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University of North Carolina at Asheville

## Colonel Alexander Boyd Andrews: "Hero" of the Western North Carolina Railroad

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**Abstract:**

In 1880, after more than twenty years of political and financial mismanagement by the state of North Carolina, Col. Alexander Boyd Andrews assumed control of the Western North Carolina Railroad. Halted outside of Asheville and under attack by politicians and citizens alike for being costly and unwanted, the railroad nearly met its doom. However, under the leadership of Andrews, the Western North Carolina Railroad found its greatest success, reaching the Tennessee border in less than two years. Suddenly thrown into the national spotlight, the once economically distant region of Western North Carolina was never to be the same. This thesis looks to assess the influence and significance of Col. Andrews in the completion of the Western North Carolina Railroad and aims to examine the long-term political and economic impact of his leadership.

May Gov. Jarvis and Mr. Best and Col. Andrews, and Maj. Wilson say: When the history of North Carolina comes to be written, we would rather it should be said it was during our administration that the Western North Carolina Railroad climbed the mountains, penetrated the Blue Ridge and entered upon the beautiful section of Western Carolina. A monument should be erected to the true men who have worked so earnestly, so constantly, in the face of so many obstacles and so much slander and treachery, to carry on such work.<sup>1</sup>

On October 3, 1880, as the first passenger train in Asheville's history slowly made its way up the winding road from Old Fort, citizens listened with excitement as the distant screeches of the locomotive drew near. The culmination of decades of work, the completion of the Western North Carolina Railroad and the arrival of the first train to Asheville signified a rebirth for the people of the region. However, despite the celebrations that surrounded the small mountain communities in the days following the engine's arrival, much work still remained on the financially mismanaged project. Unaffected by the surrounding jubilation, Col. Alexander Boyd Andrews continued to work on ensuring the completion of the line to Tennessee. While the legacy and impact of the Western North Carolina Railroad is well established both in regional and state history, the story of the man responsible for its completion remains vague. Rocked by scandal, war, and worker shortages in the years preceding Andrews' arrival, the W.N.C.R.R. became a project many viewed as unsalvageable. Despite numerous setbacks and opposition from powerful political figures in the state, Col. Andrews charged ahead with the project, ultimately completing the railroad that many believed could never be built.

From its humble beginnings in 1855, the Western North Carolina Railroad was a controversial project. In his 1976 master's thesis, William Abrams addresses the difficulty of securing funding and support for the railroad project that took more than thirty-five years to

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<sup>1</sup> "The Iron Horse Near Our Suburbs," *The Semi-Weekly Citizen*, October 7, 1880, accessed February 2, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/63416947>.

complete. Whether the problems originated from opposition in Eastern North Carolina or the arrival of the Civil War in 1861, which halted construction “five and one half miles short of Morganton,” the W.N.C.R.R. faced a multitude of issues in its formative years.<sup>2</sup> Similar to the work of Mr. Abrams, John Preston Arthur, a native of Western North Carolina, provides insight into the construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad in his book *Western North Carolina: A History from 1730 to 1913*.<sup>3</sup> In this work, Arthur provides a detailed account on the importance of James W. Wilson as Chief Engineer during the railroad’s most challenging task of bringing the track from Old Fort to Swannanoa, a critical stretch of the railroad that paved the way for Col. Andrews’ future success.

Kenneth Cecil Brown discusses the importance of Western North Carolina in the completion of a state operated railroad trunk line system in his dissertation “A State Movement in Railroad Development: The Story of North Carolina's First Effort to Establish an East and West Trunk Line Railroad.”<sup>4</sup> Among the oldest studies found on the W.N.C.R.R., Brown’s thorough descriptions of the original design remains one of the most detailed investigations on the line’s history. Brown also makes reference to outside entities that played a crucial role in the development of the railroad including Governor Zebulon Vance, an early ally and later adversary to Col. Andrews. Similarly, in 1975, Margaret Morris published an article in the *North Carolina Historical Review* entitled, “The Completion of the Western North Carolina Railroad: Politics of

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<sup>2</sup> William H. Abrams Jr., “The Western North Carolina Railroad, 1855-1894” (M.A. thesis, Western Carolina University, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> John Preston Arthur, *Western North Carolina: A History from 1730 to 1913* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing, 1914).

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Cecil Brown, “A State Movement in Railroad Development: The Story of North Carolina's First Effort to Establish an East and West Trunk Line Railroad” (PhD diss., UNC Chapel Hill, 1927).

Concealment.”<sup>5</sup> In this article, Morris details the political motives behind the construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad and the animosity towards the project from some state politicians. Motivated by their desire to broaden North Carolina’s economic horizons, legislators in Raleigh advocated for the construction of a line capable of opening new trade routes with the agriculturally rich Midwest. While the majority of the impacts of the railroad were felt in the mountains, the completion of the track also provided an opportunity for North Carolina to become a bigger player on the national stage.

In 2001, Gordon McKinney, a professor of history at Berea College, published an article entitled “Zeb Vance and the Construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad” which discusses Governor Zebulon Vance’s political involvement in the construction of the W.N.C.R.R.<sup>6</sup> McKinney suggests that the relationship between Vance and executives of the railroad played a crucial role in the ultimate success of the project. Adding to the complex history of the W.N.C.R.R., in 1995, Cary Franklin Poole published *A History of Railroading in Western North Carolina*.<sup>7</sup> This book provides an overview of the railroad’s construction and long-term impact on the region as a whole. Along with a thorough description on the construction of the railroad from Old Fort to Asheville, Poole provides insight on the extensive work done to improve the railroad following its completion and the lasting legacy of the railroad in Western North Carolina.

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<sup>5</sup> Margaret Morris, “The Completion of the Western North Carolina Railroad: Politics of Concealment,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, Vol. 56 (1975):256-282.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon McKinney, “Zeb Vance and the Construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad,” *Appalachian Journal*, Vol. 29 (2001): 58-67.

<sup>7</sup> Cary Franklin Poole, *A History of Railroading in Western North Carolina* (Johnson City, TN: The Overmountain Press, 1995).

In one of the most recent works discussing the Western North Carolina Railroad, Homer Carson's 2005 thesis "Penal Reform and Construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad 1875-1892" focuses on the excessive use of convict labor in the line's construction.<sup>8</sup> Carson successfully utilizes newspaper articles, penitentiary reports, and letters to Governor Jarvis to highlight the use of convict labor as another form of slavery. The argument that the use of convict labor was a continuation of slave practices also rings true for Dr. Darin Waters, who in 2012, published his dissertation "Life Beneath The Veneer The Black Community in Asheville, North Carolina from 1793 to 1900".<sup>9</sup> In this dissertation, Dr. Waters explains the importance of black labor in the construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad. Following the Civil War, the railroad continued with a vengeance leading to harsh working conditions and the deaths of 461 African American convicts, so says Waters.<sup>10</sup> Dr. Waters also highlights the economic advantages brought forth by the railroad including a population increase of more than eight thousand in the first ten years after the railroad's completion.

Scholarship involving the men responsible for the completion of the railroad, namely Col. Alexander Andrews, was lacking until 2010, when lawyer Stephen Little published his book *Tunnels, Nitro, and Convicts: Building the Railroad That Couldn't Be Built*, a work solely dedicated to the construction of the Swannanoa Grade of the W.N.C.R.R.<sup>11</sup> Mr. Little provides context to the various construction methods utilized on the track, many of which were unique to this engineering marvel. In 2012, Mr. Little published another book entitled *Andrews Geyser*:

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<sup>8</sup> Homer Carson, "Penal Reform and Construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad 1875-1892" (Thesis, UNC Asheville, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Darin Waters, "Life Beneath The Veneer The Black Community in Asheville, North Carolina from 1793 to 1900" (PhD diss., UNC Chapel Hill, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Homer Carson, "Penal Reform and Construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad 1875-1892" (Thesis, UNC Asheville, 2005), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Little, *Tunnels, Nitro, and Convicts: Building the Railroad That Couldn't Be Built* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2010).

*Star of the Mountain Railroad*, one of the only published documents that describes the impact of Col. Andrews on the construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad and the monument left behind in his honor.<sup>12</sup>

While the lack of published material on the life of Col. Andrews is disappointing, the railroading expert remains memorialized at Andrews Geyser in Old Fort, North Carolina, a monument to the success of the Western North Carolina Railroad. Although the focus of this research surrounds Andrews' lasting impact on Western North Carolina, it would be inappropriate not to mention the accomplishments of his predecessors. A closer examination of men like Maj. James W. Wilson, whose convict labor system and ingenuity in the rugged mountains near Old Fort paved the way for Andrews' later achievements, allows for a better understanding of the complicated history surrounding the W.N.C.R.R. Andrews' ability to overcome numerous political and economic obstacles during his tenure as President of the Western North Carolina Railroad has come to define his legacy. Through this extensive research, this thesis aims to truly scrutinize the successes and failures of the railroading hero known as Col. Alexander Boyd Andrews.

Born on July 23, 1841 in Franklin County, North Carolina, Alexander Boyd Andrews enjoyed early childhood surrounded by his seven siblings.<sup>13</sup> In 1852, following the death of his parents, Andrews came under the supervision of his uncle, Philemon B. Hawkins, a railroading mastermind in South Carolina. In 1859, through his relationship with Hawkins, Andrews secured his first job in the railroading industry as a Purchasing Agent for the Blue Ridge Railroad.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Stephen Little, *Andrews Geyser: Star of the Mountain Railroad* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> J.D. Cameron, "Alexander Boyd Andrews," *North Carolina University Magazine* (1894): 391-404.

<sup>14</sup> "Col. A.B. Andrews," *Greensboro Patriot*, May 29, 1884, accessed August 12, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/61991986/>.

Later that same year, the B.R.R. promoted Andrews to the position of General Superintendent. The arrival of the Civil War signified a brief interlude in Andrews' railroading career. On September 22, 1863, while serving in Company E of the First North Carolina Cavalry, Andrews suffered a gunshot wound to the chest, ending his time in Confederate Army.<sup>15</sup> Despite the near fatal encounter, Andrews twice attempted to rejoin his comrades on the front line. His bravery caught the attention of many on the battlefield, including the Adjutant of the regiment, who noted that he served with "No braver or better man" than the "gallant Capt. Andrews."<sup>16</sup> Eager to put the violence of war behind him, Andrews returned home to marry Julia Johnston, with whom he fathered five children.<sup>17</sup>

Following the conclusion of the Civil War, Andrews hastily returned to positions of power in railroad companies across the South. In July 1867, the Raleigh and Gaston R.R., one of the most prominent railway companies in North Carolina, designated Andrews as Superintendent.<sup>18</sup> This new position gave Andrews his first access to railroading in North Carolina. Soon after, Andrews began seeking alliances with other railroad executives, including those in power on the Western North Carolina Railroad. Correspondence between Andrews and Samuel McDowell Tate, then President of the W.N.C.R.R., suggests that business relations between the men and their railroads were well underway. In a July 1867 response to Andrews, Tate assured that once the "slow moving" delays in Salisbury were resolved he would fulfill all

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<sup>15</sup> "Medical Certificate Retiring Invalid Officer," 20 April 1865, Folder 1, A.B. Andrews Papers and Photographs, W.L.Eury Appalachian Collection, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC.

<sup>16</sup> "From the First N.C. Calvary," *Fayetteville Weekly Observer*, October 5, 1863, accessed June 17, 2015, <http://www.newspapers.com/image/63245821/>.

<sup>17</sup> "Col. A.B. Andrews' Last Call," *State Journal*, April 23, 1915, accessed May 19, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/56157055>.

<sup>18</sup> "Col. A.B. Andrews Dies," *The Randolph Bulletin*, April 21, 1915, accessed October 11, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/62543768>.



of Andrews' transaction requests by no later than the fall.<sup>19</sup> While these exchanges between Andrews and Tate may seem trivial, the relationship forged by these men in the W.N.C.R.R.'s formative years were crucial to Andrews' later prominence in the railroad's affairs.

Andrews' steady success and rise to fame in North Carolina quickly caught the attention of the Richmond and Danville Railroad Company of Virginia. In November 1875, looking to capitalize on his potential, the R&D.R.R. Company appointed Andrews Superintendent of the Charlotte to Goldsboro line of their railroad.<sup>20</sup> Through the late 1870's, Andrews continued to gain assets and esteemed positions in many other railroads, including numerous lines in the state operated North Carolina Railroad.<sup>21</sup> Having staked a claim in a majority of North Carolina's railroading interests, Andrews' reputation rapidly grew across the state as his name became synonymous with the industry.

Thanks to his service and dedication to North Carolina, in January 1877, Governor Zebulon Vance awarded Andrews the rank of Colonel.<sup>22</sup> A lifelong Democrat, Andrews fit in well with Vance and the established political arena of the time. Following his 1879 appointment to Vance's "Commander and Chief Staff," Andrews secured commissioner positions within several prominent legislative committees, including the commission created to "Provide a Suitable House for the Governor."<sup>23</sup> Propelled by his prominent status within Vance's inner

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<sup>19</sup> "Letter from Samuel McDowell Tate," 27 July 1867, Box 2, Folder 15, Alexander Boyd Andrews Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>20</sup> "Sketch of Col. Alexander Boyd Andrews," *Charlotte News*, April 18, 1915, accessed April 12, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/61410263>.

<sup>21</sup> "Letter from Andrews as Superintendent of North Carolina Railroad," 21 June 1878, Box 6, Folder 77, Alexander Boyd Andrews Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>22</sup> "State of North Carolina to A.B. Andrews Colonel Promotion," 8 January 1877, Box 6, Folder 77, Alexander Boyd Andrews Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>23</sup> Public Documents of the General Assembly of North Carolina, *Report of the Commissioners to Provide a Suitable House For the Governor*, 1879, Document 19, Page 847-851.

circle, Andrews established political alliances to advance himself even further in the railroading industry.

Long before Andrews' arrival in the western region of the state, the only viable route to the mountains of North Carolina from the east was through the local stagecoach. Driven daily by John Pence from Old Fort to Asheville, the stage took more than three hours to cross into modern day Buncombe County and became notorious for its dangerous and deadly trek.<sup>24</sup> Just one of the many drawbacks of Western North Carolina in this time period, the lack of a suitable transportation system only aided in the creation of an isolated society. Largely ignored by the rest of the state, the remote mountains were of little concern to a government so close to realizing its own state run trunk line dreams. Notwithstanding the near completion of the North Carolina Railroad in 1855, which connected the state North to South, there lacked a true route in the state East to West. Without a direct link to the western United States, North Carolina risked falling behind its neighbors Virginia and South Carolina economically.<sup>25</sup> Despite these mounting economic concerns, eastern politicians continued to be inconsiderate to the plight of the poverty stricken western people. An exception to these government officials were men like Samuel McDowell Tate, who since the early 1850's had aspired to construct a line that penetrated the impassable mountains to the west.<sup>26</sup>

In spite of opposition from some in the eastern region of the state, many politicians in Raleigh realized the necessity of building a railroad in the mountains. In 1855, North Carolina's

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<sup>24</sup> "Items from Western North Carolina," *Semi-Weekly Eagle*, August 9, 1873, accessed February 13, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/61961551>.

<sup>25</sup> "Western North Carolina Railroad," *Greensboro Patriot*, May 29, 1884, accessed August 12, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/61991986>.

<sup>26</sup> James W. Wilson to Samuel McDowell Tate, 18 October 1859, Box 1, Folder 1, Samuel McDowell Tate Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC.

General Assembly officially chartered the Western North Carolina Railroad.<sup>27</sup> Immediately following its approval, the charter of the W.N.C.R.R. company specified that construction should commence immediately in Salisbury with its first objective to reach Morganton by the following year.<sup>28</sup> Although construction began unabated and perpetuated a positive outlook, chaos soon consumed not only the railroad company but the state of North Carolina as a whole.<sup>29</sup>

The arrival of the Civil War brought construction to a halt and summoned Andrews, like so many other North Carolinians, to the field of duty. This violent conflict caused immense destruction to the bodies of both Andrews and the Western North Carolina Railroad and it was only after the conclusion of the war that either were able to heal. Despite reconstruction efforts, North Carolina continued to face internal conflicts that further postponed the railroad's completion. In 1868, the State Constitutional Convention authorized the issuance of bonds in hopes that with public backing the project could be expedited from Morganton to Asheville.<sup>30</sup> In a fateful move in the history of the W.N.C.R.R., North Carolinians George Swepson and Milton Littlefield purchased more than half of the issued bonds, giving two men control of the railroad's affairs.<sup>31</sup> Despite falling under new leadership, construction continued to lag throughout the Reconstruction Era. The railroad in its entirety came under fire following the discovery of the

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<sup>27</sup> Western North Carolina Railroad Company, *Proceedings of the General Meeting of Stockholders of the Western North Carolina Railroad Company, at Salisbury, August 30, 1855: with the Charter and By-Laws of the Company*, (Salisbury, NC: Banner Office, 1855), 1-4.

<sup>28</sup> North Carolina Railroad Company, *Proceedings of the General Meeting of Stockholders of the North Carolina Railroad Company at Greensboro, July 10, 1851*, (Greensboro, 1851).

<sup>29</sup> Western North Carolina Railroad Company, *Annual report of the Western N.C. Railroad Company: Embracing the Reports of the Officers: for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1884*, (Raleigh: Uzzell & Gatling Printers).

<sup>30</sup> *Journal of the Constitutional Convention of the State of North-Carolina, at Its Session 1868*. (Raleigh: Joseph W. Holden Convention Printer, 1868), 64.

<sup>31</sup> John Preston Arthur, *Western North Carolina: A History from 1730 to 1913*, (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton Printing, 1914), 457.

duo's dispersal of fraudulent bonds.<sup>32</sup> As a result of their scheme, the W.N.C.R.R. flirted with bankruptcy and new questions about its validity and purpose began to rise across the state once again.

As Andrews continued to gain prominence in railroading affairs across the Southeast, North Carolina politicians continued to persist in their attempt to recover from the Swepson and Littlefield scandal and the subsequent railroad bankruptcy. 1872 brought forth new demands to end the wasteful project but supportive legislators eventually prevailed.<sup>33</sup> Attempting to ensure the continued construction of the project, the General Assembly agreed to purchase the Western North Carolina Railroad.<sup>34</sup> However, unbeknownst to many in Raleigh, some of the most difficult terrain for the railroad still lay ahead. The town of Catawba Vale, later renamed Old Fort, presented immense challenges to the railroad's engineers.<sup>35</sup> Uncharted territory for the railroading industry, the mountains of McDowell County ascended 1100-feet in less than three miles, forcing Maj. James W. Wilson to envision a radical and innovative design for the newly coined "Mountain Division." Through the creation of a series of loops, tunnels and switchbacks, Wilson proposed a track that slowly climbed up the mountains, rather than tackle the ascent all at once.<sup>36</sup> While Wilson's plan provided a solution to past construction woes, his radical techniques carried deadly risks.

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<sup>32</sup> Arthur, *Western North Carolina*, 457-459.

<sup>33</sup> *Executive and Legislative Documents Laid Before the General Assembly of North-Carolina [1872-1873]* (Raleigh: Stone & Uzzell, State Printers And Binders, 1873), 489.

<sup>34</sup> State of North Carolina, *Public Laws and Resolution of the General Assembly, Sessions of 1870-71, An Act to Repeal An Act Entitled "An Act to Amend the Charter of the Western North Carolina Railroad Company,"* Chap. 246, 402-404.

<sup>35</sup> "Captions of Acts and Resolutions," *Weekly Era*, March 6, 1873, accessed March 18, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/59008514/>.

<sup>36</sup> James W. Wilson, *Western N.C. Railroad - Mountain Division* [map], 1881, "North Carolina Collection," North Carolina Maps, <http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/ncmaps/id/1327/rec/1>.

Despite the ingenuity of Wilson's engineering schematics, he required a substantial labor force to see his vision realized. Therefore, following his 1877 election, Governor Vance issued a plea to the North Carolina legislature requesting that the "entire available force of the penitentiary" be sent to the mountains for the "heart-broken Western people."<sup>37</sup> Vance's vindication and expedition of convict labor helped in securing a larger workforce for Wilson in the railroad's formative years and established a dangerous precedent for the railroad's future. Vance and Wilson's decision to expedite convict labor met its first test in 1879 with an accident involving nitroglycerin in the Swannanoa Tunnel, which resulted in the deaths of twenty-one convict laborers.<sup>38</sup> Despite this setback, the Mountain Division reached its pinnacle in March of 1879 with the completion of the 1800' long tunnel.<sup>39</sup> Following this accomplishment, many across the state anointed Maj. Wilson a hero, including Vance who praised him for his ingenuity, claiming: "No one but Jim Wilson would have thought of or executed such an idea."<sup>40</sup>

Although Wilson attained success on the Mountain Division, a summer of drenching rain, mudslides and financial mismanagement stalled the project's momentum. By 1879, twenty-four years after the project had begun, the first rail lines still failed to reach Asheville and support for the project once again began to wane.<sup>41</sup> These mishaps and constant shortcomings in construction ultimately led to the arrival of railroading expert Alexander Boyd Andrews. Having already won the trust of Sen. Zebulon Vance and Gov. Jordan Jarvis through his service in the

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<sup>37</sup> "Gov. Vance's Message," *Greensboro Patriot*, January 17, 1877, accessed July 12, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/62294692>.

<sup>38</sup> Abrams, "The Western North Carolina Railroad, 1855-1894," 44.

<sup>39</sup> "Notes: North Carolinian," *Wilmington Sun*, March 14, 1879, accessed October 3, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/55327279/>.

<sup>40</sup> "Construction of New Highway Across Blue Ridge Recalls Famous Railway Achievement," *Asheville Citizen Times*, April 2, 1922, accessed September 10, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/76829185>.

<sup>41</sup> Wilfred Buck Yearn, *The Papers of Thomas Jordan Jarvis, Volume 1, 1869-1882*, Volume ed. (Raleigh: State Department of Archives, Raleigh, 1969), xxvii. (Hereafter cited as Yearn, Jarvis Papers).

Civil War and his well-known railroading success, Andrews had the political connections and railroading knowledge to take over the daunting task at hand. The arrival of Andrews did little to combat the anger of national railroad companies, many of which Governor Jarvis dealt with on a regular basis. In a reply to the President of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, Jarvis promised that once the line reached “Asheville by the 1st of Feb’y or March” that the construction of the line to Tennessee would be swift, proclaiming that the grade to the state border was “comparatively easy.”<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately, Jarvis lacked understanding of the complex nature of the construction project. His promise, however, reassured the people of North Carolina that once the railroad reached its completion it would signify “the beginning of closer relations commercially with people across the nation.”<sup>43</sup>

Even with the arrival of Andrews in Western North Carolina, construction continued to lag as a harsh winter delayed the line towards Asheville. Far over budget and long overdue, criticism of Andrews and the railroad company itself only continued to grow. It was through this pessimism towards the project that Andrews chose to work with Governor Jarvis to devise a plan to sell the railroad, a decision that suggested a complete removal of state involvement in the project.<sup>44</sup> This notion gained traction following correspondence between Gov. Jarvis and William J. Best, a New York tycoon who displayed a clear desire to purchase part of the railroad.<sup>45</sup> Enthusiastic over Best’s proposal, Governor Jarvis called a special session of the General Assembly to discuss the potential sale of the railroad. Ultimately approved by legislators on March 20, 1880, there were several conditions Mr. Best had to agree to before considering the

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<sup>42</sup> Yearn, Jarvis Papers, “Thomas J. Jarvis to Elisha David Standiford,” 117-118.

<sup>43</sup> Yearn, Jarvis Papers, “Thomas J. Jarvis to Elisha David Standiford,” 118.

<sup>44</sup> Yearn, Jarvis Papers, “Thomas J. Jarvis to A.B. Andrews,” 257.

<sup>45</sup> Yearn, Jarvis Papers, “Thomas J. Jarvis to W.J. Best,” 134.

transaction complete. Namely, Best had to guarantee the completion of the W.N.C.R.R. to Ducktown, Tennessee by January 1, 1885 or forfeit the railroad.<sup>46</sup>

While confidence existed in the agreement between Best and the General Assembly, as the payment deadline approached, investors left Best stranded with little hope of making the payment in time. Fearing the outcry that would ensue following another public failure in regards to the Western North Carolina Railroad, Governor Jarvis and Sen. Vance authorized Andrews to assist Best in acquiring the necessary funds.<sup>47</sup> Unable to convince the previously committed investors, Andrews and Best ultimately found a new suitor willing to assist in the purchase of the W.N.C.R.R., Andrews' own Richmond and Danville Railroad Company. Agreeing to loan Mr. Best the money needed to purchase the railroad, the R&D.R.R company issued an ultimatum that if Mr. Best failed to repay the loan by a pre-negotiated time, the entirety of the Western North Carolina Railroad became property of the Richmond and Danville.<sup>48</sup>

After gaining control of the railroad, Best assumed the position of President of the Western North Carolina Railroad and appointed Andrews as his Vice President. In spite of his earnest attempts to keep possession of the railroad, Best failed to repay his loan to the Richmond and Danville Railroad, resulting in the Virginia based company's complete acquisition of the line.<sup>49</sup> The quick turnaround and sale of the railroad outraged some within the state, namely Senator Vance, who challenged Andrews' authority, going as far as to say that Andrews' words

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<sup>46</sup> *Journal of the Senate of the General Assembly of the State of North Carolina at Its Special Session, 1880.* (Raleigh: State Printers and Binders, 1880), 366.

<sup>47</sup> Yearn, Jarvis Papers, 254-260.

<sup>48</sup> "Western North Carolina Railroad," *Greensboro Patriot*, May 29, 1884, accessed August 12, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/61991986/>.

<sup>49</sup> "Bitter Conflict between Rival Railroads," *Daily Commercial News*, October 8, 1881, accessed August 17, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/52707118>.

were “unworthy of notice.”<sup>50</sup> After exhaustive probing and review of Andrews in February of 1881, the Richmond and Danville R.R. appointed the Colonel as the line’s new President, a title Andrews officially accepted on April 13, 1881.<sup>51</sup> Having removed nearly all influence of North Carolina politicians from the project, Andrews had acquired a new adversary in Zebulon Vance, a feud that remained detrimental to the railroad’s progress for years to come.

After resolving the issues presented to him following the Richmond and Danville Railroad’s acquisition of the W.N.C.R.R., Andrews turned his attention to meeting the deadlines set by the state. Knowing well of Wilson’s convict labor force and subsequent success in the Mountain Division, Col. Andrews sought to alleviate any doubts about his ability to lead the railroad. Aiming to expand the already sizeable workforce, which by 1880 totaled more than 175 black and mulatto workers, Andrews pursued assistance from Governor Jarvis and the North Carolina legislature in acquiring more convicts.<sup>52</sup> By 1881, under the leadership of Andrews, there were at least 500 convicts working alongside 500 hired laborers on the stretch of rail leaving Asheville.<sup>53</sup> However, despite Andrews’ moves, construction once again fell flat thanks in part to harsh winter weather and widespread disease that decimated the labor force.

Facing immense pressure from citizens and politicians alike, Andrews once again requested support from Raleigh. In a letter to Governor Jarvis, Andrews blamed the slow progress in the western region of the state on Jarvis and Vance’s reluctance to supply proper care and clothing to the convict laborers. Andrews told Jarvis that “many convicts are in the hospital

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<sup>50</sup> “The Railroad War: Col. Andrews On Sen. Vance,” *Weekly State Journal*, September 21 1881, accessed June 1, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/56689015/>.

<sup>51</sup> Years, Jarvis Papers, 390.

<sup>52</sup> Margie Cox and Jewell R. Randolph, *The 1880 Census of McDowell County, North Carolina*, (Nebo, NC: Appalachian Press, 1996).

<sup>53</sup> “Spirits Turpentine,” *Wilmington Morning Star*, April 29 1881, accessed August 11, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/54057754>.



from scurvy” and that it is “unfair to the railroad authorities” and that the “humanity of the prisoners demands different treatment.”<sup>54</sup> Disgusted by the actions of politicians in Raleigh, Andrews became the first Western North Carolina Railroad executive to serve as an advocate for the betterment of convict laborers.

Unfortunately, Andrews’ plea accomplished little for the convicts or for the construction of the railroad as Vance, now a member of the Railroad Commission, utilized this “failure” by Andrews to formulate a plan to overthrow his one-time ally. As a prominent member of the three seat Railroad Commission, Vance held great power over the railroading industry in North Carolina. Still bitter over the actions of Andrews and the Richmond and Danville Railroad, Vance initiated a move to return W.J. Best to the project. After initialing agreeing to Andrews’ requests for more labor, Vance wrote to Jarvis detailing his need to “withdraw consent to the extension of time asked for by A.B. Andrews,” citing that “circumstances coming to his knowledge” since their first meeting compelled him to do so.<sup>55</sup> Vance then made a point to let his personal opinions about Andrews be known statewide in several newspapers. Often attacking the Colonel for not completing the railroad with “diligence and energy” and for Andrews’ ways of “discriminating against towns and cities,” Vance openly challenged the public image of Andrews as a railroading hero.<sup>56</sup>

Eventually, through politicking with Jarvis and other railroad commissioners, Andrews bypassed Vance’s unwillingness to grant an extension of completion deadlines. With the railroad finished to Asheville, Andrews now turned his attention to the two “branches of the

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<sup>54</sup> Yearn, Jarvis Papers, “A.B. Andrews to Thomas J. Jarvis,” 399-400.

<sup>55</sup> Yearn, Jarvis Papers, “Z.B. Vance to Thomas J. Jarvis,” 394-395.

<sup>56</sup> “Four Complaints of the Commissioners,” *News and Observer*, August 28 1881, accessed May 12, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/76658609/>.

W.N.C.R.R.” Designed to split into a northern and southern branch following the completion of the line to Asheville, Andrews now turned his attention to the final stretch of the railroad’s design. Intended to connect with a separate railroad in Tennessee, the Paint Rock line, or “northern branch,” became the main priority of Andrews. Concurrently, Andrews envisioned a completed Murphy line, or southern branch, which planned to traverse through the southern mountains to Franklin.<sup>57</sup> Projected to give access to the western frontier, these branches of the Western North Carolina Railroad completed the original vision of the railroad’s design.

While Andrews’ on-time completion of the Paint Rock line in January 1882 resulted in high praise from many across the state, the Ducktown line provided another frustrating construction task for the railroad executive.<sup>58</sup> Similar to the challenges that Old Fort and Swannanoa provided for James Wilson, obstructing the railroad’s path to the Tennessee border were twenty miles of daunting mountainous terrain, including another monumental obstacle in the Pigeon River. Though work continued in line with the prearranged timetable, Zebulon Vance kept a very watchful eye on both Andrews and his construction techniques, which Vance believed to be shoddy and fraudulent.<sup>59</sup> In spite of the growing political opposition, Andrews reached Canton in January of 1882, and continued to march his railroad westward without delay, reaching Clyde in August of the same year and finally Waynesville in April of 1883.<sup>60</sup>

It was during these crucial developments in the far western region of the state that Andrews, just two years into his presidency, oversaw one of the deadliest incidents in the entire

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<sup>57</sup> Western North Carolina Railroad Company, *Annual Proceedings of the Western North Carolina Railroad Company*, (Statesville: Eugene B. Drake and Sons, 1868), 2.

<sup>58</sup> “The Road About Completed to Paint Rock,” *Goldsboro Messenger*, January 30, 1882, accessed November 01, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/63375594>.

<sup>59</sup> Yearns, Jarvis Papers, “Z.B. Vance to Thomas J. Jarvis,” 394-395.

<sup>60</sup> Abrams, “The Western North Carolina Railroad, 1855-1894,” 61.

construction of the railroad. Commonly transferred from their stockades to the workplace by ferry, convicts had become adjusted to the dangerous journey required of them, but colder weather meant an unusual amount of ice in the Tuckasegee river making travel more hazardous than usual.<sup>61</sup> These dangerous conditions came to a head on December 30, 1883 when railroad executives rounded thirty convicts onto a ferryboat to cross the icy Tuckasegee. According to reports, the convicts soon became alarmed at the sight of ice and water on board the ship and their panicked actions caused the vessel to capsize. Resulting in the deaths of eighteen convicts, the Cowee Tunnel disaster prompted little reaction from state politicians and local officials. Instead of pointing out safety deficiencies, local newspapers laid blame on the convicts and each man's solitary instinct to look "after his own personal safety."<sup>62</sup> Despite being bound together, the convicts received no assistance from watchmen on duty, essentially sentencing them to death. The lack of a response by Andrews, a man who at one time fought for better treatment of convict laborers, remains disheartening but should not come as a surprise, as it was common of railroad executives to view the deaths of convict laborers as nothing more than a temporary setback.

While Andrews was not the only railroad executive to utilize convict labor for his own advantage, his diverse actions, both for and against the benefit of the convicts, leaves many unanswered questions. During Andrews' time as President of the Western North Carolina Railroad, convicts often endured bouts of disease and starvation and lived off meager meals consisting of "bacon and beef, cornbread, peas, Irish potatoes and onions."<sup>63</sup> Due to the living

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<sup>61</sup> "Flat Boat Sinks with Them in the Tuckasegee River," *Goldsboro Messenger*, January 8, 1883, accessed July 17, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/61979645>.

<sup>62</sup> "An Awful Accident: Eighteen Convicts Dead at Once," *News and Observer*, January 3, 1883, accessed June 1, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/76617497>.

<sup>63</sup> *Public Documents of the General Assembly of North Carolina Session 1879* (Raleigh: State Printers and Binders, 1879), 924.

conditions in the convict stockades, misbehavior became a common issue for watchmen across the span of the railroad. While most convicts faced added sentence time or an increased labor for misbehavior, some prisoners faced death for their disobedience. One such case came with convict laborer George Caldwell, who after successfully escaping the stockades, was “fired upon and killed.”<sup>64</sup> The association of the railroad with the state penitentiary created an environment where workers were viewed as an expendable tool and easily replaceable. In many ways, the convict labor system implemented by the state of North Carolina on the Western North Carolina Railroad and across the south on various other infrastructure projects was a continuation of their past racial oppression, truly slavery by another name.

Notwithstanding the labor tragedy occurring in far Western North Carolina, the citizens of the Old North State had fallen in love with Col. Andrews. Early in 1884, as part of a pre-negotiated agreement with the State treasury,<sup>65</sup> Andrews paid off \$600,000 of the W.N.C.R.R.’s debt to the state, in turn allowing state legislators to exempt all North Carolinians from paying a state tax.<sup>66</sup> In a Waynesville celebration of both Andrews’ payment and the arrival of the first train to the town, Raleigh’s *News and Observer* reported that “no people in North Carolina love the name of and appreciate the good work of Col. Andrews had done for them, more than the people of Haywood County.”<sup>67</sup> Rather than join Gov. Jarvis in grandstanding at the celebration, Andrews, labeled as being a “no talking man,” instead preferred that “his work speak for him.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> *The Farmer and Mechanic*, June 4, 1884, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/57860370>.

<sup>65</sup> “State Affairs,” *The Roanoke News*, May 08, 1884, accessed July 15, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/67747400>.

<sup>66</sup> “For Treasurer, or Secretary of State,” *The Farmer and Mechanic*, April 23, 1884, accessed July 15, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/57860346>.

<sup>67</sup> “Gov. Jarvis and Col. Andrews,” *News and Observer*, April 6, 1884, accessed June 4, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/75656170>.

<sup>68</sup> “The Completion of the W.N.C.R.R. to Waynesville,” *Greensboro Patriot*, April 17, 1884, accessed August 13, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/61991909>.

In the three short years following his appointment as President of the W.N.C.R.R., Andrews had not only made a name for himself, but also dramatically shifted public perception of the once detested project.

Through communications between Andrews and his fellow railroad associates, it became apparent completion of the railroad could only be realized through the continued use of convict labor. In a letter from James Wilson to Andrews in October 1884, the Chief Engineer detailed the financial advantages of utilizing convict labor to complete the line from the Tuckasegee River to the state border. At the bottom of the letter, Col. Andrews himself noted the workforce of the “100 men” he believed would be needed to grade the final trek of the road from “Allmans to Franklin.”<sup>69</sup> Heavily discussed in the railroad’s final push for completion, Andrews and Wilson often examined the implications of increased convict labor. In another October letter between the two friends, the railroad President contemplated his best move in finishing the final 32 miles of track to Murphy. Aspiring to complete the project in less than two years, Andrews believed that it would cost less than \$37,500 dollars to hire 150 convict laborers. This notion meant that Andrews willingly spent less than \$250 per convict for two years of food, shelter and general care.<sup>70</sup>

During their time spent working together on the W.N.C.R.R. Andrews and James Wilson cultivated a long-lasting friendship, which can be witnessed through their private letters. In a letter to Andrews, Wilson confided to the Colonel that he had “been sick for some time” but that

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<sup>69</sup> James W. Wilson to A.B. Andrews, 18 October 1884, Box 6, Folder 78, Alexander Boyd Andrews Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>70</sup> James W. Wilson to A.B. Andrews, October 1884, Box 6, Folder 78, Alexander Boyd Andrews Papers.

he had not let that delay the progress of the railroad.<sup>71</sup> Though not much is known about the friendship between Wilson and Andrews outside of the railroad, it is known that in 1885 the two men partnered together to build a hotel and eating house in the town of Old Fort.<sup>72</sup> Built for around \$8,000, the establishment later known as Round Knob, was a huge success and featured a fountain monument that became synonymous with the railroad itself.<sup>73</sup> In the history of the railroad and its construction, there may be no more important partnership than the one between Col. Alexander Andrews and Major. James Wilson.

In early 1886, Andrews briefly retired from his work on the Western North Carolina Railroad as his appointment, by President Grover Cleveland, to the Northern Pacific Railroad Committee drew his attention away from the project. However, following his journey out west, Andrews returned to Asheville claiming that he “much preferred North Carolina.”<sup>74</sup> Andrews’ reappointment as President in December of 1886 also signaled the return of his close friend and associate, Maj. Wilson, now donning the title of General Superintendent.<sup>75</sup> Despite minor issues along the way, Andrews successfully completed the construction of the railroad in January 1891, with the first train reaching Murphy on his 50th birthday, July 23 1891.<sup>76</sup> A common theme in the months following the railroad’s completion, newspapers and citizens across the state of North Carolina heralded Andrews as a hero, including *The Greensboro North State* which proclaimed

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<sup>71</sup> James W. Wilson to A.B. Andrews, 10 November, Box 6, Folder 80, Alexander Boyd Andrews Papers, University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, NC.

<sup>72</sup> “All Charges Denied,” *Press Visitor*, September 1, 1897, accessed June 7, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/58963199>.

<sup>73</sup> “Why The Wilsons Were Removed,” *The North Carolinian*, January 19, 1899, accessed June 7, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/58963199>.

<sup>74</sup> “Across the Continent,” *Daily Charlotte Observer*, May 27, 1886.

<sup>75</sup> “Breif’s Adrift,” *Danbury Reporter*, December 16, 1886, accessed July 11, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/63495264>.

<sup>76</sup> “North Carolina United,” *Asheville Democrat*, August 13, 1891, accessed July 12, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/62275973>.

that, “On his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday was completed the colossal task which he undertook of constructing a railroad from Old Fort across the Blue Ridge to Asheville, and thence to Waynesville and over the Balsam mountains and on to the Cherokee county along the banks of the Tuckasegee, the Little Tennessee and the beautiful Nantahala. North Carolina had a son who was capable and able to do all of this. Col. A.B Andrews undertook the task.”<sup>77</sup>

By 1891, Andrews successfully linked the state of North Carolina by rail, from Currituck to Murphy, for the first time in its history, truly creating a railroad meant to cross both mountain and sea.<sup>78</sup> However, the early 1890’s brought a new twist to the railroading industry in North Carolina as a new conglomerate of railroads, known as the Southern Railway Company, began its mission to merge and conquer smaller railroads across the south. In 1894, the Southern Railway company purchased the Richmond and Danville Railroad and all its assets, including the Western North Carolina Railroad.<sup>79</sup> Under the control of the more nationally motivated Southern Railway Company, the former W.N.C.R.R. became an avenue of trade and commerce not only for North Carolina, but for the entire southeast corridor.

In 1895, following the acquisition of the Western North Carolina Railroad by the Southern Railway Company, Andrews secured a position as the company’s first Vice-President.<sup>80</sup> In his new role, Andrews utilized his knowledge of Western North Carolina to promote both the Southern Railway and the regional economy through the publication of several pamphlets and brochures. Many of his publications followed the basic outline of his 1882

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<sup>77</sup> “Col. Andrews- the W.N.C.R.R.,” *Greensboro North State*, July 30, 1891, accessed July 27, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/63252136>.

<sup>78</sup> “North Carolina United,” *Asheville Democrat*, August 13, 1891, accessed July 12, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/62275973>.

<sup>79</sup> Abrams, “The Western North Carolina Railroad, 1855-1894,” 65.

<sup>80</sup> “Andrews Made First Vice-President,” *News and Observer*, September 21, 1895, accessed October 12, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/54000236>.

publication, “Illustrated Guidebook of the Western North Carolina Railroad Company,” which focused on selling the western region as a relaxation destination, one free of the hot air of Raleigh.<sup>81</sup> Prioritizing his role as an advocate for tourism and trade in the far western region of North Carolina, Andrews capitalized on his past success to reach new heights during his tenure at the Southern Railway Company.

In a prominent position in both state and regional affairs, Andrews became a symbol of the power, both economically and politically, that the railroad held over the state of North Carolina. However, not all citizens of the Old North State viewed Andrews and the railroad so positively. Caught up in a public fight between Republican Governor Daniel Russell and the historically Democratic Railroad Commission, Andrews faced extreme criticism for his support and friendship with Maj. Wilson.<sup>82</sup> Stemming from Maj. Wilson’s failure to grant the governor’s requests of raising taxes on the railroad, while also reducing rates, Russell accused Maj. Wilson and Col. Andrews of creating a monopoly within the railroad itself. Centering his allegations around Old Fort’s Round Knob Hotel, Russell argued that the hotel and eating house, built by Andrews and Wilson, hindered Wilson’s ability to make unbiased judgments on the Railroad Commission.<sup>83</sup>

In a sign of the political turmoil in North Carolina in the late 1890s, the feud between Governor Russell and the railroad powerhouses, Andrews and Wilson, made its way into the public spectrum with both sides of the aisle taking their stands in state newspapers and other

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<sup>81</sup> Western North Carolina Railroad Company, *Illustrated Guidebook of the Western North Carolina Railroad Company*,” (Salisbury: Passenger Dept, 1882).

<sup>82</sup> “Suits Against Col. Andrews,” *Semi-Weekly Messenger*, February 1, 1898, accessed June 7, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/53657307>.

<sup>83</sup> “All Charges Denied,” *Press Visitor*, September 1, 1897, accessed June 7, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/58963199>.



public forums. More Republican and Fusionist leaning papers favored a negative view of Andrews, similar to the earlier views of Zebulon Vance. Focusing on Andrews' control over state politicians, an August 2, 1895 *News and Observer* political cartoon entitled "Col. Andrews' Steam Calliope" depicted an image of a strong and manipulative Andrews playing the state's trustees like a musical instrument, representative of both his and the railroad's power over state politicians.<sup>84</sup> In more Democratic leaning papers, rumors of Russell's larger plans to invest himself in the railroad became a prominent theme. Andrews and other leading railroad associates accused Governor Russell of having tried to sell a portion of the North Carolina Railroad in 1897 for around \$2,000,000 but when he failed to come to terms with Andrews, Russell began to formulate a plan of revenge.<sup>85</sup> As the debate spilled into the public forum, opinions on Andrews and the railroad differed across the state, but the power and influence of the Colonel on North Carolina politics in this era was undeniable.

Despite the debates that engrossed the state, Governor Russell and the state Supreme Court moved ahead with their plan of removing Wilson from the Railroad Commission, with hopes of conquering Andrews at a later date. Maj. Wilson contested the decision, ultimately claiming that Russell's ability to remove someone from the Railroad Commission was unconstitutional. However, with support in the legislature, the Supreme Court upheld the decision.<sup>86</sup> Accused of working with Wilson both on the Round Knob Hotel and the Railroad Commission for the betterment of the Southern Railway, Andrews became the secondary target

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<sup>84</sup> "History of 99 Year Lease," *News and Observer*, January 31, 1897, accessed September 13, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/78506750>.

<sup>85</sup> "Russell-ism," *King's Weekly*, January 21, 1898, accessed June 2, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/63273739>.

<sup>86</sup> "Wilson v. North Carolina 169 U.S. 586," 1898, JUSTIA, accessed September 29, 2015, <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/169/586/>.

of Russell's attacks. While never removed from office, Andrews faced severe consequences for Russell's accusations, including being levied with eight civil action lawsuits totaling more than \$40,000. Despite initial protests by Andrews, the Colonel ultimately refused to testify in court against Russell's accusations, forcing the court upheld the charges.<sup>87</sup>

Russell's removal of Wilson and charges against Andrews ultimately backfired in the next election as the Democrats regained control of the legislature. Following the monumental political victory, Democratic legislators quickly moved to vindicate Andrews and Wilson.<sup>88</sup> The entire feud between the Railroad Commission and Governor Russell was part of larger political developments that challenged the foundation of North Carolina politics at the time. Russell's assault on the railroad was in itself an attack on the the Democratic establishment of North Carolina's "glory days."<sup>89</sup> Russell had general disdain for the railroad and the people behind it, so while these attacks on Andrews and Wilson may seem personal, they were just a smaller portion of a larger attack on the ideals of the Democratic party and the way the establishment constantly supported the "radical actions" of the Railroad Commission.

Following the political events that transpired in the 1890's, Andrews continued his work as the Vice-President of the Southern Railway company, a lucrative position he retained until his death on April 17, 1915. For years after his passing, Andrews remained the prominent figure most closely associated with railroading affairs in the state. As citizens began to realize the importance of his undertakings, many moved to see his accomplishments memorialized. This movement to honor Andrews, however, was not new to the state. In 1884 the *Greensboro Patriot*

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<sup>87</sup> "Col. Andrews Sued," *Raleigh Times*, January 29, 1898, accessed February 11, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/60031718>.

<sup>88</sup> "The Wilsons Reinstated," *Farmer and Mechanic*, March 7, 1899.

<sup>89</sup> Jeffrey J. Crow and Robert F. Durden, *Maverick Republican in the Old North State: A Political Biography of Daniel L. Russell* (LSU Press, 1999), 105.

asserted that men like Andrews, “Are the true heroes of the state, the men who have turned their energies to the development of the matchless resources of North Carolina; who build up the long neglected sections; who make it possible to build up cities like Asheville, the Queen of the Alleghenies. To men such as he is let due honor”.<sup>90</sup>

In 1903, the Round Knob Hotel that Andrews helped Maj. Wilson construct burnt to the ground, but the fountain just outside of Mill Creek continued to run, until some years later when the “geyser” of Old Fort fell into disrepair.<sup>91</sup> Seeing the disorder of Andrews’ once great work, Southern Railway Commissioner George F. Baker, a longtime friend of the Colonel, vowed to have the area cleaned in order to construct a new monument in honor to his colleague.<sup>92</sup> In conjunction with the Southern Railway Company, Baker successfully completed “Andrews Geyser,” a monument that remains a key tourist attraction to the town of Old Fort. The small Cherokee County town of Andrews, NC also bares the name of Colonel Andrews and prides itself on its railroad history.<sup>93</sup> The plot of land in the far western region of the state, originally purchased by Andrews for the railroad, went unnoticed in the initial years following the W.N.C.R.R.’s completion, nonetheless, with the introduction of new business the region quickly developed into a thriving community, one proud of its namesake’s accomplishments.

Despite Andrews’ numerous successes across the South, no project had such long term implications on a people or economy than the Western North Carolina Railroad. In just ten years following the completion of the track, Asheville witnessed its population increase by more than

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<sup>90</sup> “Western North Carolina Railroad,” *Greensboro Patriot*, May 29, 1884, accessed August 12, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/61991986/>.

<sup>91</sup> “Round Knob Hotel Destroyed by Fire,” *Asheville Citizen Times*, September 12, 1903, accessed April 27, 2015, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/73337150>.

<sup>92</sup> Stephen Little, *Andrews Geyser: Star of the Mountain Railroad* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2010), 16-18.

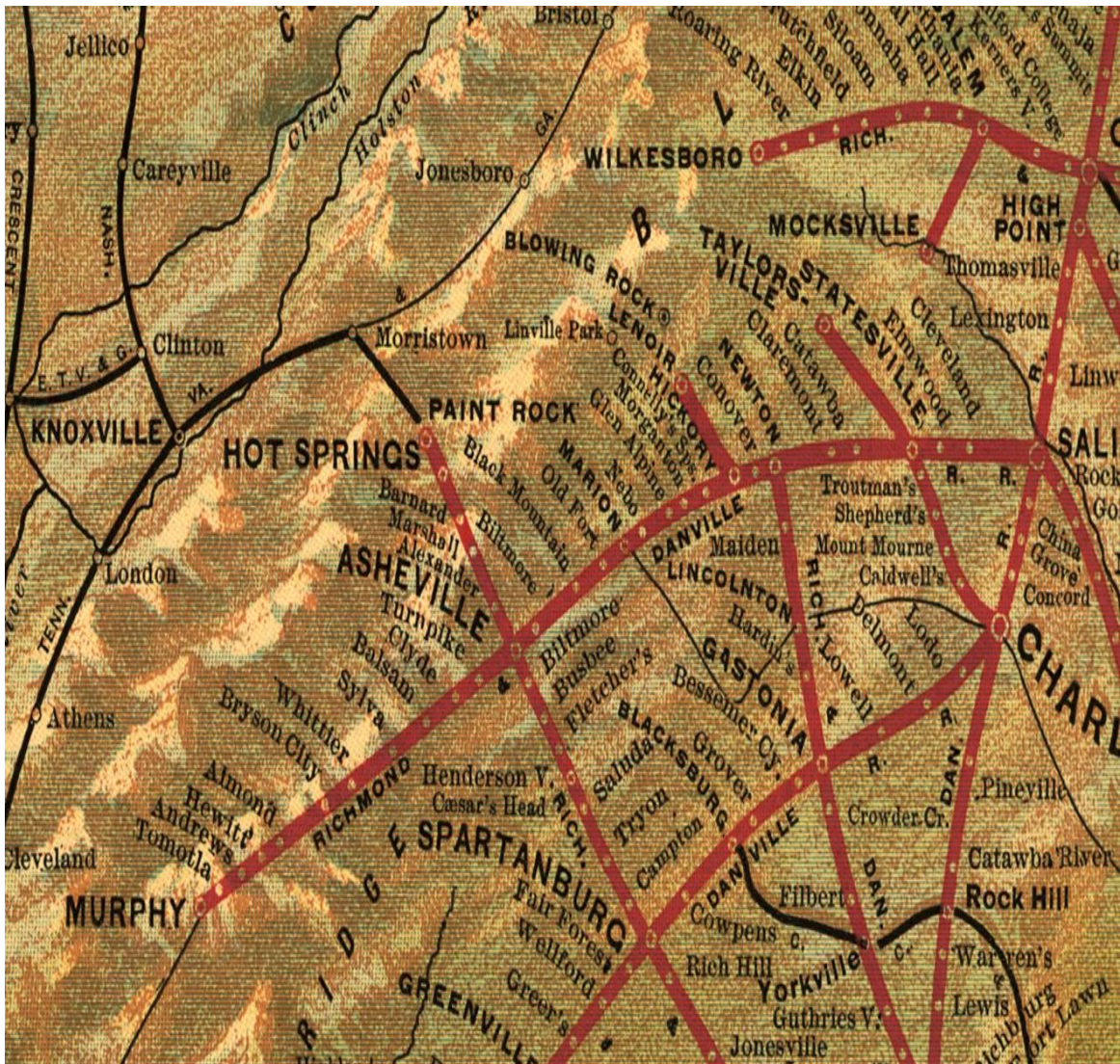
<sup>93</sup> “Town of Andrews,” <http://www.andrewsnc.com/about.php>.

eight thousand.<sup>94</sup> Hotels, dining houses and textile mills began to thrive in the once barren countryside. Defined by his time as a leader on the Western North Carolina Railroad, Col. Alexander Boyd Andrews is a figure that deserves both praise and criticism. Andrews' mixed history with convict labor combined with his continual will to fight against unfair actions by politicians in Raleigh, demonstrates the complex nature of this railroading hero. As this thesis has demonstrated, while imperfect in his actions, Andrews' resiliency in completing the Western North Carolina Railroad cemented his legacy as one of the most influential men in the history of Western North Carolina.

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<sup>94</sup> Darin Waters, "Life Beneath the Veneer: The Black Community in Asheville, North Carolina from 1793 to 1900" (PhD diss., UNC Chapel Hill, 2012), 53.

## Appendix



**Item A.** Map depicting the two branches of the W.N.C.R.R.<sup>95</sup> (Referenced on Page 17)

<sup>95</sup> Richmond and Danville Railroad Company, *Birds-eye-view of the Richmond & Danville Railroad* [map], 1893,” Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/98688789/>.



**Item B.** Political Cartoon Referenced on Page 24.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>96</sup> *News and Observer*, August 2, 1895.

## Bibliography

### Primary

A.B. Andrews Papers and Photographs. E.W. Eury Appalachian Collection. Appalachian State University Belk Library, Boone.

This collection held by Appalachian State University holds a small amount of crucial information on Alexander Andrews. Along with documents relating to his time in the Confederate Army, this manuscript collection contains several pieces of family lineage and personal photographs.

Alexander Boyd Andrews Papers. Southern Historical Collection. University of North Carolina Louis Round Wilson Library, Chapel Hill.

The Southern Historical Collection in Chapel Hill is in possession of 6.0 linear feet, approximately 2,500 items, regarding Alexander Andrews' professional life. Some of the more critical material found in this collection are correspondences regarding his time as a Western North Carolina Railroad executive. Scattered throughout the collection are personal letters and family items, including some important documentation on his work in the military and his political alliances.

Cameron, J.D. "Alexander Boyd Andrews." *North Carolina University Magazine* (1893): 391-404.

As a prominent representative for the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Alexander Boyd Andrews received recognition for his work on several occasions. This short publication by J.D. Cameron provides glimpses into the life of Andrews from the Colonel himself. While the majority of the piece surrounds Andrews' work on numerous railroad lines across the South, Cameron also specifics family ties and friendships throughout Andrews' life.

Cox, Margie H., and Jewell R. Randolph. *The 1880 Federal Census of McDowell County, North Carolina*. Nebo, NC: Appalachian Press, 1996.

Aiming to provide clearer interpretation to the 1880 Federal Census of McDowell County, Margie Cox and Jewell Randolph provide a clear interpretation of the convict labor force that resided within Western North Carolina during the railroad's formative years.



“Newspapers.com-Historical Newspapers from 1700s-2000s.” <http://www.newspapers.com>.

*Asheville Citizen Times*. 1891-1922.  
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*Daily Charlotte Observer*. 1886.  
*Daily Commercial News*. 1881  
*Fayetteville Weekly Observer*. 1863.  
*Greensboro North State*. 1891.  
*Goldsboro Messenger*. 1882-1883.  
*News and Observer*. 1881-1895.  
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*The Press Visitor*. 1897.  
*The Weekly Era*. 1873.  
*Weekly State Journal*. 1881.  
*Wilmington Morning Star*. 1881.  
*Wilmington Sun*. 1879.

Dedicated to providing access to thousands of online newspaper articles and publications, Newspapers.com is a website of great importance to most historical research. Providing insight into the political climate of North Carolina during the life of Col. Andrews, newspapers highlight the divisive nature of the railroad. Along with providing helpful clues and timeline information on further research, this online resource has proved invaluable to the investigation of Andrews and the Western North Carolina Railroad.

North Carolina General Assembly. Public Laws of North Carolina. Session of 1870-71. *An Act to Amend the Charter of the Western North Carolina Railroad Company*. Chapter 246.  
 Raleigh: W. W. Holden, Printer to the State, 1871.

State document outlining General Assembly decisions and arguments surrounding the Western North Carolina Railroad. This document entails much of the discussion following the Milton and Littlefield scandal of the late 1860s.



North Carolina General Assembly. Public Documents of the General Assembly. *Report of Commissioners to Provide a Suitable House for the Governor*. Document 19. Raleigh: The Observer, 1879.

Document detailing the first close relationship forged between Andrews and Governor Vance. A member of the “Suitable House” commission, Andrews held considerable influence over state affairs position during Vance’s administration.

North Carolina Railroad Company. *Proceedings of the General Meeting of Stockholders of the North Carolina Rail Road Company at Greensboro, July 10, 1851: with the By-Laws of the Company*. Greensboro, 1851.

Part of North Carolina’s original state operated railroad project, the North Carolina Railroad Company paved the way for a potential western rail line. Descriptions of continuing a line into the mountains is first mentioned in this documents, albeit briefly.

Passenger Department of the Western North Carolina Railroad Company. “Illustrated Guide Book of the Western North Carolina Railroad Company Now Completed From Salisbury to Paint Rock.” Philadelphia, PA: Allen, Lane & Scott, 1882.

Published and issued by the Passenger Department of the Western North Carolina Railroad under the guidance of President Alexander Andrews in 1882, this illustrated guidebook was designed to attract tourists to Asheville and Western North Carolina.

Samuel McDowell Tate Papers. Southern Historical Collection. The University of North Carolina Louis Round Library, Chapel Hill.

This collection, dedicated to the life of Samuel McDowell Tate, features nearly 3.5 linear feet of documentation on his life as a Confederate colonel and President of the Western North Carolina Railroad. Tate was the first President of the railroad following the Civil War and dealt with the process of reconstruction and the massive corruption brought with it.

Western North Carolina Railroad Company. *Proceedings of the General Meeting of Stockholders of the Western North Carolina RailRoad Company, at Salisbury, August 30, 1855: with the Charter and By-Laws of the Company*. Salisbury, NC: Banner Office, 1855.

As the founding charter of the Western North Carolina Railroad this document outlines the original plans and designs for the completion of North Carolina’s first mountain rail line. Although this document would see multiple revisions in its lifetime, its place in the history of the railroad is of utmost importance.

Western North Carolina Railroad Company, "Annual proceedings of the Western North Carolina Railroad Company." Statesville: Eugene B. Drake and Sons, printers, 1884.

This document contains reports by both Alexander Andrews as acting President and James Wilson as Chief Engineer of the Western North Carolina Railroad. A part of an annual update given by the Western North Carolina Railroad Company to the stockholders of its construction, this document highlights both the successes and failures of the early Andrews' administration.

Wilson, James W. *Western N.C. Railroad - Mountain Division*. Map. New York: Moss Engraving Co., 1991. From UNC Chapel Hill North Carolina Collection, *North Carolina Maps*. <http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/ncmaps/id/1327/rec/1>.

The famed Mountain Division of the Western North Carolina Railroad set the path for Andrews' eventual success in the far western region of the state. This map illustrates Wilson's original design for the complicated mountainous region of Old Fort.

Yearns, Wilfred Buck. *The Papers of Thomas Jordan Jarvis, Volume 1, 1869-1882. Volume ed.* Raleigh: State Department of Archives, Raleigh, 1969.

Containing dozens of letters between Andrews, Jarvis, Vance, and Wilson, this collection of documents surrounding Thomas Jarvis' tenure as Governor of North Carolina highlights several important events in the history of the Western North Carolina Railroad.

## **Secondary**

Abrams, William Hutson, Jr. "The Western North Carolina Railroad 1855-1894." Master's Thesis., Western Carolina University, 1976.

William Abrams, a graduate of Western Carolina University, focuses his master's thesis on the difficulty of completing the WNCRR, a project that took more than thirty years to complete. Along with a detailed section on the deadly conditions that laborers dealt with on a daily basis, this source highlights the important roles prominent figures, such as Zebulon Vance, played in the railroad's construction.

Arthur, John Preston. *Western North Carolina: A History from 1730 to 1913*. Asheville: The Edward Buncombe Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1914.

A native of Western North Carolina, John Preston Arthur's work provides insight into the inner workings of the region and the people who live in its borders. Along with an entire chapter dedicated to the construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad, Arthur gives detailed

accounts on the importance of James W. Wilson as Chief Engineer during the railroad's most challenging task of bringing the track up Old Fort Mountain and through Swannanoa. Aside from the details on James Wilson, this source also highlights other important information including the economy of the region before and after the railroad, the selling of the railroad, and the legacy it left behind.

Brown, Cecil Kenneth. *A State Movement in Railroad Development: The Story of North Carolina's First Effort to Establish an East and West Trunk Line Railroad*. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1928.

Dr. Cecil Brown, graduate of Davidson College and UNC Chapel Hill, was well versed in the history of North Carolina infrastructure projects, including the construction of the State Highway System and the Western North Carolina Railroad. Along with insightful information as to the planning of the W.N.C.R.R., Brown also gives specific information on each of the players involved in the railroad's construction, including Governor Vance, the Richmond and Danville Railroad Company, James Wilson and Alexander Andrews.

Carson, Homer. "Penal Reform and Construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad 1875-1892." University of North Carolina Asheville, 2003.

Homer Carson, a 2003 graduate of UNC Asheville, focused the majority of his senior research on the excessive use of convict labor on the Western North Carolina Railroad. Along with official penitentiary reports and executive railroading documents, Carson successfully utilizes newspaper articles and letters to Governor Jarvis to highlight the use of convict labor as another form of slavery.

Crow, Jeffrey J., and Robert F. Durden. *Maverick Republican in the Old North State: A Political Biography of Daniel L. Russell (Southern Biography Series)*. LSU Press, 1999.

Detailing the actions of Governor Daniel Russell, who in his time presented a challenge to all common political themes of North Carolina, these authors highlight the ability of the Governor to challenge both the Democratic establishment and the railroading industry, two entities that were at times intertwined in their pursuits.

Little, Stephen R. *Andrews Geyser: Star of the Mountain Railroad*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2012.

Steve Little, a graduate of Wake Forest University, has written several books on the Western North Carolina Railroad, the people who built it, and its impact on the region as a whole. Mr. Little has published one of the only works that discuss the life of the man responsible for the completion of the Western North Carolina Railroad, Alexander Andrews. Despite having one of Old Fort's most well known monuments named in his honor, published material on Col. Andrews is sparse. This source also discusses some of the history behind the importance of the James W. Wilson, the railroad and the Geyser in Old Fort's history.

Little, Stephen R. *Tunnels, Nitro, and Convicts: Building the Railroad That Couldn't Be Built*. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2010.

This source helps provide some context to the methods used in constructing the Western North Carolina Railroad. When considering the complex nature that this infrastructure provided for all the parties involved, the completion of the Western North Carolina Railroad at its time was an engineering marvel. Mr. Little highlights some of the harsh realities behind the construction of the railroad including the dangerous and widespread use of nitroglycerin.

McKinney, Gordon. "Zeb Vance and the Construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad." *Appalachian Journal* 29 (2001): 58-67.

Gordon McKinney, a professor of history at Berea College, has written several articles and books on the impact of Asheville native and North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance. In the construction of the Western North Carolina Railroad, Vance played a key role in securing funding and publically supported the project during different periods of his life. This article focuses on Vance's eventual support and demand for convict labor, something that would result in the deaths of hundreds of laborers.

Morris, Margaret W. "The Completion of the Western North Carolina Railroad: Politics of Concealment." *North Carolina Historical Review*, Vol 56 (1975): 256-282.

In this article, Margaret Morris, a frequent contributor to the North Carolina Historical Review, highlights the political motivations behind the construction of the W.N.C.R.R. Detailing Vance's anger over losing his western railroad to a Virginia monopoly, Morris discusses several political disconnects between politicians in Raleigh and those in charge over the railroad. North Carolina was just one of many states across the Union that desired to own a state operated rail line but the timing and impact of North Carolina's pursuits add intrigue to the railroad's story.

Poole, Cary Franklin. *A History of Railroading in Western North Carolina*. Johnson City, Tenn.: Overmountain Press, 1995.

Cary Poole, graduate of Auburn University, has published several works on trains and the construction of railroads across the United States. Rather than focus on one aspect of the construction of the Western North Carolina, this source attempts to give a comprehensive overview of the railroad's construction and its long term impact on WNC.

O'Bannon, Patrick W. *Swannanoa Tunnel, U.S. Route 70, Ridgecrest, Buncombe County, NC. Written Historical and Descriptive Data, Historic American Engineering Record*. From Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress; 1972.  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/nc0009/>.

This government sponsored investigation and report of the Swannanoa Tunnel details both the living conditions of convict laborers on the railroad and the difficulty of repeating its successful completion in modern day times. Highlighting the importance of Maj. Wilson in the completion of the Swannanoa Tunnel, this report details the longevity of the railroad's construction and its lasting impacts on the region.

Waters, Darin J. "Life Beneath The Veneer The Black Community in Asheville, North Carolina from 1793 to 1900." PhD diss., University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, 2012.

Dr. Darin Waters' work on Asheville and Western North Carolina is extensive and as one of the foremost experts on the region's legacy regarding slavery and African American history, Dr. Waters dissertation is invaluable when it comes to discussions about convict labor. The heavy use of slaves in the construction of the railroad in the years preceding the Civil War and the continual use of black convict labor following the war suggests that race played a factor in railroad decision making throughout its history.