

Building Potomac Yard

Potomac Yard was located between Washington D.C. and Alexandria because the site already served as the confluence of many shipping routes; was centrally located on the eastern seaboard; and would alleviate troublesome train congestion from smaller yards in the region. When Potomac Yard opened in 1906, it encompassed 450 acres of land, was about 2.5 miles long, and contained 52 miles of track.

Potomac Yard was a rail classification yard that facilitated distribution of freight between northbound and southbound trains for six railroad companies. Most trains entering the Yard were composed of rail cars bound for different destinations. One train entering the Yard might contain cars bound for five or more cities. To increase efficiency, these trains were “switched” (or dismantled) and reassembled into different trains where all the cars were headed to the same location, or at least a destination along the same route. Potomac Yard was called a “classification yard” because each rail car was classified by its contents and destination and those classifications helped Yard workers determine how to reassemble the trains.

Besides miles of track, the Yard contained numerous buildings and structures over the years. Yard management was done from the Central Operations building, Yardmaster’s Office, and Accountant’s Office. Refueling took place at the tall coaling tipples or the Diesel Oil Pump House. Repairs were done at the Blacksmith’s Shop, Carpenter’s Shop, and Machine Shop. Laborers slept and ate at on-site bunkhouses and kitchens. The Yard also contained livestock pens, fire stations, storage sheds, and water treatment facilities.



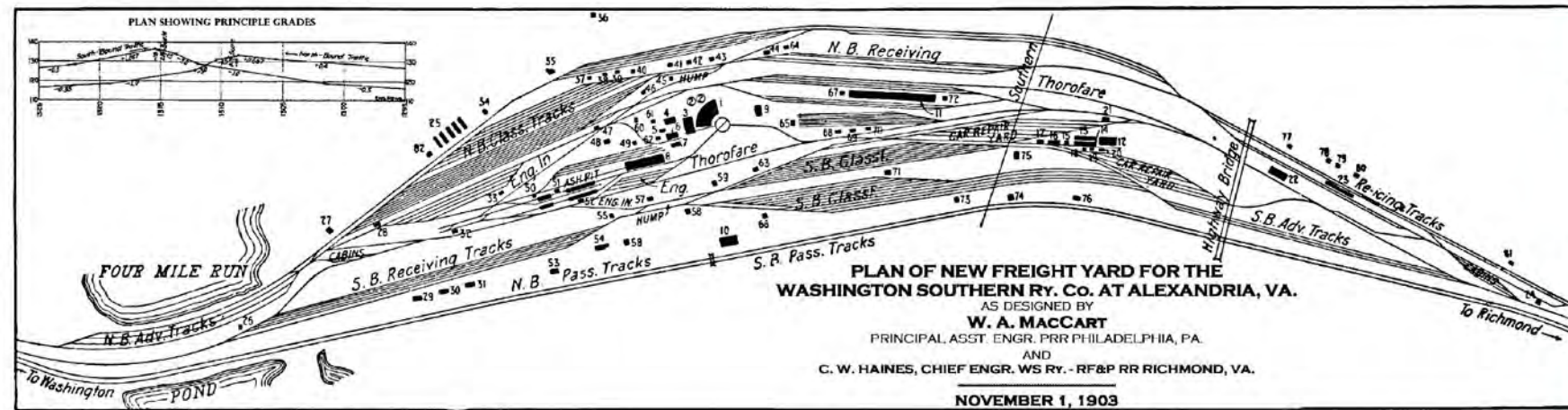
Engine Roundhouse



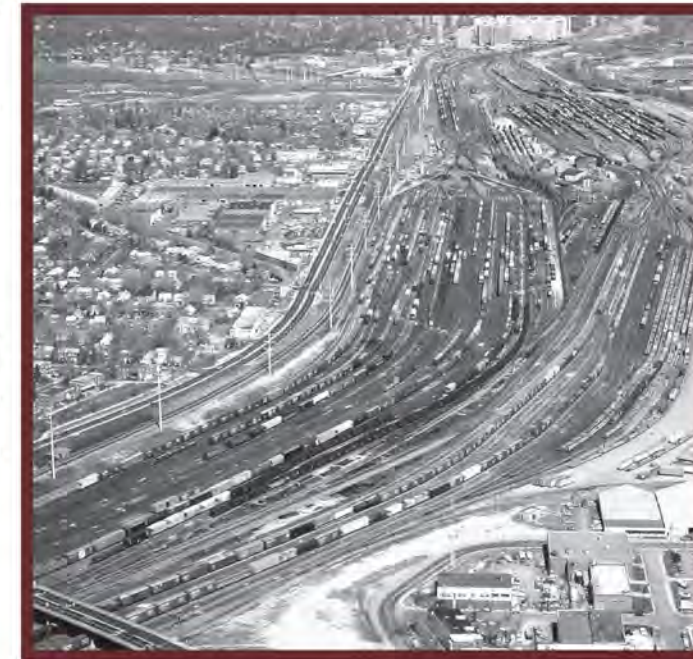
Coal Tipple



Power House



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|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Roundhouse | 16 Wheel Shop Bldg | 31 SB Car Oilers Bldg | 46 West Ladder Jct Switch Box | 61 Sheet metal and pipe bldg | 76 St. Asaph Pngr shelter bldg |
| 2 Water Tanks | 17 Cotton waste reclaiming | 32 Hostler's Box | 47 West Ladder Switch Box | 62 Track Dept Bldg | 77 Mutual Ice House & Plant |
| 3 Machine Shop | 18 Locker Wash and Toilet | 33 Tool House | 48 Track Laborers Bldg & Office | 63 East Ladder Switch Tender | 78 Mutual Ice House & Plant |
| 4 Bunk House | 19 Brake and Brake Beam shp | 34 Stock Pen Fire Reel House | 49 Engine Inspectors Bldg | 64 Car Dept Bldg | 79 Mutual Ice House & Plant |
| 5 Auditor's Building | 20 Blacksmith Shop | 35 Stock Pump House on River | 50 Engine Inspectors Bldg | 65 Pump House hydrant water lines | 80 Mutual Ice House & Plant |
| 6 Store House | 21 Car Oil Storage | 36 East Ladder Switch Box | 51 Ash Pit Bldg | 66 West Ladder Switch Tender | 81 Toilet |
| 7 Oil House | 22 Armour Inspection Bldg | 37 Car Inspectors Building | 52 Hostlers & Front Riders shanty | 67 Transfer Fire Hose Reel House | 82 Stockpen Fire Hose House |
| 8 Coal Wharf | 23 Ice House Platforms | 38 Car Inspectors Lockers | 53 Car Inspectors | 68 Bulk Transfer toilet wash & locker | |
| 9 Power House | 24 Braddock Rd Switch Box | 39 Car Inspectors | 54 Car Inspectors | 69 Bulk Transfer Shop bldg stores | |
| 10 MAIN OFFICE | 25 Stock Pens | 40 East Ladder Jct Switch Box | 55 SB Hump Switch Tender | 70 Bulk Transfer Shop bldg | |
| 11 Transfer House | 26 Four Mile Run Switch Box | 41 NB Jct Sw Box and Hump Condr | 56 Toilet | 71 SB Class Car Insp and Oilers Bldg | |
| 12 Planing Mill | 27 Toilet | 42 NBH Yardmaster & Clerks | 57 SB Hump Condr and Clerks | 72 Transfer Fire Hose Reel House | |
| 13 Lumber Storage | 28 Four Mile Run Yd Office | 43 Revision Bureau | 58 SB Jct Switch Tender & W Ladder | 73 Toilet | |
| 14 New Box Packing | 29 Car Inspector's Toilet | 44 Car Dept Bldg | 59 East Ladder Jct Switch Tender | 74 Roadway Tool House | |
| 15 Journal Bras Shed | 30 SB Car Inspectors Office | 45 Scale house and Scales | 60 Track Dept Bldg | 75 Southbound Yard Office | |



Aerial view of Potomac Yard in the 1960s, looking north. Courtesy of Alexandria Library Potomac Yard Collection.

The Mutual Ice Company

Established in 1900, the Mutual Ice Company stood just east of the Yard and supplied ice for cars carrying perishable items such as meat and fruit. Before the days of mechanical refrigeration, blocks of ice were conveyed from the ice warehouse on overhead platforms and lowered into rail cars through roof hatches. At its peak, Mutual Ice loaded 700 tons of ice onto 500 cars each day. However, the onset of refrigerated cars in the 1950s made icing obsolete and Mutual Ice closed its doors in 1969.



Ice chutes, conveyors, and platforms. Courtesy of Alexandria Library Potomac Yard Collection.



Ice storage house. Courtesy of Alexandria Library Potomac Yard Collection.



Left: Loading ice into rail cars with perishable goods. Right: Hauling ice with tongs. Courtesy of Alexandria Library Potomac Yard Collection.



Original 1903 plan for Potomac Yard showing proposed track layout and buildings. Courtesy of Alexandria Library Potomac Yard Collection.



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA EST. 1749

