

THE HISTORY OF THE APEX UNION DEPOT

The Apex Union Depot is the most prominent site in Apex and has a long and varied history. Originally constructed in 1870, a new wooden depot was built in 1906, when a second set of tracks was laid for the Durham and Southern Railroads. By 1911, over thirty trains passed through Apex daily carrying passengers and freight. In 1911, fire destroyed most of the downtown business area, and although the railroad water tank was destroyed, the frame depot remained untouched. However, in late 1913 or early 1914, the depot was burned during another fire. Designed by Seaboard architects, the impressive Apex Union Depot brick station, which stands today, was completed in late 1914 at a cost of \$8,586.

The remarkably well-preserved depot is built on a simple rectangular plan, measuring 76'8" by 30'6", with 13'6" wide bays projecting 5' at the centers of the longer trackside and Salem Street elevations. A bellcast hip roof covers the building and is still clad with the "Cartwrights Victoria Galvanized Shingles or equal" specified in the architectural drawings. A 7' roof overhang shelters the walls, supported at the corners with heavy chamfered brackets. On the Salem Street side, the bay terminates under the slope of the roof, while the trackside bay breaks through the roof to form a hipped dormer.

The dark red brick veneer, laid with red tinted mortar, may be the "Oriental Brick" specified in original drawings. Windowsills, doorsills, and a continuous stringcourse around the building, which doubles as the sills of the larger windows, are brown sandstone. Several windows are original poured glass. The baggage room doors on the south end of the building provided access for baggage carts, and the double-leafed sliding doors at the rear of the room opened to the baggage loading dock. Original, conical cast iron corner guards manufactured by Raleigh Iron Works protect all four exterior corners of the building and the jambs of the baggage room doors.

The interior plan has retained most of the 1914 design, which included racially segregated waiting rooms and restrooms, an arrangement common to all depots built during the era. The waiting rooms for whites (north end) and blacks (south end) are divided across the center of the building by the stationmaster's office, which extends into the trackside bay on the back of the building, and the utility closets and restrooms on the Salem Street side. The north side waiting room was partitioned on the north end to create a separate lounge and restroom for white women. The restroom has been replaced with a storage area. On the south side, the black waiting room remains in tact, but the baggage room has been partitioned for a small mechanical room. The stationmaster's office remains much as originally configured. What were formerly restrooms for white and black men, serve as men and women's today. A narrow hall connects the two former waiting rooms, and the previous black women's restroom has been converted into a kitchen by the current occupant.

The interior finish is well preserved. Walls are plaster over a wainscot with a symmetrically molded 6 1/4" chair rail, a dado paneled with vertical beaded boards, and a wide baseboard. Window and door frames, including those of the ticket windows, are molded and mitered. Three fireplaces, one double-sided, originally heated the two waiting rooms and the separate women's lounge. The fireplace's elaborate paneled mantels of Neo-classical design have Ionic capitals on the pilasters flanking the fireplace openings and carry a deep shelf. One wooden stall with louvered doors remains in the restrooms and the oversized urinal in the men's restroom is still functional. A heavy iron light fixture with six railroad lanterns hangs in the main lobby. The lanterns, now converted from oil to electric, are stamped with seals from five different railroads. Several switchmen's lanterns hang outside the building and a small metal plaque embedded in the rear of the building identifies the highest point on the railroad.

When passenger service was discontinued in 1969, the depot was acquired by the Town of Apex for use as a public library, although CSX Transportation Corporation retains ownership of the land. In 1988, the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. With the opening of a regional library, the building was leased to the Apex Chamber of Commerce in March 1996 for use as its headquarters and a visitor center. With help from the community and its members, the Apex Chamber refurbished the depot, carefully preserving and restoring its interior. Today, the Apex Union Depot welcomes thousands of visitors each year, serves as a meeting and information center, and plays host to a variety of events including band concerts and festivals.

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