

## Chatham's Role in Early Railroads

At the first meeting in the state to discuss the prospects of rail transportation, held on the farm of William Albright in Chatham County<sup>1</sup> in 1828 and attended by about two hundred men—largely or totally farmers—of Orange, Chatham, and Guilford counties, it was concluded that a route through the middle of North Carolina would at last make it possible for farmers to get their produce to market. Unfortunately, these men lacked both the resources and the political influence to go beyond the talking stage. In the same year, however, the first experimental railroad in the state was constructed. In Fayetteville convex wooden rails were laid up Person Street from the site of Campbellton on the Cape Fear River to St. James Square. On this crude line a wagonlike conveyance, with concave iron wheels and pulled by horses or mules, hauled goods from the steamer to a warehouse.



In 1833, a similar mile-long “experimental railroad” was laid in Raleigh from a quarry to the site of the new capitol. It was used to haul stone for the building but on Sunday, passengers were taken for pleasure rides....

[In 1835]....the Democrats were responsible for chartering the first two railroads in the state. These lines had three promotional centers—Wilmington, the Roanoke River, and Raleigh. None of these would benefit the west, of course<sup>2</sup>.

Excerpt from *North Carolina through Four Centuries*, by William Powell, 1989, pages 285-286.

[Learn more](#) about early railroads.

Also see [Prosperity Came to Pittsboro on the Train](#).

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<sup>1</sup>Now Alamance County, as this portion was transferred from Chatham in 1897.

<sup>2</sup> The “west” is the Piedmont and beyond, as the east was still the center of commerce and power in the state.