

# The History of the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad

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The Washington and Old Dominion Railroad is descended from two corporate families. The elder first came into being in 1847 as the Alexandria and Harpers Ferry Railroad but this company was never active. In 1853, the General Assembly incorporated the Alexandria, Loudoun, and Hampshire Railroad as its successor. Hampshire, then in Virginia, has been in West Virginia, since the creation of that State. The railroad never got that far. The company had a capital of \$3.5 million of which the State supplied \$853,000. Subscriptions were received for 1,000 shares of the capital stock.

The first meeting of the corporation was held in the Potomac Insurance Building in Alexandria on May 24, 1853. At this meeting, Lewis McKenzie was elected president at \$1,500 a year and by-laws were adopted. On June 9, Charles T. Manning from the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad arrived to be Chief Engineer at \$2,700 a year; there were 52 men in his department.

The first annual meeting was held on October 20, 1853, when there was discussion of building a branch to the Potomac River opposite Washington City and seeking the help of Congress to get across the river. The Engineer reported that survey work had been completed through Leesburg and suggested alternate routes through the mountains. The more northerly would go through Hillsboro and the Keyes Gap and would require a 1,600 foot tunnel. The southerly way would use Snickers Gap and a 4,500 foot tunnel. The grades by either route were reported to be all right. The financial report shows that \$13,800 had been paid in and \$12,700 expended.

By September 1858 grading had been completed to Leesburg but no rail had as yet been laid. A depot in Alexandria was begun in that year. An engine house for three locomotives was also constructed, and a turntable. A trial run was made over the road on May 9, 1859, for 1½ miles. The first engine, the "Lewis McKenzie", had been placed on the tracks on March 22, 1859.

The first 24 cars (14 "burthen" and 10 "house" cars) were built by T. S. Jamison in Alexandria, and the first passenger car by John Summers in the car shops on Pitt Street in Alexandria. It was 47 feet long and the seats were covered with lilac plush. In 1860, a three compartmented combine car was purchased. It had sections for passengers, baggage, and mail.

The first profitable business was running people to a camp meeting in Vienna. The *Alexandria Gazette* of August 18, 1859, carried an advertisement which stated that the fare was 50 cents each way.

No progress was made during the Civil War. Confederate soldiers tore up the rails, heated them, and wrapped them around trees to prevent use of the railroad by the enemy. Not surprisingly the railroad went bankrupt.

In 1870, the Washington and Ohio was formed to succeed the Alexandria, Loudoun, and Hampshire. In 1873, this new corporation issued a prospectus showing plans to extend the line as far as the Ohio River at Point Pleasant. It was proposed to compete with both the C & O canal and the B & O over a 325 mile line from tidewater. In 1871, the rails were carried over Clark's Gap and shortly thereafter two trains daily were run from Alexandria. The company had a capital of \$1,335,000 in 1872. Bluemont, however, was as far as the road was ever built and that point was not reached until 1900.

In 1878, the Washington and Ohio went bankrupt and in 1880, the Washington and Western was formed as its successor. This, too, went into bankruptcy, in 1883, and the Washington, Ohio, and Western was formed. This company operated the line until 1886 when a 999 year lease with the Richmond and Danville was negotiated. In 1894 the Southern Railway took over. On July 1, 1912, the Washington and Old Dominion leased the line for 50 years.

The second branch of the ancestry of this road begins with the Great Falls and Old Dominion Railroad which was chartered on January 21, 1900, with a capital of \$2 million. Among the original Directors were Alfred Grunwell, Thomas B. Jewell, George Truett, George N. Saegmuller, and George Butiler all Arlingtonians. Mrs. Jewell, Mrs. Grunwell, and Mrs. Truett were daughters of Gilbert Vanderwerken who had run a horse car line from Georgetown to the Navy Yard in the District. Mrs. Saeg-

muller was their cousin. These men owned much of the land needed for the right-of-way of the railroad. Most of them sold to the company but Mr. Jewell gave only an easement which led to some difficulty in 1935.

In 1901 the original Board of Directors sold out to Senator Stephen Elkins of West Virginia and John R. McLean. Senator Elkins married the daughter of a Mr. Davis who was connected with the B & O. Their son was Davis Elkins.

There was a trial run over the road on March 7, 1906. The shops were at Rosslyn. The line did not go all the way through to the Falls at first as the bridge over Difficult Run had not been completed. The cars were 42 feet long and carried 44 people. The tickets were transferable onto the Capital Traction lines in Washington and were sold six for 25 cents. The first car each day left the Aqueduct Bridge at 5 A.M.

On July 3, 1906, the bridge was completed and the tracks laid all the way to the Falls. A shelter was built at the Falls, and a second line of track laid in 1908. In that year a new company, the Washington, Frederick, and Gettysburg issued a prospectus in which it proposed to operate into Washington over the tracks of the G.F. & O. D. This plan was never brought to fruition.

Five cars were bought from the Cincinnati Car Company. Traffic on the line was very heavy and three locomotives and six cars were bought from the Manhattan elevated railroads in New York City. These steam locomotives were used when not enough water was available for the condenser at the power plant in Rosslyn. They pulled two-car trains.

In 1911 the Washington and Old Dominion was incorporated as the successor of the Great Falls and Old Dominion Railroad and got a 50 year lease to take over the Bluemont Branch on July 1, 1912, as noted earlier. It also leased the Southern Railway steam equipment until electrification of the line was completed late in 1912.

A parlor car trailer was added and 25 cents extra was charged to ride in it. Freight was hauled by steam on the Bluemont Division until 1919. Passenger service was provided from Rosslyn up Spout Run through Lacey and Bluemont Junction to the Fairfax Street depot in Alexandria as well as to Bluemont and Great Falls. In 1919 two electric locomotives were built and in 1920 and 1922 two more were bought. In 1941-42 three Diesel engines were bought, one of which is still in service today.

The terminal was at 36th and M Streets in the District where the present gasoline filling station is. There was a 50 by 100 foot steel shed. It was only a single track line over the bridge which itself was so inadequate that trains were run over in one car units, people having to transfer at Rosslyn. In 1923, a new station was built in Rosslyn where the drive-in restaurant now stands.

The line was loosely managed. Some cars were completely wrecked through carelessness. On at least one occasion the motorman, who carried a shotgun by his side, stopped the train to retrieve a rabbit which he had shot in the light of the headlights.

The tracks on the Great Falls line from Thrifton to Great Falls Park were removed in 1935 after the line went into receivership in March of that year. Elkins became sole owner, putting up \$35,000 to buy the road's assets. A compromise with Arlington and Fairfax counties was reached relative to tax delinquency whereby the counties took over the line's right-of-way for highway purposes. This is now Old Dominion Drive.

In 1944, the Bluemont Branch was acquired from the Southern for a price of \$70,000. Rent had been \$6,000 a year. On November 5, 1956, Davis Elkins (his father's heir) sold his 350 shares of capital stock plus other securities to the C & O Railroad for \$450,000. The C & O now assumed control but continues to preserve the corporate entity of the Washington and Old Dominion Railroad.