



Interesting Tidbits

- ❖ The Town of Spencer exists primarily because of Spencer Shops, and grew up around the repair facility. The complex opened in 1896, and the town quickly sprung up where once there had only been farmland. The town was incorporated in 1905, the same year the Shops' mammoth Back Shop building opened.
- ❖ The Back Shop, which is the length of two football fields, 150-feet wide and 1 ½ stories tall, was for many years the largest industrial building in North Carolina. The building was used to do complete rebuilds to Southern Railway's steam locomotives. During its heyday, one locomotive a day would be completed and sent back on its way, with about 10-15 engines being overhauled at any given time.
- ❖ The shops were named for Southern Railway's president, Samuel Spencer. Spencer served as a Confederate officer in the Civil War. Ironically, he was killed in train wreck in 1906. Another train rammed his private rail car on the mainline in northern Virginia.
- ❖ The site is mainly known as a repair facility, but it also included a freight yard, a transfer shed (where goods were unloaded from freight cars, repackaged and distributed locally) and livestock yard (when livestock traveled via train, federal regulations mandated that the animals be exercised, fed and watered after a set number of hours).
- ❖ Though museum visitors are familiar with the 100-foot turntable by the Roundhouse, many do not realize there was once a smaller turntable behind the oil house.
- ❖ The Bob Julian Roundhouse is believed to be the largest remaining such structure in the United States. The building was named for the Roundhouse former, and was the only named roundhouse in the Southern Railway system. It replaced an earlier 15-stall roundhouse, which stood in the same footprint. Parts of the old roundhouse floor were found when the current building was restored and renovated in 1996.
- ❖ Barber Junction, the visitors center, was not original to the site. It served as the train depot in Barber, N.C. and was moved to the site in 1980. The building was cut into three sections for the move.

- ❖ When the Shops were still operating, all power for the facility was generated on-site at the Power House, which was built in three stages from 1913 to 1924. Restoration and renovation of this structure is the next stage in the Back Shop restoration project. The building will be used to house the HVAC systems for the Back Shop and will include interpretation and preservation of the generators and other machinery in the building.
- ❖ One of the most famous legends associated with Spencer is the Wreck of the Old 97, a railroad tragedy immortalized in a popular 1920s ballad, which declares “This is not 38, this is old 97, you must put ‘er into Spencer on time.” Engineer Steve Brody was on his first run with train 97 in September 1903, a fast mail and passenger train between Washington, D.C., and Atlanta. Unfamiliar with the route and running behind, Brody approached Still house Trestle in Danville, Va., which sits at the bottom of a three-mile grade, too fast, and couldn’t negotiate the curve. The train derailed, killing Brody and 11 others. The train was scheduled to stop in Spencer; the badly-damaged locomotive eventually did make it to the Shops, where it was repaired and put back to work.
- ❖ The 544 Seaboard Airline steam locomotive, the iconic engine that sits in the first stall of the Roundhouse, is one of the most unique pieces of rail equipment at the museum. The large Decapod (an engine with 10 driving wheels) was originally built for Russian railroads, but a civil war there kept the engine in the United States. Because Russian rails have a broader gauge than U.S. rails, the engine was fitted with especially wide wheels to accommodate U.S. track.
- ❖ The Atlantic Coast Line 501 diesel locomotive has the notoriety of being the highest mileage diesel passenger engine in the world, with more than six million miles. This colorful purple, silver and gold engine still operates, and will be open for tours during Rail Days.