

## Railroad Fans “Railfans” Tour Historical Background

Looking for something really unique? How about a Railfan Tour? The tour connects railroad fans to the rich railroad history of Gordonsville and Orange County. One cannot separate the history of the town or the area from the history of the railroad!



As far back as 1787, **Gordonsville** has been a major crossroads. In the 1840's Gordonsville was the western terminus of the Louisa Railroad and the westernmost railhead in Virginia. At one point in the 1850's Gordonsville was the largest and most populous town in Orange County, due in part to the railroad junction. During the Civil War, Gordonsville was a main storage depot for the confederacy. The Exchange Hotel was converted into a military hospital during the Civil War and the railroad again played an important role in bringing

wounded soldiers to the hospital.

In the late 1860's and early 1870's, Gordonsville women sold food to C&O passengers through the open windows of the wooden cars. It was possible for the hungry traveler to purchase biscuits, coffee, fruit, hard-boiled eggs, bread, pies, and chicken without leaving the train. As a matter of fact, Gordonsville was known as the Chicken Leg Center of the Universe in the 1870's. As late as 1914, hungry travelers could still buy food through the open windows of C&O trains. When dining cars became popular, dressed chickens were stock piled at Gordonsville and the Gordonsville name was used on menus. Today this legacy is honored on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday in May with Gordonsville Famous Fried Chicken Festival. Visit the town's website at [www.townofgordonsville.org](http://www.townofgordonsville.org) to learn more.



At one point, there were five different rail lines running through Orange County, making it the commercial hub dominating the region. During the 1930s and 40s, as many as 13 trains were understood to have stopped in Orange County every day. Today, three of those rail corridors are still in use.

Stop by the Gordonsville Visitor Center to pick up your “Tracks Through Time” brochure. The tour can take up to five hours to complete as you travel from point to point. If you want a downloadable list of GPS coordinates for each site and a nice description of the venues, go to [www.visitorangevirginia.com](http://www.visitorangevirginia.com)

## Railroad Fans Tour

### Places to Stop, Look and Listen



Your first stop is the **Exchange Hotel and Civil War Museum**, located 2 blocks south of the Visitor Center. In the 1860's the Exchange Hotel in Gordonsville was a luxurious stopping place for Virginia Central passengers. During the Civil War, troops, supplies and wounded were transported on these rail lines to Gordonsville. Today, there are three floors of displays in an 1860 railroad hotel.

**The Old Freight Depot** is still standing and is located near the Exchange Hotel on Depot Street.



**The Magnolia House** was built as a hotel in the early 1870's. Today it is a private residence, but easily accessible to view. From the Visitor Center, go north on Main Street and under the railroad bridge. Take a right on Market Street and then a quick right onto Commerce Street.



**The Orange Train Depot** is located just 10 minutes from downtown Gordonsville in the heart of Orange, Virginia. Travel north on US 15 to Orange and turn right on Main Street. A short 2 blocks down the hill and the entrance is on your right. The station was built in 1909 – 1910. Passenger service was discontinued in the 1970's. After renovation, the station is the home of the Orange County Visitor Center. Open to the public. Hours 9 am – 5 pm Monday – Saturday and 11 am – 3 pm on Sunday.



**The Montpelier Train Depot** is located just 10 minutes from downtown Gordonsville. There are several ways to get there. Shortest is to travel north on State Road 231 to



Somerset and then right on State Road 20 North to Montpelier. You can also travel north on US 15 to Orange and then left on State Road 20 to Montpelier. The depot was originally constructed to bring passengers and freight service to the DuPont estate at Montpelier. Besides being a depot, the station also housed the Montpelier Station Post Office and a Western Union Telegraph Office. The Montpelier Station Train Depot is open daily from 10:30 am – 4:30 pm and houses the exhibit *In the Time of Segregation*, while it continues to function as a Post Office, which is located in the restored freight room.

**Barboursville** is located just 5 miles west of downtown Gordonsville on US 33 west. In the early 1900's before US 29 and Interstate 64 were built, Barboursville was at the major intersection of two major north-south, east-west roads, State Route 20 and US 33. At one time, there was a train depot there, along with hotels, boarding houses, livery stables, a post office and stores. The trains still go through, but do not stop. For enthusiasts, you can still turn into the village. Where you cross the tracks, you will find off-property viewing to the south. The tracks on the north side of US 33 are elevated and viewing may be limited.



Today, the tracks are still active and the old station is still standing.

**Trevilian Station** is located 9 miles east of downtown Gordonsville on US 33 east. The railroad purchased the land from the Trevilian family for right of way. Historically, Trevilian Station was the site of a large scale cavalry raid during the Civil War. The Union attack was intended to destroy the tracks and the station of the Virginia Central. Union General George A. Custer led the charge but was repulsed. The Confederate victory at Trevilian kept the Union army from reaching

**Charlottesville's Union Station** is located just 20 miles south/southwest of downtown Gordonsville. The shortest route is to take State Road 231 through Keswick to US 250 Business west. Remain on Business US 250 to the McIntire Road exit. Turn left on McIntire Road and then right on West Main Street. The station will be on your left after a few blocks.



The original Union Station was built in 1885 to jointly serve the Charlottesville and Rapidan Railroad, the Virginia Midland Railway, and the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway. Today, the former baggage handling facility is home to the Amtrak ticket office and waiting area. The main facility has been privately developed into a commercial restaurant. Out of the twenty Virginia stations, Charlottesville is the fourth busiest in the state according to the FY2013 ridership.



wood products after the Civil War. Today, the station is part of the Rapidan Historic District.

**Rapidan's Passenger Depot** is located 14 miles north/northeast of downtown Gordonsville and can be reached by traveling north on US 15 to Orange. Turn right/east on Main Street, which will become State Road 615. Rapidan will be about 5 miles northeast. Historically, the town was established in the late eighteenth century around the old Waugh's Ford Mill. In the 1850's the Orange and Alexandria Railroad laid tracks through the town. The town's strategic location of both railroad and river saw several raids during the Civil War. The town became a regional shipping point for lumber and