

= Charlottesville and Albemarle Railway =

The Charlottesville and Albemarle Railway (C & A) was a short electric street railroad operating within the city of Charlottesville , Virginia , United States , during the early 20th century . The line was preceded by several streetcar lines operating both horse @-@ drawn and electric powered cars dating back to 1887 . After facing financial difficulties , the predecessor lines were reorganized into the C & A in 1903 . The C & A 's electric streetcars operated off of an overhead line system that was powered by the railroad 's own power plant . The C & A also offered electric power generated by its plant to the city of Charlottesville . During the mid @-@ 1910s , the line received numerous upgrades , including the construction of a new power plant on the Rivanna River , a new company headquarters building , expansion of track , and the purchase of new streetcars .

Increased expenses and decreasing ridership , coupled with the Great Depression , caused the railway to cease streetcar operations in 1935 . The railway was reorganized as the Charlottesville and Albemarle Bus Company in 1936 with a transition to bus service . Today , Charlottesville Area Transit provides bus service to the city of Charlottesville ; however , the city has recently investigated the feasibility of a streetcar line following much of the same route as the Charlottesville and Albemarle Railway .

= = History = =

= = = Background = = =

Charlottesville gained its first railroad in 1850 , when the Virginia Central Railroad ? formerly the Louisa Railroad ? arrived as it progressed westward towards the Blue Ridge Mountains . The Orange and Alexandria Railroad , chartered in 1848 , entered into a contract in the early 1850s with the Virginia Central to use the Virginia Central 's track from Gordonsville to Charlottesville for its extension southward towards Lynchburg . This line began operations to Charlottesville in April 1854 . Thus , two major railroads ? the Virginia Central in an east @-@ west direction and the Orange and Alexandria in a north @-@ south direction ? converged at Charlottesville , ensuring the town 's prosperity . In 1868 , the Virginia Central was reorganized with the Covington and Ohio Railroad to form the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad , which was renamed as the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway (C & O) in 1878 . After a series of mergers , the Orange and Alexandria Railroad was incorporated into the newly formed Southern Railway in 1894 . Charlottesville became a significant junction of the two railroads , with two railroad stations in operation . One was on the C & O line and the second , the Union Station , was just west of the C & O station at the junction between the C & O and Southern railroads .

The first local transit system within Charlottesville was established in 1883 as an omnibus line operating on a regular schedule . This service , which consisted of a large mule- or horse @-@ drawn cart , operated between downtown Charlottesville and the University of Virginia . Fare for the one @-@ way trip cost 10 ¢ (\$ 2 @.@ 54 today) . This service would soon be replaced by the development of Charlottesville 's streetcar system .

= = = Development of the streetcar system = = =

The C & A 's earliest predecessor line was chartered by the Virginia General Assembly on March 30 , 1887 as the Charlottesville and University Street Railway Company . This line constructed the first horse @-@ drawn streetcar line within Charlottesville and began operation on June 14 , 1887 . The Piedmont Construction and Improvement Company (renamed as Piedmont Traction Company in January 1896) was incorporated by the General Assembly on March 4 , 1890 and began work on an electrified streetcar line . Meanwhile , the Charlottesville and University Street Railway Company ? renamed as the Charlottesville City and Suburban Railway in 1895 ? continued operation . For a time these two companies operated both horse @-@ drawn and electric streetcars on parallel tracks

simultaneously , beginning with the first operation of the electric streetcars on January 12 , 1895 .

This continued until all of the Piedmont Traction Company 's holdings were transferred to the Charlottesville City and Suburban Railway on July 31 , 1896 , at which time the operation of horse @-@ drawn streetcars ceased . Several other companies , including the Charlottesville and University Electric Light and Gas Company , the Consolidated Ice and Electric Company , and the Jefferson Park Company , were acquired by the Charlottesville City and Suburban Railway around 1900 . Having defaulted on six months of payments towards bonds and mortgages , the Charlottesville City and Suburban Railway was sold at public auction on November 10 , 1903 , after which it was reorganized as the Charlottesville and Albemarle Railway .

= = = Expansion , development , and decline = = =

After the reorganization of the company as the Charlottesville and Albemarle Railway in 1903 , the new railway faced hardship in establishing a profitable business . Charlottesville , as of the 1900 Census , had only a population of 6 @, @ 449 people and few industries , making the development of an electric power provider and streetcar service difficult . Furthermore , the company 's electric power service , at that time using direct current , competed with the municipal gas provider . The C & A 's streetcar service was not expansive either , running for only 3 miles (4 @.@ 8 km) down Main Street from the C & O station west to the University of Virginia with multiple branches . Thus , the C & A 's profitability suffered and the railway went further into debt until it was purchased in 1912 by F.C. Todd , Norman James , and John L. Livers . Under the new ownership , the company was revitalized with many improvements including the construction of a new power plant producing alternating current electricity , the purchase of one @-@ man streetcars (operated by one man) , and a refocus of the company 's power service .

The C & A 's 3 @-@ mile (4 @.@ 8 km) track was expanded by 1 ? 2 mile (0 @.@ 80 km) during this time to reach the University of Virginia 's new stadium . The new one @-@ man streetcars required an alteration of the track at each end of the C & A 's line to accommodate the turning of the cars . After failing to receive permission from the C & O Railway to construct a loop at the C & O station , the C & A constructed a small turntable ; however , this was later replaced by a loop . The C & A also increased the number of Main Street sidings from three to five , thus reducing travel time to five minutes .

By 1922 , the C & A had grown to serve 28 @, @ 000 customers and employed 55 people . This prosperity , however , would soon reverse with the coming of the Great Depression at the end of the decade . Like many other transit companies , the C & A suffered financially during the depression . With a decrease in ridership and increased operational costs , the C & A ended streetcar operations in 1935 . On February 2 , 1936 , the company was renamed as the Charlottesville and Albemarle Bus Company and began providing bus service . Today , Charlottesville Area Transit provides bus transit in the Charlottesville area .

= = Operation and infrastructure = =

= = = Route Description = = =

As of 1920 , the C & A 's line was approximately 3 @.@ 5 miles (5 @.@ 6 km) long . The line began at its easternmost point at the C & O Station and continued west down West Main Street . At the intersection of West Main Street and Ridge Street , a short branch line down Ridge Street was in service to reach the company 's car barn . The main street line continued past Ridge Street , the Charlottesville Union Station , and passed over the Southern Railway tracks before coming to the junction of West Main Street and Jefferson Park Avenue approximately 0 @.@ 3 miles (0 @.@ 48 km) west of the Southern tracks . At this point the line split , with one line following Jefferson Park Avenue south for approximately 1 @.@ 6 miles (2 @.@ 6 km) to Jefferson Park and Fry 's Spring . The other line , approximately 1 ? 2 mile (0 @.@ 80 km) long , continued west on West Main

Street to the University of Virginia , passing the Rotunda , before turning north on Rugby Road where the line ended just before reaching the C & O mainline .

The C & A 's five passing sidings were located at the following locations : approximately halfway between the C & O station and Ridge Street on West Main Street , at the intersection of West Main Street and Ridge Street , near the union station , before the intersection of West Main Street and Jefferson Park Avenue , and approximately halfway down the Jefferson Park Avenue branch .

= = = Company headquarters = = =

In 1914 , the C & A began construction on a new company headquarters building at 300 West Main Street , which was completed in 1916 . Built in the Jeffersonian style of architecture , the new building featured red brick , white trim , and green shutters with bronze letters spelling the company name on the front . The building served as the company 's headquarters , a sales room , and an electrical substation . The substation was attached to the rear of the office building and featured two 200 @-@ kilowatt converters and three 65 @-@ kilowatt transformers for the purpose of reducing the 2200 @-@ volt AC power generated at the power plant to 600 @-@ volt DC power for use in the street railway system . The substation also contained devices to prepare the power for use in street lighting . The Southern Railway took advantage of the substation and installed transformers , raising the voltage to 4400 volts , for use along the Southern 's line between Calverton and Lynchburg . The building has since become an office building .

Located behind the company headquarters building was the railway 's car barn , the location where the streetcars were stored and maintained . Though constructed of only leftover rail and corrugated iron , the car barn suited the railway 's purpose , and most repair work was done in shop . The car barn has since become the entrance to a Greyhound Lines bus station .

= = = Power plant = = =

The C & A 's original power plant was located within the city of Charlottesville and produced direct current power for distribution to city residents . By the 1912 ownership change , this power plant had become worn and expensive to maintain , costing as much as 8 ¢ per kilowatt hour (kWh) to generate electricity (equivalent today to \$ 1 @. @ 89) . The plant also suffered from a flywheel explosion that caused \$ 15 @, @ 000 dollars worth of damage on February 14 , 1913 . Because of the high expense , along with the difficulties of distributing DC power over an expanding system , the building of a new power plant to produce AC power was deemed necessary .

A location was selected east of Charlottesville where the C & O mainline followed the Rivanna River , providing both an easy water supply and rail access . The Red Land Power Corporation , chartered March 29 , 1913 , was charged to construct a 2 @, @ 000 @-@ horsepower plant for the C & A and was merged into the C & A on November 25 , 1913 . The old power plant was used temporarily , with new equipment , to produce AC power for the city as the new plant was being completed . Coal was provided to the new plant by way of rail , where a spur off of the C & O railway was provided to allow coal from hopper cars to be unloaded into a storage bin beneath . Two 400 hp boilers were installed along with multiple turbines and generators in order to generate the electricity . The completed plant produced 175 @, @ 000 kWh per month as of 1914 and consumed four hopper cars worth of coal per month ; this is contrasted with the old power plant 's generation of 125 @, @ 000 kWh per month consuming 14 ? 15 cars worth , demonstrating the new plant 's efficiency .

= = = Jefferson Park = = =

Jefferson Park , which was located near the university in western Charlottesville , was owned by the C & A. The 13 @-@ acre park was improved in the mid @-@ 1910s with a renovated dance hall using materials harvested from a hotel that was torn down nearby . The park also featured motion picture shows , boxball , roller @-@ skating , and swings . The C & A used the park 's attractions to garner further passengers on its streetcar line .

== Streetcars ==

The C & A possessed multiple types of streetcars throughout its history . Both open and closed cars were used by the C & A , with these cars seating an average of 24 passengers and weighing between 24 @, @ 000 and 30 @, @ 000 pounds (11 @, @ 000 and 14 @, @ 000 kg) . The closed cars were refurbished as part of the series of upgrades across the line to include new interior paint , tungsten lamps , and orange and blue exterior paint , a move to make the cars " more attractive to the students " of the University of Virginia , as these were the school 's colors .

Although the old cars received cosmetic upgrades , the energy inefficiency of the cars , due in part to their heavy weight , caused the railway to seek a new and improved car . Orders were placed with the J.G. Brill Company for five new near @-@ side one @-@ man streetcars sometime around 1913 . By June 1914 , two additional cars were ordered and placed in service making for a total of seven new streetcars servicing Charlottesville . These new cars offered multiple advantages to the company , as they were lighter , weighing around 18 @, @ 000 pounds (8 @, @ 200 kg) , seated 36 people , and could be operated by one man . The near @-@ side cars were in length 31 feet 2 1 ? 4 inches (9 @. @ 5 m) and rode on a single truck . The benefits of the new cars allowed the company to scrap most of the older cars soon after the arrival of the new replacements .

== Future plans ==

Though the Charlottesville and Albemarle Railway 's streetcars are long gone from Charlottesville , public transit is still of interest to the city . Since the rise of the personal automobile , Charlottesville has struggled to provide an effective public transportation system . Although bus service has been implemented under Charlottesville Area Transit , the city is challenged by expanding development and the lack of consumer willingness to use public transportation . In the early 2000s , the city began planning and analyzing various methods of public transportation for implementation within Charlottesville , one of which includes the development of a streetcar system . A 2005 study entitled Shaping Community with Transit laid out plans for the development of a streetcar system that would operate along West Main Street from the University of Virginia to downtown Charlottesville , following much of the same path as the Charlottesville and Albemarle Railway . A Streetcar Task Force was created in December 2006 by the City Council to examine the feasibility of a streetcar system , though no concrete plans have been developed or implemented as of 2012 .