

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 many weeks. We encourage any of you reading this article to join in the conversation. Contact information is at the bottom of this article.

The 1840's and 1850's was a time of great growth in Missouri – especially in the St. Louis area including what is now North County. You have probably driven on Brotherton, Chambers, Tiffin, Hereford, Hartnett, January and Ferguson – these are the names of early investors who purchased large tracts of farm land in the Ferguson area. This month we are going to focus on two of these men: William Ferguson and Thomas January.



Like our sister cities of Webster Groves and Kirkwood, Ferguson grew up as a railroad town. Both men were instrumental in this aspect of the growth of Ferguson. The 1850's were a time of growth in westward commerce and St. Louis was the Gateway to the West. Railroads figured big in this westward expansion and by 1855 St. Louis had the start of three railroads: The St. Louis and Iron Mountain Railroad heading south to Tennessee and beyond, the Pacific Railroad

heading west through Allenton to the Pacific Ocean and the North Missouri Railway heading through North County toward St. Charles. It is the North Missouri that would go through the area we now know as Ferguson.

In 1845 William Ferguson, a newlywed from Ohio, bought 177 acres in what is now between Old and New Florissant Roads. This area, at this time, was farmland about a ½ day's ride from St. Louis – a probable overnight stay. In 1855 Ferguson donated 9 or 10 acres (what is now downtown Ferguson) to the North Missouri Railway. In payment he required they place a depot here and name it "Ferguson Station". Ferguson went on to hire an engineer to lay out streets for "Ferguson Station" – and then left for California never to be heard of again. William Ferguson got things started. He even provided a name for the area – Ferguson Station. Ferguson did not become a city until 1894.



Thomas T. January arrived in the area from Kentucky in the 1840's. He bought 1000 acres in the area we know as Ferguson Middle School and January-Wabash lake. January brought his enslaved people with him and built a mansion on the hill where Ferguson Middle sits. He also had a



large pond at the bottom of the hill. It is the pond that is important to the expansion of Ferguson Station. January became a Director of the North Missouri Railroad and allowed a pipeline to be built from his pond to the tracks. This is the era of steam and locomotives require frequent fill ups of water. Following the Civil War, January freed his enslaved

People and gave them land on which to live (an area near the lake off Eddy Street). January died in 1886, but his son, Charles, sold 19.5 acres, including the lake, to the now Wabash Railroad as a recreational area for employees. In 1948 Ferguson purchased the land for a park.

By 1871 the North Missouri Railroad was bought out by the Wabash Railroad as noted above. The Wabash was a major midwestern railroad with lines running from New York, Canada, Detroit, Chicago, and west to Kansas City and beyond. Ferguson Station was an important link in that system. By 1876 the Wabash created a direct link for commuter service between St. Charles and St. Louis – running through and stopping in Ferguson Station. This was a major freight and passenger route with as many as 8 trains a day.

The current depot was built in 1885 and at one time had as many as 8 tracks for switching with as many as 6 passenger trains a day. In early years, prior to Ferguson becoming a city, the Ferguson Station depot served as a major civic center – a polling place, area for early churches to meet, and other civic events. The depot telegraph was used by the community for communication and train whistles were used to summon volunteers for a fire. From the late 1880's to just after World War Two, Ferguson Depot was a major station for commuters to St. Louis Union Station and to St. Charles and Kansas City. In 1900 the streetcar line from Ferguson to Kirkwood was a major interurban service. Following World War Two, with the increase of busses and autos, Wabash ended passenger service in 1960 and streetcar service ended in 1946. The depot was used by the Wabash until 1988 and was purchased by Ferguson in 1991 to preserve historically.

Thanks to William Ferguson and Thomas January we have a city with a name and great city park with a lake. 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 beginning in April (hopefully).

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