

# Pair of Historic Buildings Continue Benefitting Crozet

Two buildings in Crozet are prominent examples of eminently successful preservation efforts. Even though they no longer serve their original purposes, they continue to benefit the community and are testaments to the forward looking investors who converted them for modern-day uses. Standing within feet of one another, the 100-year old structures are remnants of the central role that the railroad played in the development of Crozet.

One of the buildings served as the passenger train depot when daily trains ferried people in Crozet to places as far away as Richmond and beyond. The other was used to make ice and to keep fruit in cold storage until shipped by rail to markets throughout the east. After being abandoned, the depot housed a branch of Jefferson Madison Regional Library for 29 years and is now the home of Crozet Artisans and the Albemarle Tourism and Adventure Center. The cold storage building sat idle for years after the apple and peach industry declined and was later transformed for senior living, referred to by locals as going from a “white elephant” to the “Miracle on Main Street.”

The end of passenger train service to Crozet in May 1968 resulted in the abandonment of the depot. The one-story brick building just around the corner from the railroad underpass and cold storage plant was built in 1923 to replace an ornate wood-frame station dating from the late 1800s. A C&O official agreed to the original train station,



but he told the prominent orchardist Abram Wayland, for whom the settlement had become known as Waylands, the depot will be named “Crozet or nothing.”

Purchased in 1984 by the philanthropic Perry Foundation of Charlottesville, the brick depot was renovated for the library which remained there until moving in 2013 to its present location. Albemarle County, now owner of the depot, is currently leasing the building to the artisans and tourism center.

Two-thirds of the area formerly used by the library is occupied by a shop operated by a partnership of Crozet-area artisans. The beautifully decorated, well-lighted shop contains a variety of items for sale including artwork, jewelry, edibles, and many gift ideas. At least one of the artisan partners is always on duty.

The remaining third of the building's interior is devoted to loads of information on travel and recreation opportunities in western Albemarle and the Rockfish Valley as well as throughout the state of Virginia. An attendant is available to help with travel plans. The welcome center is an affiliation of the Charlottesville Albemarle Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The six-story reinforced concrete ice and cold storage plant was built alongside the railroad tracks by Navy doctor William Fitzhugh Carter and opened in 1915. The huge structure stored over 40,000 barrels of apples and peaches, manufactured ice, and supplied water and electricity to Crozet residents. The whole Crozet area was a veritable orchard. Peach season rivaled Christmas when entire families worked the orchards and packing houses to earn money for the things they dreamed of.

Cold storage enabled growers to wait for prices to rise before selling their fruit. Ice from the plant was conveyed to the railroad cars and trucks used to **Cont'd next page.**



*Clockwise from top: The Lodge as seen from the top of the former cold-storage building; the Crozet train depot; the transformed cold-storage building.*

## Historic Buildings (cont'd)

carry the fruit to eastern seaboard markets.

No one seems to know when the cold storage building was shut down, but with the decline of orchards after the 1930s, it became essentially useless. Years went by before Stanley Paul Wilcox, president of a health care company and resident of Crozet, envisioned a new use of the old building. He purchased the property in 1978 and spent two years remodeling the building for senior housing. The renovated building opened in 1981 as Windham, housing 123 adults “in a comfortable, secure environment for leisurely living.”

Suddenly in 2002, Windham announced plans to close its doors and the non-profit JABA (Jefferson Area Board for Aging) came to the rescue by agreeing to take over the operation they renamed Mountainside Senior Living. Administrator Sharon Britt speculates that Mountainside is the only assisted living facility west of Richmond that accepts Medicaid residents. “About half of our 107 beds are Medicaid assisted,” says Britt, “enabling us to serve the working class including former police, firefighters, and nurses.” But Britt says that to continue providing affordable care, they must constantly rely on generous donations.

Be reminded as you look to the east from The Lodge and see the six-story Mountainside building breaking the skyline that you are gazing on a representative of Crozet’s very different past. And when riding through Crozet, pay special attention to these two historical artifacts and be sure to stop to visit the Crozet Artisan’s Depot.

### DEPOT HOURS

Closed Mondays and Tuesdays  
Wednesday-Saturday 10 am to 5 pm  
Sundays 12 noon to 5 pm



*Counter clockwise from top right: the Crozet Artisans shop; the original Crozet train depot; the Carter Ice and Cold Storage building before remodeling.*