

Ferguson Has A History Museum

Ferguson, indeed, does have a Historical Society and a History Museum and we are moving forward with the help of our readers of the past four weeks. We encourage any of you reading this article to join in the conversation. Contact information is at the bottom of this article.

Last month we highlighted the Ferguson Wall of Fame – an often-overlooked part of our city. This month we will deal with a much more obvious site: The twin cabooses. Along with being a fun word to say, cabooses are a large part of Ferguson’s history. Ferguson, like our sister cities of Kirkwood and Webster Groves, grew up as a railroad town. While railroads needed locomotives and cars to transfer the freight and passengers, the caboose was maybe the most necessary car – the office of the train. Ferguson has two examples of the typical caboose – one from the Great Northern Railway and the other from the L&N (Louisville & Nashville).



The Great Northern Railroad was established in the 1880’s to run from St. Paul Minnesota to Seattle Washington. It was the most northern transcontinental railroad. The caboose (model X211), built in 1941, was donated to Ferguson in 1985 by Grannemann Elementary School (Hazelwood Schools). The Great Northern mascot, the Rocky Mountain Goat painted on the side of the caboose, was based on a director’s childhood memory of his goat which pulled his newspaper cart. One of the railroads most famous trains was the “Empire Builder”, which ran from Chicago to Seattle. It ran along the southern borders of Glacier National Park with stops there. Today Amtrak operates that same scenic route across America with a train of the same name. Book early and stop off and visit Glacier.

You might be wondering why a caboose, on a railroad which never ran further south than Chicago, would wind up in Ferguson. The answer lies in mergers. The Great Northern and the Burlington Railroads merged – then they merged again with the Santa Fe Railroad – which did run through St. Louis. That railroad is now known as – you guessed it – the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railroad.

Like most cabooses constructed in this period, it is made of wood and features a cupola – the little lookout that sits high up. This was the era of steam engines and steam engines burn coal that spew out hot cinders which can cause fires. The cupola has windows which can overlook the entire train and spot trouble. Inside you will find closets, a stove, kerosene lamps, water drum, tables and seating areas – and yes – a bathroom. Trains are not the only things that have to go!



The second caboose comes from an even more historic railroad, the L&N (Louisville and Nashville) and it actually did run through St Louis. The L&N was established in 1850 and operated as the L&N for 132 years before becoming CSX Transportation in the 1980's. The Civil War made the L&N historic. It was actually a northern train since Kentucky was not part of the Confederacy. Tennessee, a Confederate state, fell to the Union within a year. This made the L&N an important part of the Union's efforts to move into the South. After the Civil War the line served mainly the Southeast. Its most famous train was the "Dixie Flyer" which ran from Chicago, through St. Louis to Florida. Amtrak runs passenger service on some of L&N's old lines.

This caboose was built in 1921 in Louisville, Kentucky. It is also of wood construction with the cupola on top. It came to Ferguson in 1985, a gift of the Heiligtag family of Imperial, Missouri. The inside is slightly different from the Great Northern. Inside you will find a stove, Marsh

cooler (to keep food cold), tables, seating, kerosene lamps, and bunk benches. The L&N Caboose is an excellent example of a 1920's caboose.

You are always welcome to walk around and view the cabooses. They have been open for visiting on special occasions – often during parades or special days. Your Ferguson Historical Society normally hosts these visitations. At present, visitation is not possible

The cabooses are just one more example of the great things you can find in Ferguson. If you have any suggestions, questions, or items to donate to the Ferguson Historical Society, please contact **Jerry Benner** at fjbenner@mindspring.com. You are also welcome to visit the History Museum.

“The Ferguson Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of Ferguson Missouri. Membership is open to all sharing our interest.”

