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Hometown History

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Next Stop Winchester

Just as the railroad industry was important to the United States as a whole it was just as vital to the growth of small towns and cities across the country. Winchester being one of the cities, was founded in 1818 in White River Township, Randolph County. Two main trains of Randolph County were the Bee Line and New York Central, they were commonly used to transport people, goods, and livestock great distances.

The railroads that would find their way to our county began in Indiana in 1848 when the Indiana General Assembly chartered what would eventually come to be known as the Indianapolis and Bellefontaine Railroad, or “Bee Line”.¹ Back in 1853, Jeremiah Smith agreed to have a railroad company through Union City. “The railroads offered transportation to a great part of the county.”² The railroad was called The Bee Line, and it ran through Parker, Farmland, Winchester, and Union City.³ The Bee Line railroad also linked the Bellefontaine and Indiana Railroad and the Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati Railroad. Keeping up pace with the rest of the country, Randolph County hosted five railway companies by 1867, but when they built the Bee Line Railroad, they underestimated how much money it would cost to make it.

¹ Richard M. Simpson, III. “The ‘Bee’ Line.” Indiana Transportation History, June 15, 2020. <https://intransporthistory.home.blog/2020/06/16/the-bee-line/>.

² The Historical and Genealogical Society of Randolph County, Indiana. *Randolph County, Indiana*. Turner Publishing Company. 1991. P. 246.

³ The Historical and Genealogical Society of Randolph County, Indiana. *Randolph County, Indiana*. Turner Publishing Company. 1991.

The Bee Line Railroad was a significant component of the Big Four Railway. The name of the Bee Line came from the company that built it, and it was finalized sometime in 1848. The railroads lines that ran through the various cities and towns served to link Randolph County to the rest of the country. The Indianapolis and Bellefontaine line served the towns of Winchester, Parker, Farmland and Union City. Saratoga and Ridgeville were stops along the Pennsylvania Lines while the Grand Rapids and Indianapolis lines crossed the N.Y.C lines in Winchester. The Pennsylvania Lines intercepted the G.R.& I in Ridgeville.⁴ Depots and towers were a common site in these towns as the trains brought both people and commerce with them along the tracks.

The Railroads that came through Winchester, allowed for more business through Winchester. Agriculture was a very important business at the time and the railroads brought great improvements to this. Some of the improvements consisted of bringing a grain elevator and flouring mill. "The first train to run on the Bee Line Railroad through Winchester was in 1853, and it was a free excursion to Muncie."⁵ The Cincinnati, Richmond and Muncie Railroad was eventually constructed in 1900, running through Losantville and linking the county to the city of Muncie. However, despite providing a connection and commerce route, the railway was a financial failure. In 1908, it landed under the management of Winchester local and then state chairman, J.P. Goodrich who managed to rework the railway into a profitable venture. It was eventually sold to the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad Company of Indiana.⁶

⁴ "Transportation." Essay. In *Randolph County, Indiana, 1818-1990*. Winchester, IN: Historical & Genealogical Society of Randolph County, Indiana, 1991. 246.

⁵ Hamilton, Joe. "The Randolph County Historical Review." (July 1962)

⁶ Smith, John L., and Lee L. Driver. "Past and Present of Randolph County, Indiana ." Internet Archive. Indianapolis : A. W. Bowen, January 1, 1970.

<https://archive.org/details/cu31924006111326/page/798/mode/2up?ref=ol&view=theater>.

The Big Four Depot is the main train station in Winchester; the Bee Line Railroad went through it. “The passenger trains passed through the county every 24 hours in 1914.”⁷ The railroads were an easy way of transportation for people back in the day. However, there could also be some complications that came with traveling on the railroad. “Early railroad companies did not allow locomotives or rail cars to travel beyond their geographic/corporate boundaries...”⁸

As you can see, railroads were a significant part of the history of Winchester, Indiana, but over the course of the years the use for the railways in Randolph County have declined. Where rail lines once crossed over the landscape, only a single A CSX Freight line now runs through Randolph County.⁹ The once busy and bustling depots and towers have either disappeared or been repurposed with only pictures and stories of their former lives remaining.

⁷ The Historical and Genealogical Society of Randolph County, Indiana. Randolph County, Indiana. Turner Publishing Company. 1991. P. 246.

⁸ Olson, Andrew. “The Bee Line Railroad: At the Dawn of the Midwest Railroad Era.” Indiana History Blog, February 20, 2022, <https://blog.history.in.gov/the-bee-line-railroad-at-the-dawn-of-the-midwest-railroad-era/>.

⁹ IN.gov. “Randolph County Area Transportation.” IN.gov, August 22, 2022. <https://www.in.gov/counties/randolph/living-here/area-transportation/>.