

= Virginia Central Railroad =

The Virginia Central Railroad was an early railroad in the U.S. state of Virginia that operated between 1850 and 1868 from Richmond westward for 206 miles (332 km) to Covington . Chartered in 1836 as the Louisa Railroad by the Virginia General Assembly , the railroad began near the Richmond , Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad 's line and expanded westward to Orange County , reaching Gordonsville by 1840 . In 1849 , the Blue Ridge Railroad was chartered to construct a line over the Blue Ridge Mountains for the Louisa Railroad which reached the base of the Blue Ridge in 1852 . After a decision from the U.S. Supreme Court , the Louisa Railroad was allowed to expand eastward from a point near Doswell to Richmond .

Renamed as the Virginia Central Railroad in 1850 , the railroad bypassed the under construction Blue Ridge Railroad via a temporary track built over Rockfish Gap . This connected the railroad 's eastern division with its expanding line across the Blue Ridge in the Shenandoah Valley . Having reached Clifton Forge by 1857 , the railroad began operating the completed Blue Ridge Railroad in 1858 and continued preparing for further expansion until the beginning of the American Civil War in 1861 . As a prime target for Federal raids by Union Cavalry , the railroad faced significant action against it during the war . Although the war left the railroad with only a fraction of its line left operable , the railroad was running over its entire pre @-@ war length by July 1865 .

After the war , both longtime president Edmund Fontaine and former Confederate General Williams Carter Wickham served as president of the Virginia Central and oversaw its expansion towards Covington . The Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad was formed in 1868 from the merger of the Virginia Central Railroad and the Covington and Ohio Railroad , and had expanded westward to the Ohio River by 1873 after new financing from Collis P. Huntington was recruited . The new railroad (reorganized as the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway in 1878) expanded eastward in the 1880s via the Peninsula Subdivision to Newport News . The Chesapeake and Ohio operated for over one hundred years until it was reorganized through merger as CSX Transportation in the 1980s . Today , CSX , Amtrak , and the Buckingham Branch Railroad still use portions of the old Virginia Central line for freight and passenger rail service .

= = Louisa Railroad = =

The Virginia General Assembly passed on February 18 , 1836 , an act to incorporate the Louisa Railroad company to construct a rail line extending from the Richmond , Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad (RF & P) westward . The railroad , as specified by the original charter , was to connect with the RF & P near Taylorsville , at what would become Hanover Junction , and extend westward , passing the Louisa courthouse , to Orange County at the base of the Southwest Mountains . The Virginia Board of Public Works owned two @-@ fifths of the total \$ 300 @,@ 000 (\$ 8 @,@ 533 @,@ 200 today) stock sold to finance the railroad 's initial construction .

Construction of the Louisa Railroad began in October 1836 , reaching the Louisa courthouse by 1839 , and by 1840 had reached Gordonsville . The railroad had been planned by its original charter to build across the Blue Ridge Mountains to Harrisonburg , but in 1839 , the Commonwealth requested a survey to be conducted to determine a feasible route to Staunton by way of Charlottesville . Ultimately , this route , which passed over the mountains at Rockfish Gap , was chosen as a better alternative than the original plan to cross at Swift Run Gap to the north . In 1847 , the charter was modified by the Assembly to provide for the railroad 's construction to the eastern base of the Blue Ridge , and in 1849 , the Blue Ridge Railroad was chartered to cross the mountains at Rockfish Gap to Waynesboro . Claudius Crozet was appointed Chief Engineer of the Blue Ridge Railroad , and under his leadership and direction , the railroad began construction over the Blue Ridge using a series of four tunnels . Meanwhile , the Louisa Railroad had reached the Rivanna River near Charlottesville by 1850 and by 1852 had reached Mechums River , near the eastern end of the Blue Ridge Railroad .

Operation of the Louisa Railroad was initially handled by the RF & P , beginning with the first operation of a train over Louisa Railroad tracks on December 20 , 1837 . This condition continued

until June 1847 , when the Louisa Railroad took over operations .

The eastern terminus of the Louisa Railroad was originally at Hanover Junction (now known as Doswell) with the RF & P Railroad . The charter of that line protected it from construction of a parallel competitor , but an act by the Virginia General Assembly in 1848 authorized the extension of the Louisa Railroad easterly through Hanover and Henrico Counties to reach Richmond . This act was protested by the RF & P for violating the earlier decree of the Assembly against a parallel competitor . The RF & P 's claim was originally overturned by a Virginia State Court , which ruled that the Assembly retained the right to authorize construction of other railroads between Richmond and Fredericksburg , and that the original charter of the RF & P only applied to the transportation of passengers . The decision of the court was appealed and eventually reached the U.S. Supreme Court in Richmond , Fredericksburg and Potomac Railroad Company v. Louisa Railroad Company , which ruled in favor of the Louisa Railroad , upholding the state court 's decision .

The first president of the Louisa Railroad was Frederick Overton Harris , a native of Louisa County , who served until 1841 . After Harris ' term , Charles Y. Kimbrough , also from Louisa , served until 1845 , when Edmund Fontaine was elected to office upon Kimbrough 's death . Edmund Fontaine would continue to serve as president of the Louisa Railroad and its successor until after the American Civil War .

= = Further expansion as the Virginia Central = =

While the Blue Ridge Mountain section was being breached , the Louisa Railroad was busy building westward from the western foot of the mountains , across the Shenandoah Valley to Staunton . In January 1850 , the Commonwealth authorized the Louisa Railroad to increase its stock in order to build from Staunton to Covington . On February 2 , 1850 , the Louisa Railroad , having expanded greatly since its beginnings in Louisa and Hanover counties , was renamed as the Virginia Central Railroad .

In order to connect the eastern and western divisions of the railroad at this time divided by the unfinished Blue Ridge Railroad , a temporary track over Rockfish Gap was proposed by the railroad 's chief engineer , Charles Ellet , Jr . , and by 1854 had been constructed and was in use . Built over and around the under construction Blue Ridge Tunnel , this 4 @. @ 38 @-@ mile @-@ long (7 @. @ 05 km) track , called the Mountain Track , included steep grades (maximum 5 @. @ 6 % with a ruling grade of 5 @. @ 3 %) and sharp curves (minimum radius of 300 feet (91 m)) , thereby limiting speeds to around 5 ? 7 miles per hour (8 @. @ 0 ? 11 @. @ 3 km / h) . Three small tank locomotives were ordered for the temporary track , one of which was supplied by the Tredegar Iron Works of Richmond , the Joseph R. Anderson , and two from Baldwin Locomotive Works of Philadelphia , the Baldwin and C.R. Mason . A second temporary track 1 ? 2 @-@ mile @-@ long (0 @. @ 80 km) around the Brooksville Tunnel and a third 3 ? 4 @-@ mile @-@ long (1 @. @ 2 km) around Robertson 's hollow were also constructed . The temporary tracks successfully joined the railroad and by eliminating the extra cost and effort of removing freight and passengers from trains for transport over the mountains , facilitated further growth and expansion westward .

Construction continued from Staunton through a water gap near Goshen at Great North Mountain by 1855 , and had reached Millboro by 1856 . This western section of the line included an additional three tunnels , and a temporary track approximately 1 @. @ 25 miles (2 @. @ 01 km) long was used at Millboro while the tunnel was being completed . By 1857 , the railroad had reached a point known as Jackson 's River Station , at the foot of the Alleghany Mountains . This location would later be known as Clifton Forge and become a division point for the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway .

The temporary track over Rockfish Gap was used until the Blue Ridge Tunnel 's opening in April 1858 , and the last train to use the temporary track did so on the evening of April 12 . That night , the connection with the completed Blue Ridge Railroad was made , and on the morning of the 13th , the mail train was the first train routed through the tunnel . With the tunnel in use , the temporary track was promptly torn up . At the time of the Blue Ridge Tunnel 's completion , it was the longest tunnel in the United States and the first tunnel in the country to be completed without the use of vertical shafts . Although the Virginia Central did not own the Blue Ridge Railroad , it was granted

the right to operate it from the Commonwealth of Virginia in return for an annual fee .

In 1859 , the Virginia Central 's line carried 134 @, @ 883 passengers throughout the year , and hauled 64 @, @ 177 tons of freight . The road connected Richmond to a point about 10 miles (16 km) east of Covington , where the proposed Covington and Ohio Railroad would have started , a distance of approximately 195 miles (314 km) . In February 1853 , the Commonwealth of Virginia had chartered the Covington and Ohio Railroad to extend the line completed by the Virginia Central westward across the Alleghany Mountains to the Ohio River . This company began work in 1855 and completed important grading work on the Alleghany grade , including the construction of numerous tunnels , and , to a lesser extent , in the areas around Charleston and the Kanawha River . However , as the American Civil War began in 1861 , westward expansion came to a halt and the Covington and Ohio 's line remained incomplete .

= = Civil War = =

The Virginia Central was one of the most important railroads for the Confederacy during the war , as it linked the fertile Shenandoah farmland of Virginia to Richmond and points eastward , enabling supplies and troops to easily be transported to nearby campaigns . The Blue Ridge tunnels and the Virginia Central were key tools in the fast mobilization of Confederate General Stonewall Jackson 's famous " foot cavalry " . Soon after the beginning of the war , the Virginia Central contracted with the Confederate States Postal Service , as it had done with the U.S. Postal Service before the war , to carry mail over its line . This service , along with passenger and general goods transport , became less reliable as the transport of military goods and troops took precedence .

As the war progressed , the railroad continually fell into a state of disrepair due to its constant use and the limited availability of supplies for upkeep . Union raids also destroyed many sections of the line , including the majority of the railroad 's depots , with notable exceptions for those at Gordonsville and Charlottesville , two key points of trade . The defeat of Jubal Early 's forces at Waynesboro led to the destruction of much of the bridges and line between Staunton and Keswick , and as Union armies converged on Richmond , further damage was done to the eastern section of the railroad . By the end of the war , the railroad operated less than 20 miles (32 km) of track and held only \$ 40 (\$ 618 @. @ 35 today) in gold .

During the Peninsula Campaign of 1862 , the South Anna River bridge was destroyed by Union cavalry and the Virginia Central 's line between Hanover and Atlee was torn up . Although this and numerous other raids caused significant damage , the damage was soon repaired and the line was generally kept in good use . May 1863 saw another raid against the line , during which the Louisa Court House was attacked and the Hanover depot burned . During Ulysses S. Grant 's Overland Campaign of 1864 , Phillip Sheridan was ordered , along with nearly 8 @, @ 000 men , to proceed westward to join forces with David Hunter in Charlottesville , destroying as much of the Virginia Central as possible along the way . From Charlottesville , the combined force would advance towards Richmond from the west . Robert E. Lee responded by sending cavalry under the command of Wade Hampton and Fitzhugh Lee , who would meet Sheridan on June 11 at Trevilian Station on the Virginia Central 's line . Confederate forces succeeded in pushing Sheridan back , who at 10 : 00 pm of the 12th withdrew towards the Army of the Potomac . Little damage was done to the tracks during the raid , and the damage was soon repaired and the line returned to operation .

= = Rebuilding = =

Reconstruction of the Virginia Central began soon after the Confederacy 's collapse , and under the permission of General Edward Ord , repairs commenced on April 21 , 1865 . Construction of temporary bridges and repairs were made swiftly , enabling trains to run to the Rivanna River by May . Temporary overland stage and wagon routes were set up to bypass inoperable sections of the railroad as repairs were made and provided for the transportation of goods and passengers . By the end of July , trains were able to run to the western terminus of Jackson 's River Station . The Virginia Central 's rolling stock had suffered throughout the Civil War , and the operable equipment

had dwindled to an amount insufficient to provide for demand . To help solve this issue , four locomotives and forty cars were rented from the government at a price of \$ 20 and \$ 2 (\$ 309 @. @ 17 and \$ 30 @. @ 92 today) each per day respectively . The Beaverdam Depot was rebuilt in 1866 .

In November 1865 , an election for a new president of the company was held , and former Confederate General Williams Carter Wickham was elected over longtime president Edmund Fontaine by 364 votes . In recognition of Fontaine 's dedication and service to the railroad , the stockholders resolved to grant Fontaine and his family free tickets for life . Fontaine was unanimously reelected as president of the company in 1866 and 1867 .

= = Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad = =

Since before the Civil War , the section of the line between Jackson 's River Station and Covington , a distance of about 10 miles (16 km) , had remained incomplete . This section was necessary for further westward expansion , and by July 31 , 1867 , the last of the track was laid and placed in operation . Reaching Covington enabled connection with the Covington and Ohio railroad , which at that time was still under construction , and provided for the future merging of the two companies as specified by an act of the Virginia General Assembly passed on March 1 , 1867 .

On August 31 , 1868 , the Virginia Central was merged with the Covington and Ohio to form the new Chesapeake and Ohio (C & O) Railroad (reorganized as the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway in 1878) , and Wickham was elected as president . Wickham realized the need to find adequate financing to resume the westward work through the challenging mountainous terrain , as the Virginia Board of Public Works was no longer in a position to help as it had in the past . After failing in the impoverished southern states and with British investors , Wickham found new capital and financing by recruiting Collis P. Huntington , one of the so @-@ called " Big Four " , a group of businessmen who had recently completed the western portion of the transcontinental railroad . Under Huntington 's leadership , and with millions in new financing from New York City , westward construction resumed in 1868 .

Having long paid tolls for the use of the state @-@ owned Blue Ridge Railroad , the C & O arranged to purchase the line from the Commonwealth of Virginia and assumed full ownership on April 1 , 1870 . In all , the Virginia Central and the C & O paid around \$ 900 @, @ 000 (\$ 16 @, @ 841 @, @ 842 @. @ 11 today) to the Commonwealth , including both the purchase price and previous fees for use , which was significantly less than the Commonwealth 's expenditure of \$ 1 @, @ 694 @, @ 870 @. @ 85 (\$ 31 @, @ 716 @, @ 385 @. @ 83 today) in building the line .

Construction of the old Covington and Ohio line began from Huntington , West Virginia on the western end and Covington on the eastern end , and progressed towards the middle . By July 1869 , construction of the line westward had reached White Sulphur Springs , West Virginia , and with the use of three temporary tracks around two unfinished tunnels and an embankment , the entire line of 227 miles (365 km) from Richmond to White Sulphur Springs could be traveled . In August 1871 , a locomotive named the Greenbrier was floated down the Ohio River to aid in the construction of the line from the western side . The final spike ceremony for the 428 @-@ mile (689 km) long line from Richmond to the Ohio River was held on January 29 , 1873 , at Hawk 's Nest railroad bridge in the New River Valley , near the town of Ansted in Fayette County , West Virginia . The last spike was driven by C.R. Mason , who had also driven the first spike of the Louisa Railroad and had held various positions over the course of the Virginia Central 's and C & O 's history .

Huntington was also aware of the potential to ship eastbound coal from West Virginia 's untapped natural resources with the completion of the new railroad . His agents began acquiring property in Warwick County in eastern Virginia . In the 1880s , he oversaw the extension of the C & O 's new Peninsula Subdivision , which extended from the Church Hill Tunnel in Richmond southeast down the peninsula through Williamsburg to Newport News , where the company developed coal piers on the harbors of Hampton Roads and Newport News .

The Richmond and Alleghany Railroad , which ran from Clifton Forge to Richmond following the James River and the old James River and Kanawha Canal , was merged into the Chesapeake and

Ohio in 1889 . On this line , trains descended nearly 1 @, @ 000 feet (300 m) in elevation to Richmond following the path of the river . The addition of the " James River Line " allowed the C & O to avoid the heavier grades of the old Virginia Central 's line to the north and became the principal artery of eastbound coal transportation down to the present day , with the earlier Virginia Central line used for westbound empty hoppers . From the convergence of the lines in Richmond , both eastbound and westbound coal trains utilized the Peninsula Subdivision through Williamsburg to service the coal piers in the East End of Newport News .

= = Modern times and other uses = =

After the Chesapeake and Ohio was consolidated with several other large railroads in the 1980s to form CSX Transportation , the line built by the Virginia Central from Staunton to Clifton forge was considered for abandonment . CSX , however , decided to keep the line in order to route empty coal trains westward , which , although intended for times of excess traffic , has become common practice . In addition to CSX , portions of the old Virginia Central line are in use by Amtrak 's Cardinal from Gordonsville to Clifton Forge , and the Buckingham Branch Railroad , a Virginia @-@ based short @-@ line railroad that leases the line from CSX .

Many years after the original Virginia Central became part of the Chesapeake and Ohio in 1868 , another railroad between Fredericksburg and Orange used the name " Virginia Central . " The Potomac , Fredericksburg & Piedmont Railroad Company (PF & P) operated 38 miles (61 km) of 3 @-@ foot (910 mm) gauge railroad between Fredericksburg (with a connection to the RF & P Railroad) and Orange (with a connection to the Orange & Alexandria Railroad) . It operated as narrow gauge until 1926 , when the line was standard gauged and the name changed to the Virginia Central Railway . In 1937 , the entire line was abandoned except for a 1 mile (1 @. @ 6 km) segment in Fredericksburg which lasted until 1984 .