

WEST FLORIDA RAILROAD MUSEUM
L & N Depot

The West Florida Railroad Museum, opened on Fridays and Saturdays, appears quiet much of the time. But, truth be told, inside is a world waiting to come to life. Once the “nerve center” of Milton, the L & N Depot is as rich with memories as it is railroad history. For many, this historic landmark served as their connection to the rest of the world. It was here that families reunited, telegrams were sent, Christmas packages arrived, and soldiers waved good-bye to home and loved ones, sometimes for the last time.

Indeed, the L& N Depot and West Florida Railroad Museum houses memorabilia ranging from conductor hats and dispatcher boards to tickets and model trains, but there’s more than meets the eye. Within the confines of the Depot’s walls lie incredible stories. There are the people who used to work here, the neighborhood boys that went swimming in the locomotive water tower, the bridge tender who lost his first wife and child during a hurricane, and so forth.

Many of these stories come from the lips of Art Blank, who runs the West Florida Railroad Museum. Tourists who encounter Art cannot help but notice a twinkle in his eye as he talks about the L & N Depot and Northwest Florida’s vibrant railroad history. His passion is obvious and, according to him, stems from a lifelong love affair with trains. He recalls fondly his boyhood days in Michigan, where he used to run down to see the train 20 to 30 times a day.

Today, tourists can share his enthusiasm as they make their way through the depot, which includes a General Waiting Room, “Colored” Waiting Room, Agents Office, Express Room, and Freight House in such great condition that they’d swear employees and passengers will return within hours. The grounds also boast a number of trains: L & N Dining Car #2722, L & N Passenger Car #1652, L & N Dining Car #2715, L & N Baggage-Dormitory Car #1653, Frisco Caboose #1102, Engine Cab, Tool House, Bridge Tenders House, L & N Boxcar #18050, L & N Flat Car #21107, and L&N Caboose #1148.

The original Milton Depot was built by the Pensacola & Atlantic Railroad in 1882, but burned around 1907. The present structure, designed as a mid-size combination freight and passenger station, was then constructed by the Louisville & Nashville Railroad in 1909.

Passenger service peaked in the 1920s with six trains a day calling at Milton. However, with the coming of the automobile and airplane, station activity dwindled. The last passenger train ran in 1971; the last freight operated in 1973 – at which time the depot closed.

The Santa Rosa Historical Society purchased the depot, beginning preliminary restorations as a 1976 Bicentennial project and then undertaking major renovations in 1992.

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