SURVEY RECORDS

Raleigh

CITY, TOWN

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Burlington Depot was built in the late nineteenth century as a passenger station on the North Carolina Railroad. The rectangular, one story boldly bracketed red brick and wood structure is marked by a hipped roof with flared eaves and an octagonal tower and two triangular dormers on its west, or front, exposure, making it a fine example of the railroad architecture of the period.

The vaguely Tudor Burlington Depot is a rectangular building, approximately 38 feet wide and 126 feet long, set on a north-south axis on an acre of land in downtown Burlington. Except for the addition of a wraparound roof overhang built between 1904 and 1908, it is virtually unchanged since it was erected in the early 1890s.

The one-story depot is built of common bond red brick, with a stepped brick base, quoined stone corners, and irregular quoined ornamentation on its east and west sides. Above the window lines, the building features white stucco. An offset interior brick chirney stands at the southern end of the structure.

The depot has a hipped slate roof with flared eaves and decorative ridge flashing. Ornamental wood brackets support an open corniced roof overhang of about eight feet which encircles the building. There are also copper gutters.

Perhaps the most unusual feature of the building, and certainly its most interesting is the asymmetrical octagonal tower protruding from its west, or front, side. The hip roofed tower, topped by a tiny knob with finial supporting a locomotive weathervane (new), extends approximately six feet beyond the body of the main structure in a boxed cornice eight boards wide. Composed of brick in its lower reaches, the tower is of brown painted wood where it rises above the main roof overhang.

Flanking the tower are two triangular dormers with elliptical wooden vents, which combine with the tower to make the depot's western aspect its most distinctive.

Also flanking the tower on the west are rectangular doors with five moulded, single leaf, horizontal panels. The doors are topped with one-light transoms. As with the depot windows, the doors display plain architraves and segmental arched brick heads.

At the southern end of the building on both the east and west sides are matching diagonally boarded, three paneled, sliding double freight doors above which are found multi-lighted fixed transoms. Fixed windows are also found on the buildings southern exposure; these are small and horizontally arranged.

At the northern end of the building is a three by three sashed and frosted window and two sashed two by two windows, one frosted and one not. The depot's east and west sides, which, as with the north and south sides, do not quite match, display sashed two by two windows, excluding those in the tower and above the doors.

The interior of the Burlington Depot features tongue-in-groove wood floors, white plastered walls, and simple woodwork presently painted brown, including a shoulder high chair rail throughout. At the south end of the building are a storage room and an equipment room, to the southeast and southwest, respectively. The northwestern corner of

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the building is an office area, the northeastern corner bathrooms and a heater room. The bulk of the building is an exhibit hall more or less divided into three sections—a southern section approximately twenty—five feet long; a central area including the base of the octagonal tower on the west, set off by the bottom halves of Dutch doors at both ends of its approximately fourteen foot length; and a forty—foot room at the northern end of the exhibit area, leading thence to the office and bathrooms.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Burlington Passenger Depot, constructed by the North Carolina Railroad Company in 1892, is typical of stations built by the railroads during the "Golden Age." Hundreds once lined the tracks, but urban growth has reduced the number to a precious few. Remaining passenger depots stand as testimony to the socio-economic revolution ushered in durin the railroad age. The Victorian Tudor Burlington Depot, with its hipped roof, octagonal tower, and triangular dormers, shares that symbolism; but even more significantly, it star as a local monument to the city's origins as a railroad town.

Criteria Assessment:

- A. Representative of the role played by the railroad in the development of small towns throughout the state; and of the key role of the railroad in Burlington.
- C. Representative of the type of railroad depots built in the state in the late nineteenth century, many of which are now destroyed; the bracketed overhang quoined corne and tower are both typical and distinctive features of turn-of-the-century depots.

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The Burlington Depot, built in the late nineteenth century, stands as a reminder of the railroad's "Golden Age." The "iron horse" brought the promise of progress and prosperity to the areas through which it passed. Alamance County was no exception. Its principal city, Burlington, was born a railroad town and nearly died when the railroad moved its shops and employees out of the area. The almost simultaneous growth spurt of the textile industry, for which the railroad was partially responsible, kept the little town alive and nursed it to maturity. The presence of the Burlington Depot thus symbolis not only the role of the railroad in Alamance County, but also the transition of a railro community into a modern industrial city.

The North Carolina General Assembly chartered the North Carolina Railroad Company in 1849. The proposed route formed a near perfect arc extending from Goldsboro to Charlotte. At the apex of the arc, the tracks were to pass through Alamance County which was about half way between the terminals. Directors of the NCRR decided to place the company's maintenance and repair shops in Alamance County near the present village of Glen Raven. The idea backfired when the owners refused to sell their property to the railroad. A second choice, to build on the outskirts of Graham, also encountered local hostility. Finally, Ben Trollinger, operator of a cotton mill near Haw River, agreed to construction of the shops on his land two miles west of Graham. By 1857, twenty-seven buildings had been constructed and the village became known as Company Shops. 3

The first track of the NCRR had been laid in 1851, but the road did not reach Alamance County until 1855. It was in the spring of that year that the first "iron horse" chugged into Mebanesville (now Mebane). An observer of that historic event described the scene:

The first locomotive, at that time the eighth wonder of the world to the people in the surrounding country, came puffing up to the depot at Mebanesville. The eyes of one hundred people stared in open-eyed wonder at the strange monster; other eyes sparkled in expectation of a three-mile ride to Back Creek bridge. This was indeed a proud and glorious day for old Alamance. 4

The track was completed to Graham on September 18 and to Gibsonville by October 15. On January 29, 1856, the tracks started simultaneously from Goldsboro and Charlotte were joined near Greensboro. The NCRR was completed.

Among the buildings constructed during 1856 and 1857 was a frame passenger depot measuring sixteen by twenty-one feet and located less than fifty feet southeast of the original Main Street site of the present depot. Other structures erected during the two years included the "Boiling Brook," a one story frame lodging house (the first building in Company Shops); a railroad commissary built by Jonathan Worth & Company which was a two-story brick structure; a foundry; a wood shop; a locomotive repair shop; a blacksmith's shop; an engine shed; and two car sheds. Eight small homes were built for shop mechanics and three homes for company officials. A two-story red brick office

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building was erected on a lot about one block southeast of the depot.7 Perhaps the most significant commercial building erected in Company Shops was the Railroad Hotel, a large two-story, brick and wood structure completed by the railroad at a cost of \$30,000.8

Company Shops was a quiet little village whose entire economy depended upon the railroad. Trains stopped at the little depot to take on water and allow passengers a brief dining period at the hotel which was located about one hundred feet northwest. Several commercial stores served the needs of the towns people and passengers. A few years later, however, the depot became the center of feverish activity in the village. The telegraph in the little depot was Company Shops' main link to the world beyond North Carolina. Over the wire in April, 1861, came the portentous news that Southern troops had fired on Fort Sumter. Immediately, Charles F. Fisher, president of the North Carolina Railroad, organized and trained a local regiment at Company Shops. Two months later, they gathered at the depot awaiting the train to Raleigh. Denlistees and conscrited personnel from the surrounding countryside also passed through the depot to join the various regiments. And so it went for the duration until April, 1865, four years later. The telegraph in the depot clicked out another ominous message: General Lee had surrended ed to General Grant—the war was over.

Company Shops suffered no physical devastation from the Civil War and in its aftermath life there, so far as possible, returned to normal. The little town of 300 was incorporated in February, 1866, and later that year five new buildings were construced. The town limits covered one and a half square miles centered around the hotel and the depot. The towns people received a jolt on September 12, 1871, when they learned that the directors of the North Carolina Railroad had leased its buildings and rolling stock to the Richmond and Danville Company. The scare subsided, however, as the operation of the line continued as usual. But in 1886, the directors of the NCRR issued another announcement carrying potential tragedy for the village. The NCRR was pulling its offices, shops, and personnel out of Company Shops and transferring them to Manchester, Virginia. 15

The town of about 1,000 suffered a serious economic blow from the decision, but three cotton mills, a coffin factory, the hotel, and some very determined citizens kept the town alive. 16 In 1887 the residents decided upon a new name for their town—Burlington. However, it was not incorporated as such until 1893.17

The frame depot continued in use, but being removed from the watchful eye of railroad officials and shop personnel, its physical condition deteriorated. In 1892 the NCRR constructed a new 22' x 60' brick passenger depot at the end of the main street just northwest of the older structure. A new freight depot was erected at the same time about 250 feet southeast of the new passenger station. 18 The 1892 passenger depot, though altered and moved from its original location and returned, stands today as the most visible reminder of a community making the transition from a railroad town to a mode city.

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By 1894 financial difficulties had forced the Richmond and Danville Railroad Company into receivership. To avoid bankruptcy, the company was consolidated into the Southern Railway System. ¹⁹ In 1895 Southern Railway accepted a ninety-year lease from the NCRR even though the previous lease to the Richmond and Danville had six years to go The Southern Railroad Company thus acquired operating control and responsibility of main tenance and improvement for buildings, tracks, and property formerly operated by the NCRR. ²⁰

C. M. Ray, a railroad man from 1911 until his retirement in 1962, fondly remember the passenger depot in its heyday:

The depot was a thriving place at one time. Everybody came up to watch the trains come in. It was the only thing in town to look at . . . I've seen the time you couldn't get'em all in. 21

Ray, who worked as the ticket agent at the station from 1913 until passenger service was discontinued in 1962, noted that the early years saw four trains daily stopping at the depot. They pulled out of the station in alternating east-west routes at 7:30 A. M., 11 A. M., 7:30 P. M., and midnight. The prices of tickets in those days are to be envie by modern travelers:

It took three days and three nights to San Francisco . . . cost \$75 and a few cents one way and \$2.50 more for reserved seats on the "Sunset" out of New Orleans. . . 22

As did the Civil War over forty years before, World War I brought a flurry of activity at the train station. It was a different depot and a different war but the sce was much the same: "It was 5 a.m. and the women and children were standing on the plat form waving and crying."23 The scene was to be repeated a generation later in still and ther war.

By 1919 Burlington was suffering growth pains. The city was extending in all directions except northward where the main street was blocked by the passenger depot on the southward side of the tracks and a repair shop on the northward side. 24 Mayor E. B. Horner and city officials believed that opening Main Street north of the railroad would bring more business to the downtown area. The Southern Railroad Company, however, refused to accomodate the city by moving the structures. 25

The stalemate was followed by a series of unusual events that ultimately led to relocation of the passenger depot. In the early morning hours of a day in 1920, the sound of a dynamite blast echoed through the city. A rumor has persisted in the communi that such an "accident" was expected that particular night. Rushing to the site of the explosion, townspeople found the railroad repair shop in ruins. By morning light a path had been cleared through the brick debris and wagons passed through as if a road had

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been designed. There followed a brief confrontation between Mayor Horner and railroad personnel when several freight cars were backed across the tracks to halt the flow of traffic. Horner persuaded the engineers to pull the freight cars out of the way.

No charges were filed in the bombing incident, and in a rather interesting move, the city fathers agreed to pay the Southern Railroad \$2,000 for the brick rubble if the railroad would move the depot out of the path of Main Street. For some reason the city later agreed to pay \$7,000 as its part of the moving cost, and in March, 1921, dropped a condemnation proceeding against the depot. 26 The passenger depot was relocated about 10 feet northwest along the tracks in 1921. It then stood adjacent to the site of the old hotel which had burned in 1904. Sometime after the relocation between 1921 and 1929, the depot's size was nearly doubled by the addition of two wings. 28

The Burlington Passenger Depot served the Southern Railroad until passenger serviwas discontinued in 1962. No other use was found for the building so it was abandoned. In 1970 the Southern Railroad Company announced plans to destroy the structure which prompted a local movement known as Operation Choo Choo.

When the razing notice was posted, a group of Burlington women formed a committee to protest the destruction of the most visible vestige of the city's days as a small railroad town. They approached Allen Jones of the Burlington Redevelopment Commission who headed the urban renewal project that posed equally as dangerous a threat to the structure as the railroad. Fortunately Jones favored preservation of the depot and suggested that the women form a Save the Depot Foundation. An organizational meeting we held and Operation Choo Choo was born. Support came from many of the women's clubs and coverage by local papers brought a groundswell of public interest. Additional meetings with Jones and Southern Railroad officials brought assurances that the depot would not be destroyed. Attempts to raise funds to restore and preserve the old structure proved futile, and after a year the citizen's movement known as Operation Choo Choo came to an end. 30 Its primary mission, however, was a total success; the depot had been save from destruction, but its fate now lay in the hands of Allen Jones and the Redevelopment Commission.

For more than five years no action was taken on the depot. It stood abandoned of the corner of Webb and Main streets. Jones tried to raise funds from non-profit sources to purchase and move the building. When none were forthcoming, the Redevelopment Commission decided to shoulder the burden at a projected cost of \$100,000.31 On March 4, 1977 the Commission, on behalf of the City of Burlington, purchased the depot and several tracts from the North Carolina Railroad and its lessee, the Southern Railroad Company. 32 A year later workmen began preparations for moving the depot once again. The project was completed in May. 33 Therein occurred a most ironic twist in that the place was not a new site at all but the original spot on which the structure had been erected in 1892. 34 Fifty-nine years after the Burlington officials had worked so desperately to move the depot out of Main Street, their modern successors found it equally as expedient to return

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it to the center of Main Street. There the renovated depot will serve as a center piece for a new civic center project which the Redevelopment Commission hopes will revitalize the downtown area.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1. Laws of the State of North Carolina, 1848-49, p. 138. Resolutions or acts of incorporation are listed under <u>Private Laws</u> of the different sessions. Hereinafter all references to charters of incorporation will be cited as <u>Private Laws</u> with appropriate session and page numbers.
- 2. Selection of site discussed in Walter Whitaker, Centennial History of Alamance Coun 1849-1949 (Burlington: Alamance County Historical Association, 1949), 107-109, hereinaf cited as Whitaker, Alamance County. For value of the railroads to surrounding communities grandfather's Letters: Letters written to John Mebane Allen by Relatives and Friends of the Hawfields from 1852 to 1889. Collected and arranged by Elizabeth White Furman (privately printed, 1974), 126-127, hereinafter cited as Grandfather's Letters.
- 3. Whitaker, Alamance County, 110-111.
- 4. Quoted in George Beecher, <u>Science and Change in Alamance County Life</u> (Elon College, 1938), 13.
- 5. Whitaker, Alamance County, 107. See also Hugh Lefler and Albert Ray Newsome, The History of a Southern State: North Carolina (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, third edition, 1973), 365-366.
- 6. See Map of Southern Railway's Property, Burlington, N. C., 1893. Original destroye but copy drawn from blueprint in 1897. State Archives, Raleigh, hereinafter cited as Bu lington Map, 1893. See also Reports of the President of the North Carolina Railroad, Sta Archives, Raleigh, Seventh Annual Report, 1857, hereinafter cited as NCRR Reports with dates.
- 7. NCRR Report, 1857; Burlington Map, 1893; and Whitaker, Alamance County, 109-110.
- 8. The final cost exceeded the original appropriation by \$22,000. See committee's report, Legislative Documents, 1857-1859, No. 71, State Library, Raleigh.
- 9. Whitaker, Alamance County, 110; and Burlington Map, 1893.
- 10. Whitaker, Alamance County, 110; and Burlington Map, 1893.
- 11. Grandfather's Letters, 138.
- 12. Private Laws, 1865-66, ch. 19, p. 91; and NCRR Report, 1866.
- 13. Private Laws, 1865-66, ch. 19, p. 91. See also Burlington Map, 1893.

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- 14. Legislative Documents, 1871-1872, No. 27
- 15. Whitaker, Alamance County, 134.
- 16. See Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Alamance County, North Carolina, Population and Industrial Schedules; and Whitaker, Alamance County, 135.
- 17. Private Laws, 1893, ch. 57, p. 64. For a discussion of various alternative names, see <u>Burlington Times-News</u>, November 27, 1936; John Harden, <u>Alamance County</u>, <u>Economic and Social (Chapel Hill, 1928)</u>, unpaginated; and Whitaker, Alamance County, 135.
- 18. NCRR Report, 1893; and Burlington Map, 1893. The depot was constructed the NCRR even though under lease to the Richmond and Danville. For an explanation, see the president's report cited above.
- 19. Cecil Kenneth Brown, A State Movement in Railroad Development (Chapel Hill: The Un versity of North Carolina Press, 1928), 183, hereinafter cited as Brown, A State Movemen
- 20. See Alamance County Deed Books, Office of the Register of Deeds, Alamance County Courthouse, Graham, Deed Book 17, p. 425, hereinafter cited as Alamance County Deed Book The office building was excepted for continued use by the officials of the NCRR. Southe Railroad renegotiated the lease to insure that the NCRR would not pass out of its hands when the lease with the Richmond and Danville expired in 1901. Brown, A State Movement, 183.
- 21. Ray was the central figure in an article by Jim Lasley entitled "Railroading Gets in Your Blood" which appeared in <u>The State</u> magazine, October 1, 1971. Quotes made by Ray and herein taken from Lasley's article hereinafter cited as Ray interview, <u>The State</u> October 1, 1971.
- 22. Times and prices quoted from Ray and recorded by Lasley. Ray interview, The State, October 1, 1971.
- 23. Ray interview, The State, October 1, 1971.
- 24. <u>Daily News</u> (Greensboro), March 3, 1977, hereinafter cited as Greensboro <u>Daily News</u>; and Burlington Map, 1893.
- 25. Greensboro Daily News, March 3, 1977.
- 26. For account of incidents, see Greensboro Daily News, March 3, 1977. C. M. Ray also mentioned the bombing. Ray interview, The State, October 1, 1971.
- 27. Burlington Map, 1893; and Greensboro <u>Daily News</u>, March 3, 1977. See also Whitaker, Alamance County, 149.

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- 28. Researcher's interview with Mrs. G. Walker Blair, Jr., of Burlington, March 12, 1979. Mrs. Blair was a leader in the movement to save the depot in the early 1970s. Hereinafter cited as Blair interview. See also Sanborn Map of Burlinton, 1929.
- 29. Ray interview, The State, October 1, 1971.
- 30. Information about Operation Choo Choo and the early preservation efforts taken from Blair interview. See fn. 28.
- 31. Researcher's interview with Allen Jones of the City of Burlington Redevelopment Commission, March 12, 1979, hereinafter cited as Jones interview.
- 32. Alamance County Deed Book 424, pp. 326-331.
- 33. Jones interview.
- 34. Blair interview.

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State Historic Preservation Officer

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE DATE

DATE November 1, 1979

ATTEST: KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA



