

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.

People driving along Florissant Road in Downtown Ferguson will see our two cabooses parked on the parking lot just south of the Ferguson Library. The two are owned and maintained by the City of Ferguson, however your Ferguson Historical Society is responsible for the interior displays and opening them to the public. In the past we have opened them up during the two Ferguson parades, 4th of July and the Northern Lights and other times. We have been unable to do that for several years do to roof leakage and some vandalism issues. The good news is that we see the possibility of opening them up in the very near future.



The City of Ferguson has a ½-cent sales tax as part of the Economic Development Sales Tax Commission which must be spent in the Downtown Ferguson area. Through the incentive of Steve Weigert, local business person, and the direction of John Hampton, Ferguson Fire Chief and City Manager, the city has directed \$220,000 for the repair and upkeep of the Ferguson Station and the two cabooses. The roof will be fixed, windows repaired and interior damage, due to leaking roof, will be repaired. All this may be completed by the first of 2026. We will have an *opening of the cabooses celebration!* Stay tuned.

Let's take a look at these two cabooses. Along with being a fun word to say, cabooses are a large part of Ferguson's history. Like our sister cities of Kirkwood, Webster Groves and Pacific, Ferguson 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).

Looking at an old 1854 map of St. Louis County shows three railroads running out of St. Louis. The Iron Mountain Railroad which ran thru Carondelet and south. The Pacific which ran thru Kirkwood and west. The third was the North Missouri Railroad which ran north and west to St. Charles. While Ferguson, as a city, did not exist, Ferguson as an area did – The North Missouri Railroad ran thru Ferguson – and is one reason for Ferguson’s development into a city in 1894. The North Missouri RR has changed names over the years (becoming the Wabash Railroad and eventually the Norfolk Southern Railroad and may eventually become part of the Union Pacific Railroad). You might think that neither of these cabooses are Wabash or even Norfolk Southern – and you would be correct. So why do we have them. Let’s investigate.



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 National Park.

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 wood

or coal that spew out hot sparks which can cause fires. The cupola has windows which can overlook the entire train and spot trouble. Inside the caboose 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 railroad 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.

In the near future we hope to welcome you to walk around – inside and outside - and enjoy the cabooses. The cabooses will be open only on special occasions or by scheduling with the Ferguson Historical Society.

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.”