



Ferguson Has a History Museum

Ferguson has a Historical Society and a History Museum. We encourage any people reading this article to join in the conversation or become a member. Contact information is at the bottom of this article.

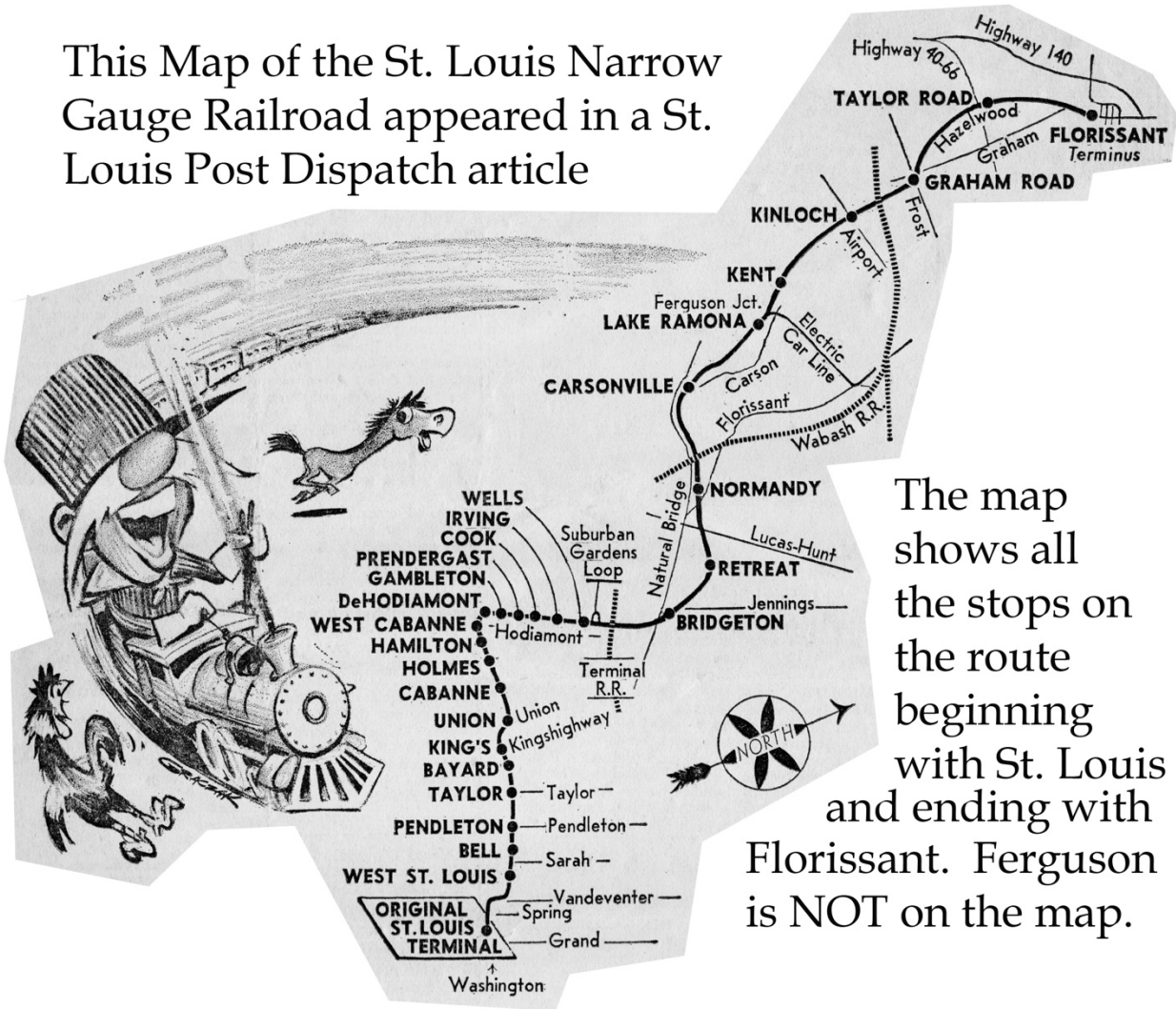
First: We want to thank all who visited our open house on **Saturday, December 2nd**. If you happened to miss the event, we will notify you of future events in this article.

Last month we featured some holiday stories by an early Ferguson resident, Edward G. Cherbonnier. As the new year begins, we will move away from our early resident memories to the history of railroading – not the railroading of the big guys – not even of the North Missouri Railroad (later to become the Wabash) which figures importantly in the History of Ferguson. This railway was a narrow-gauge (meaning that the tracks were more narrow and lighter than that of the heavier locomotives of the BIG guys). It did not run across the state or the country, it ran only 16 miles. It was not designed to carry freight, it was designed to carry people – originally wealthy St. Louisians from their city homes to their country homes in St. Louis County. In this case, North County.

In the 1870's one must remember that local transportation was by foot or by horse – on dirt roads if an actual road really existed. By the mid 1870's, Dr. Erastus Wells and James Page, of St. Louis, desired to create a rail system to take them from their city homes out to their country homes in North St. Louis County. They were eventually joined by a number of other wealthy investors and created the *St. Louis Narrow-Gauge Railroad*. The railroad, with the permission of landowners, laid down track going past many of the investor's homes as it passed through St. Louis City. Once in the county, it had stops at designated places, often early county cities such as Bridgeton, Normandy, Kinloch and eventually Florissant (the terminus). Ferguson is missing as Ferguson did not become a city until 1894. The North Missouri Railroad was already going through what was then called Ferguson Station since the 1860's.

Rail service began on October 1, 1878. It ran 4 trains a day from 7:00 AM to 6:30 PM. The train would travel to either St. Louis or Florissant, use a turntable to turn the engine around and head back. The trip took around an hour. Naturally, these wealthy residents did not have this train all by themselves as this became a valuable transportation for all people. The fare was 3-cents per mile traveled. So, a trip from St. Louis to Florissant would cost 48-cents (not cheap at that time).

This Map of the St. Louis Narrow Gauge Railroad appeared in a St. Louis Post Dispatch article



The map shows all the stops on the route beginning with St. Louis and ending with Florissant. Ferguson is NOT on the map.

The graphic above shows all the stops along the 16-mile route. The St. Louis City stops were mainly the homes of wealthy citizens with name we recognize on streets in St. Louis (Taylor, Cabanne, Hodiamont, etc.). Streets and places in smaller type are current locations to give an idea of where the stops were). Follow the map to Lake Ramona and you will see “Ferguson Junction”. If you lived in the Ferguson area, you had several stops from which to choose.

Initially the railroad used steam locomotives but by 1892 it was converted to electricity. In an interview with an Elizabeth Russel (Missouri Historical Society), Russel said, “the train consisted of a small steam engine, a smoking car (for men only) and several small coaches.” “The plush seats were red and had reversible backs”. She also talks of the wonderful things that city kids would see in the countryside as they traveled St. Louis County. The railway shut down in 1931 during the Depression – but actual service continued as the *St. Louis and Suburban Railway Company* converted the tracks to standard gauge and ran what became known as the *Hodiamont Line streetcar* service. This service continued until 1969 and was the last streetcar service in St. Louis (until the Delmar Loop – *maybe*).

There is still a relic of the St. Louis Narrow Gauge Railroad. The old train station in Florissant is still there, although in a different location than its

original site on St. Ferdinand between Washington and St. Catherine. In 1971 it was removed, restored and now is located in the Tower Court Park at Washington and Florissant Road. A book “Rail, Mail and Dreams”, written by Rosemary Davidson was published. Research shows that the book is no longer available. Historic Florissant Inc. may have additional photos and documents for those of you interested in further investigation.



These Stories come from documents in the Ferguson Historical Society archives, along with an article from the Independent News (10 Nov 2023) and www.waymarking.com/WMC2R.

Membership in the Ferguson Historical Society is open to anyone – the price is \$20.00 to \$50.00 a year. If you are interested in joining or 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 at 1064 Smith (behind the Community Center) by e-mailing the above address. Note: we will need to schedule a date for you, so ask well in advance.

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