings of the Stockholders*. Salisbury, N.C.: The Watchman Office. 1856.

The Select Committee. "Report of the Select Committee to Inquire into the Expediency of Selling the State's Interest in the Western N.C. Railroad." 1866.

Western North Carolina Railroad Company. *Annual Proceedings of the Western No. Ca. Rail-Road with Reports of Officers for 1869*. Statesville, N.C.: Drake and Son. 1869.

Western North Carolina Railroad Company. *A record of the acts and charter, (original and amended,) of the Western Division of the Western North-Carolina Railroad*. Asheville, N.C.: The "Pioneer" Office. 1869.  
<https://archive.org/stream/recordofactschar00west#page/n3/mode/2up> [18] (accessed August 1, 2012).

Clark, Walter. "Western N.C. Rail Road: The Mud-Cut Circular as furnished by the Author to The Raleigh News, Nov. 21, 1879." [Raleigh, N.C.] 1880. "Railroads - North Carolina" Vertical Reference File, [Government and Heritage Library](#) [19], North Carolina.

"The Western North Carolina Railroad, in Litigation." 1882. "Railroads - North Carolina" Vertical Reference File, [Government and Heritage Library](#) [19], North Carolina.

Passenger Department, Western North Carolina Railroad Company. *Illustrated Guide Book of the Western North Carolina Railroad Company Now Completed From Salisbury to Paint Rock*. Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott. [1882].

Connor, R.D.W. "The Western North Carolina Railroad." *Program Of Exercises For North Carolina Day (Western North Carolina)*. Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company. 1909. p. 64-67.  
<http://digital.ncdcr.gov/u/?p249901coll22,460600> [20] (accessed August 14, 2012).

Lathrop, Virginia T. "Western North North [sic] Carolina Railroad Causes Men to Marvel." *Greensboro Daily News*. September 28, 1930. "Railroads - North Carolina" Vertical Reference File, [Government and Heritage Library](#) [19], North Carolina.

#### Image Credits:

"Pass, Boarding, Accession #: [S.HS.2012.1.602](#) [5]." 1876. North Carolina Historic Sites.

#### Subjects:

[Reconstruction \(1865-1876\)](#) [21]

[Gilded Age \(1876-1900\)](#) [22]

[Railroads](#) [23]

[UNC Press](#) [24]

#### Authors:

[Castano, Vincent](#) [25]

[Kern, Donald W.](#) [26]

#### From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) [27]

1 January 2006 | Castano, Vincent; Kern, Donald W.

---

**Source URL:** <https://dev.ncpedia.org/western-north-carolina-railroad>

#### Links

- [1] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/western-north-carolina-railroad>
- [2] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/transportation-air-and-rail-nc>
- [3] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/north-carolina-railroad>
- [4] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/history/cw-1900/civil-war>
- [5] <http://collections.ncdcr.gov/RediscoveryProficioPublicSearch/ShowItem.aspx?215224+>
- [6] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/biography/fisher-charles-frederick>
- [7] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/government/convention-1868>
- [8] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/republican-party>
- [9] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/biography/swepson-george-william>
- [10] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/biography/littlefield-milton-smith>
- [11] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/holden-william-woods-research>
- [12] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/democratic-party>

- [13] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/southern-railway-system>
- [14] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/western-carolina-university>
- [15] <http://select.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F20616FA345B137B93CBAB178CD85F4D8784F9>
- [16] <https://archive.org/stream/billtoincorporatewester#page/n1/mode/2up>
- [17] <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/u/?p249901coll22,28096>
- [18] <https://archive.org/stream/recordofactschar00west#page/n3/mode/2up>
- [19] <https://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/ghl/index.html>
- [20] <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/u/?p249901coll22,460600>
- [21] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/reconstruction>
- [22] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/gilded-age-1876-1>
- [23] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/railroads>
- [24] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/unc-press>
- [25] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/category/authors/castano-vincent>
- [26] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/category/authors/kern-donald-w>
- [27] <https://dev.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/encyclopedia->