

THE NATIONAL TRUST OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Heritage Sites Register articles – Contribution from Glen Beadon

Flanagin Town Railway (30 July 2019)

Note from Glen Beadon: I recommend the name of this site be changed to:

“FLANAGIN TOWN RAILWAY STATION”

Address:

Town/City: Flanagin Town

Region: Couva – Tabaquite – Talparo

Site Type: Cultural Heritage

Ownership: Private - Janelle Nyla Nathaniel-Ramkissoon (Granfather Neptune Nathaniel was last station master at Flanagin Town railway Station)

Public Accessibility: With Permission

Listing Status: Stage 1 – Nomination of the Heritage Site & Information Gathering

Cultural Community: British

Site Features: Railway Site

History of Flanagin Town Railway Station on the Caparo Valley Railway Line (By Glen Beadon):

The idea behind building a railway into the middle of Trinidad in the 1890s was a speculative move by the Colonial Government to sell crown property, encourage settlement, exploit natural resources and boost cultivation of virgin but very fertile lands.

The principal objective, as described by the Legislative Council, was *“The opening up of the cultivation of some of the best lands in the Colony”*. It was also intended by means of the railway to afford means of transport to the owners of already cultivated lands lying beyond the easy reach of the existing main roads and railways. It was recognised that a railway through the Caparo Valley would not be financially lucrative for many years until the area had further developed. The new line was to be an investment for future prosperity.

The first part of the line was 15 miles 5 chains in length and cost £118,466 (about £13.4M in today’s money). Work began on 26 March of 1896. The line joined the TGR’s southern main line at Cunupia Farm Junction (later Jerningham Junction) and ran in a south-

easterly direction through the Caparo valley to Tabaquite. The Junction was later named after the Governor of the day, Sir Hubert Jerningham.

On 1 January of 1898, the Trinidad Government Railway opened the line from Jerningham Junction to Brasso a distance of 12 1/4 miles. In order to reach the district of Tabaquite, the TGR was faced with perhaps the most testing engineering challenge in the history of the railway. A 660ft long tunnel was required in order to drive the line under a section of Trinidad's central range.

The work on the Tabaquite tunnel was started on 26 November 1896 and was completed on 18 May 1897. The line was officially opened through the tunnel to Tabaquite from Brasso a distance of 2 3/4 miles on 20 August 1898. This line became known as the 'Caparo Valley Line'.

When the line first opened, there were only six stations beyond Jerningham Junction; Longdenville, Todd's Road, Caparo, Brasso Pierda and Tabaquite. It was originally intended to have five stations, but afterwards it was decided to build another at Todd's Road.

Flanagin Town as a railway station did not exist when the Caparo Valley line opened to traffic in 1898. It came much later, and its story is a very interesting one which is largely forgotten now. The town was named after a warden, Clifton Flanagin, who had been stationed in the area since 1899. In 1900, he transferred to a small settlement between Brasso Pierda and Tabaquite. Clifton's efforts to establish a railway station came to fruition in 1903 when the railway authorities not only agreed to build the station but named it "**Flanagin Town**" in acknowledgment.

The current occupants of the Railway Station building are descendants of the last TGR Station Master. Today they continue his legacy by keeping the building in a very satisfactory condition.

In 1914 the railway was extended another 12 miles 71.55 chains from Tabaquite to Rio Claro and then became known as the "Rio Claro Line".

The railway operated for 67 years through the station at Caparo until it was closed, along with the rest of the line to Rio Claro, on 30 August 1965.

Today the site of Flanagin Railway Station is relatively well preserved as compared to other railway stations in Trinidad. There still exists evidence of the station platform and

sections of the old railway station and station master's Quarters (Originally known as the Collector's Quarters).



Above: Flanagin Town Railway Station



Above: Flanagin Town Railway Station in 2009.



Above: A poignant moment, captured by Don Savant on the old platform at Flanagin Town Railway Station, as staff and members of the National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago await the arrival of a ghost train on 27 March 2018.

Although trains have not called here for over 50 years, everyone checks their watches in hopeful anticipation, while Mr Ruthven Bunting and Glen Beadon examine the 1950 timetable in a desperate effort to step back to a time, now long past, when the railway was more than just a service. It was a lifeline. In those long off days, if one was late and running to get to the station, engine drivers would slow down to give you time to get there so you did not miss the train. Everyone then was a known “regular passenger”.

The railway was an integral part of the local community and its absence is still very much lamented to this day.

Reasons for preservation:

-The Station building at Flanagin Town is now the best and only preserved example today along the Caparo Valley Line.

Objective: To work with the present occupants, Janelle Nyla Nathaniel-Ramkissoon (Grandfather Neptune Nathaniel was last station master at Flanagin Town railway Station), for the continued preservation of the station building and the platform which remains extant.

Plaque at the site of the station (with photos) should read:

“Site of Flanagin Town Railway Station where the Trinidad Government Railway provided a passenger and goods service between 1897 and 1965.

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