

THE NATIONAL TRUST OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Heritage Sites Register articles – Contribution from Glen Beadon

Caparo Train Station and water Tank (29 July 2019)

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

“CAPARO RAILWAY STATION AND WATER TANK”

Address: Caparo Valley Brasso Road

Town/City: Caparo

Region: Couva – Tabaquite – Talparo

Site Type: Cultural Heritage

Ownership: Public

Public Accessibility: Full Access

Listing Status: Stage 2 – Identification & Inclusion of Heritage Site on Inventory of Properties

Cultural Community: British

Site Features: Railway Sites

History of Caparo 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.

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 Caparo Railway Station is relatively well preserved as compared to other railway stations in Trinidad. There still exists evidence of the station platform, water tank and water crane (known as water column) and although the station building has long been demolished, the steps leading to the building and platform are extant.



Above: Caparo Railway Station



Above: Caparo Railway Station water tank, note the end of the platform in the foreground.

Steam locomotives require water and because of this, several points along the railway had to establish storage tanks like this one, each with its own water crane. These water points were in many ways like service stations on today's roads across the country.



Above: Caparo Railway station water crane

A water crane is a device used for delivering a large volume of water from the station water tank directly to the tank or tender of a steam locomotive. The top crane section has the flexibility to swivel towards the position of the locomotive's tank intake.

Missing from the crane at Caparo is a large metal funnel that was suspended below the end of the open pipe, held in place by chain. This arrangement allowed the engine crews to direct the flow of water onto the tender of tank opening on the engine.

During the early period of railways in Trinidad the following locations had water tank and water cranes for filling up steam locomotives: Port of Spain, St Joseph, Chaguanas, Couva, San Fernando, Princes Town, Siparia, Arima, Sangre Grande, Todds Road, Caparo and Rio Claro.

This example at Caparo is the best-preserved example today in Trinidad. There is another not so well-preserved example at San Fernando.

The water tank at Caparo was made in Glasgow by **Aitken McNeil & Co** of Colonial Iron Works, Helen Street, Govan, Glasgow.

The water crane, sometimes known as a water column, was supplied in 1900 by **COWAN SHELDON & Co Ltd** CARLISLE.

Both items were supplied to the TGR via The Crown Agents for the Colonies.

After closure of the railway through Caparo in 1965 these items were abandoned and today exist only through the protection of local people, in my view, both should be preserved as historic relics of a gone by era.

Reasons for preservation:

-The water crane at Caparo is the best preserved today in Trinidad and it is one of only two surviving examples of a once ubiquitous railway operational item. Port of Spain must have had at least five of these cranes at one time. Today only the water tank remains at Port-of-Spain.

-The water tank is another particularly good item and although others exist their condition is not as good as this one. Every effort should be made to save the Tank, water crane and remains of the platforms at Caparo railway station.

Objective: Rust proof and repaint both tank and water crane in TGR red oxide colours. Work may be carried out by volunteers and funds for paint should be raised through donations (private individuals and companies). Encourage locals to upkeep the site and keep it in a condition fit for visitors to enjoy.

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

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

The steam locomotives that powered the trains required water and because of this, several points along the railway had to establish storage tanks and water cranes. These water points were in many ways like gas stations on today’s roads across the country. Fine Examples of both items are located within this area surrounding the station at either end of the platform.

The Water tank at Caparo is located at the northern end of the station and was built by Aitken McNeil & Co of Colonial Iron Works, Helen Street, Govan, Glasgow.

The water crane at Caparo is located at the southern end of the platform and it was built and supplied by COWAN SHELDON & Co Ltd CARLISLE”.

Other photos:

See below



Caparo Railway Station platform edge

Glen Beadon Collection 2009



Caparo Railway Station site with old rails used as fence post

Glen Beadon Collection 2009



Caparo Railway Station water Crane

Glen Beadon Collection 2009



Caparo Railway Station water tank

Glen Beadon Collection 2009