



HISTORY

The Virginia and Tennessee Railroad was formed in the 1850's to provide service between Lynchburg and Bristol. Construction of the new railroad reached this area in 1855, and the Mount Airy Depot was built, named after the small settlement of Mount Airy a few miles to the northwest on the Great Road. The Depot's architectural design is Italianate, often referred to as carpenter gothic or railroad gothic. The original Depot was burned by Federal Troops during the Civil War, but was rebuilt soon after the war, probably in 1868.

It is noteworthy that the Rural Retreat Post Office had been operating since 1835 in a tavern on the Great Road, a few miles to the northeast. In 1858 the Rural Retreat Post Office moved into the town known as Mount Airy Depot, causing great confusion, so in 1871 the Town changed its name to Rural Retreat. In the decades around 1900, the Depot shipped record amounts of produce resulting in Rural Retreat being labelled "the Cabbage Capitol of the World." The Depot operated as a combined freight and passenger station until the growth of the highway system and the increased use of trucks and cars led to a decline in both freight and passenger service. The Depot was closed in the early 1970's and was no longer maintained by the railroad.

In 2011 the Depot was purchased by the Rural Retreat Depot Foundation, and it was placed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2014. Its restoration goal has been to retain as much of its historic character as possible while creating within it a Museum and a flexible and comfortable Event Center to serve the community and region.