

1-19-96

Sharon caught caboose of 1900s railroad bonanza

Western York was nearly betrayed in late bid for depot

We have written previously about how the Charlotte, Columbia and August Railroad created the towns of Rock Hill and Fort Mill in 1851. In fact, almost every S.C. town born between 1850 and 1900 followed the laying of tracks.

By the 1880s, community leaders, aware of the business likely to follow the coming of railroads, were willing to offer land and other enticements. For its part, railroad management worked to cut deals favorable to themselves.

The Charleston, Cincinnati and Chicago railroad, soon called the "Three Cs," had been chartered in 1853 as the first east-west railroad, but it had never been built. If it had come into being in the 1850s it would have had stations in Camden, Lancaster and York, three courthouse towns long in existence.

As it was, the Three Cs, at first hampered by lack of money and then the coming of the Civil War, did not revive its charter until 1888. The railroad abandoned the idea of going through Camden, Lancaster and York, now served by other railroads. Instead, the Three Cs was to lay track through undeveloped rural areas. Although they did not say it openly, the precise route would be determined by the highest bidders for Three Cs' services.

On July 24, 1888, at the railroad's request, Dr. John G. Black of western York County asked his



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neighbors to meet and select "the most suitable and convenient location for a depot." The next day it was agreed the depot should be at a spot now known as Sharon. At the time, however, it was part of John L. Rainey's plantation. The Three Cs asked for six acres. Rainey was reluctant to give up his land unless he could have assurance that, if the railroad built elsewhere, he would get his acreage back. Finally, perhaps because of the pressure of public opinion, Rainey gave the Three Cs a deed.

Houses and store buildings went up quickly in anticipation of the booming business expected to follow as soon as the railroad accepted the deed. A railroad car was designated to serve as a depot at which freight could be received and sent and passenger tickets sold by a railroad agent. The people regarded the railroad car as temporary.

A short time later the people of Sharon, who were eagerly awaiting the building of the depot, were stunned when Maj. John F. Jones, representing the railroad, an-

nounced that the depot would probably be some distance away on the land of John A. Byers. Worse yet, the citizens of Sharon received a letter from Col. R.A. Johnson, general manager of the Massachusetts and Southern Construction Co., saying that if Bullcock's Creek township would give Johnson \$15,000, he would seriously consider locating the depot at Sharon.

Losing no time, Sharon hired two of Yorkville's best lawyers, William Blackburn Wilson Jr. and David E. Finley, to represent the town in an appeal to the S.C. Railroad Commission. As a result of the August 1889 hearing, the commission ordered that "the Charleston, Cincinnati and Chicago Railroad company do forthwith re-establish the station at Sharon, the depot for same to be placed not over six hundred yards from the centre of the eleven hundred feet along the line of the railroad track deeded to them by John Rainey . . ."

In spite of its depot victory, Sharon didn't become the booming metropolis envisioned in 1888. This is the way the current "Visitors Guide to York County" describes Sharon: "This rural town, named after the local Sharon ARP Church, rests at the crossroads of Highway 211 and Highway 49. There are quaint shops and restaurants for visitors to enjoy, but never a traffic jam. Population is 330."