



Official Newsletter
of



NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 1361
Altoona, PA 16603-1361
www.hscnrhs.org

SUMMER 2016

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Note: Horseshoe Curve Chapter, National Railway Historical Society was granted a charter by the NRHS on May 11, 1968 (3 months and ten days after the PRR-NYC merger), evolving from the Altoona Railway Museum Club (1965-1968). We meet on FOURTH Tuesday of each month except December, at Railroader's Memorial Museum, Altoona, PA, 7:30 PM. Occasional exceptions are announced to the membership.

90 (+) % of all communications and notices are handled by e-mail. Please keep your e-mail address current with the officers, especially the Chapter Historian/Editor.

Meetings are open to those interested in railroad history and membership inquiries are invited. Chapter-only membership is available but national membership dues are separate. For more information visit www.nrhs.com.

Note: The offers of Chapter Secretary and Vice-President were recently reversed. Positions titles were traded by those indicated above.

“WJ” (HOMER) TOWER – EAST ALTOONA
The Westbound Receiving/Classification Yard circa March 1936
&
The 1936 St. Patrick Day Flood

Excerpted from Charles E. Burchfield Journals, Volume 39, Pages 116-127
March 9 – 27, 1936

Fortune trip to Harrisburg, Altoona, Pittsburg (sic) – [Presumed to be for Fortune Magazine]
Harrisburg trip – 1st Day –

Before Olean beautiful spotting of snow on east side of hills to west – machines like the middle of winter, as like wise (sic) in the mountains snow heavy on the hills unbroken white of mid-winter – misty rain falling – great warm from spots coming thru the snow on hillsides (the shaggy brown hills of March) a feeling of the earth coming forth again after a great ice-age,. An elemental feeling that grips – a cool dampness of the snowy hills – the damp breath of the snow seeping thru the valley, chilling to the bone, making the walls of the houses damp, roofs soggy – streams and rivers flush with churning water – one things of damp rotting logs, with white foam around them.

The Susquehanna, full and strong, speckled with floating ice, one feels that a pail-ful (sic) more of water will overflow the banks – at twilight near a town, the river has a haunting look, a whispy (sic) bar of smoke back of a hill – a feeling it would be a friendly thing to have the river as a background to one’s life –

As twilight depens into night, the roaring of trucks on the road – it has a spring sound, the black dusk glowers at the road – a train goes by – the wide vastness of train roaring thru hills in March – darkened houses steam with romance – the sadness and mystery of a warm March night, old memories crowd the mind –

The confusion of coming into Harrisburg – tired out – bending fender on hump of ice.

Harrisburg – 2nd day – Tuesday

Contacting Mr. Swank – sends Mr. Denehey to escort me to offices. Morning spent in going over break up yards at Lucknow, and “hump” at Enola –

Break up yards –

A cool day – reached thru incredibly miry roads thru swamp. Fires with blue smoke glinting in the pale March sunlight thrilled me. Here old freight carrs (obsolete and to be replaced by new all steel cars were broken up, and whatever can be salvaged is. Lumber used to make grainboards. Trucks are removed, repaired for new cars – new type of spring – to prevent rocking – all unusable iron sold as scraps – the unusable lumber burned.

Enola Hump – (will describe hump operations at Altoona later) here saw the inspection of under-side of cars. Pits built under the tracks – as the cars slowly pass over, the inspector looks for flaws in the trucks & under mechanism; and has a gun arrangement filled with white wash which he squirts at the flaw for others to see later. I was permitted to go under. The strange sinister feeling of the cars passing overhead so closely.

P.M. making water-color of two freight cars being demolished with a fire back of them – the presence of Denehey (tho he effaced himself very considerably) the fatigue of the long unaccustomed drive of the day before, and the feeling of simply having to produce something gave me the distressing feeling of being “on the spot” – I put in a difficult afternoon –

3rd day – Wednesday –(11th)

Raining all day – finished work on sketch. Showed it to Swenk and then mailed it. Rain & foginess prevented any consideration of my doing the Enola hump, coupled with my own disinterest –

Fourth Day (Thursday)-(12th)

Trip to Altoona – raining hard in the morning – river over the road in several places but we got thru (later the roads closed) a sight of one man going to his house in a canoe. Not long until rain turned to snow. A heavy down-pour necessitating frequent stops to clean windshield – later in the afternoon, the snow stopped – (a beautiful unaccustomed sight to me) – in the mountains the air in the valley warm enough to melt the snow in trees, but up on the mountain sides & tops it was colder, and the trees covered with snow with loose white ragged clouds lying low to obscure the tops at times – a fragile fairylike quality – reach Altoona about 4 p.m., go to the Penn-Alto & get comfortable rooms.

Fifth Day – Friday- (13th)

First meet Mr. Phellan, Superintendent (sic) of the operating part of the railroad, then to car works at W. Altoona or Juniata; meet Mr. Grimshaw. (This man well-named – his name might be punned into Gumjaw – his head was sculpturesque, chisled, with not a wasted form, not even a faint hint of laxness of self-indulgence, trimmed to the wind – he never spoke an unnecessary word. I liked him tremendously) – He escorts us through the works; first the locomotive repairs, and then the freight car works, foundries, and the round house, where locomotives are washed with a spray, take on coal and water. In the yard outside of the round-house seemed to be hundreds of locomotives all steamed up ready to go; a wonderful sight with smoke and steam squirting from them. At noon, call up Fortune – Miss Tracy expresses general disappointment at my failure to do Enola Hump. They seem insistent on a hump picture. So P.M. with Phelan & Grimshaw, do hump at W. Altoona. An interesting layout here – they put up a freight car for me to stand on, and I make plans for the next day.

6th Day – Saturday –(14th)

All day at hump. All the cars sorted here either according to the freight they contain, or their use (if empty) or state of repair. The sorting is done by gravity. The hump, an artificially built hill, supplying the gravity. The long train of cars is pushed up over the hump – at the peak, the cars, or groups of cars, are disconnected, and start down-grade toward the yard. The operator in the tower opposite watching how the cars are Marchked presses a button which throws the switch, and the car slides onto the desired track. As the cars are released the waiting brakemen climb upon the car, and stands with a stick inserted in the brake-wheel (to enable him to trim it easier). He controls the speed of the car. Mr. Phelan pointed out that the turn is always made inward, towards the car, so that in case of a slip or breakage of the stick, they will fall toward the car and catch themselves, and not away from it, to injury or possible death - One of the amusing sights is the jitney, and old high, gasoline-operated little car, that goes down into the yards and brings the brakeman back. There was something quite humorous about it, as it came scooting down the track, little puffs of white vapor going up from its exhaust on the roof, the men hanging on the sides, feet on running boards, the main line tracks split here, two for passenger service going to one side of the hump, tho for thru freight on the other. The passenger went thru a tunnel under the tower and the hump.

Once while sketching I heard a song-sparrow from the hills. At noon we all (Denehy, Phelan, McClintock [Station Master] & myself) went to a nearby lunch room for sandwiches & coffee. We had roast beef sandwiches. I Marchveled at their excellence – later Denehy told me it was no doubt given us (sic) to impress the “big boss” (Phelan).

I quit at early afternoon, and Denehy caught an afternoon train to Pittsburg to spend the week-end with his wife & daughter. I went to a movie in the evening.

7th Day – Sunday-(15th)

All day at Hump Picture, only taking time off for a sandwich and coffee at the car-lunch across the street. It rained all day. In the evening, after talking to Bertha I set out to a movie, only to discover there were no Dunday movies in Altoona. As it had ceased to rain, I walked down to the railroad and stood on the foot bridge awhile watching the lights & moving trains.

8th Day – Monday – 16th

Raining – A.M. to Hump with D – to refresh my mind & make new studies. Forgot to mention on Saturday the R.R. photographer made some snaps for me that were a great help, especially on the cars breaking loose.

Finish picture – Phelan in to see it, then mail it – Evening to see Laurel & Hardy in “Behemian Girl” for relaxation.



9th Day – Tuesday – 17th

Raining – terrific down-pour – undecided in morning what to do. P.M. decide I should work indoors. To E&M shop (locomotive repair) make studies. This place tho is almost beyond description. 25 – 30 locomotives in varying stages of repair, from the bare rusty cylinders to the one ready to go out. Riveting hammers going everywhere filling the air with a staccato roar tht was really not unpleasant – acetylene torches in use, like the fitful flashing of heat – lightning only of an intense white glare shading out to pure opasque cobalt – the air dense with bluish smoke of the color of wood smoke – men prowling in pits & in the iron cylinders with torches – all men with goggles and some steel helmets like drivers use. Cranes going on three double tracks, carrying anything from a wheel to a full complete locomotive. At one end a contraption for heating the tire of the big engine wheels so it could be removed and a new one put on. The wheel surround by two circular pipes with perforations on the inside. Gas at high pressure forced thru and flames shot at the wheel. A spectacular sight,

looking as [Jessup] of Fortune, said like the corona of the sun. When the “tire” is sufficiently heated, it is hammered off by a workman.

Sketch all afternoon –



“WJ” aka HOMER HUMP, East Altoona by Charles E. Burchfield. A large wall mural of this work may also be seen at Railroader’s Memorial Museum, Altoona, on the west end wall of the second floor, where an exercise may be performed to learn train classification methods.

By this time rumors of flood conditions are beginning to seep in, talk of this bridge being out, that road closed – of certain towns with 8-10-12 feet of water in some sections. Rain continues. Train

service stops (sic) in evening – many people stranded in Altoona, many come to hotel. About 10 o'clock the lights go out – the absolute dark outside & in, is profound, and frightening. It did not take much effort to imagine – now is the time to hear the roar of waters. They came on soon again, and what was (mainly) Altoona's only inconvenience during the flood week.

10th Day – Wednesday (18th)

News of disaster to many towns comes in – bulletins on local paper's window. Denehey reports spending the night telephoning to his superiors and newspapers. Receives orders to go to Pittsburg (sic), where the worst flood of all is – a special train to Pittsburg (sic) is made up at 11:15 which he takes. After he is gone unrest seizes me – I feel that's such history making floods more important at the moment than the rail-road pictures – how to get to the real scenes is a problem. I even went so far as to go down to the station hoping that the Pittsburg train has not gone and that I can go with Denehey. Fortunately (as I later learned) the train was gone. I try half-heartedly all afternoon to get to work on my shop picture – but I cannot concentrate – all I get done is a brushed drawing with the brush, & light colors washed in.

Impossible to phone in the evening, all lines held open for emergency flood-calls. At midnight I send telegram to relieve Bertha's worry.

11th day – Thursday – (19th)

A.M. to E&M shops for more notes fo& impressions – News that the flood waters have subsided quieted my unrest somewhat and I realized the interesting phase was gone anyway, and that I had better work. All day at shop picture, making better progress.

12th day – Friday (20th)

A.M. to E&M shops. Made studies of the “glaming wheel” – while watching it. I thot (sic) of the wheel that Ezekiel saw, and the “Ezekiel saw the wheel” started going thru my head. It persisted for days.

P.M. work in room on picture, bringing it almost to a finish. Letter from Denehey:

“With a city plunged into total darkness, troops patrolling the streets proclaiming Marchial Law, and flood waters that touched Pennsylvania Station. I arrived here last night at 10 P.M. after a creepy ride from Altoona. The station here was jammed with a seething mob, rolling back and forth like the flow and ebb of a titde. Walking out to the street, I saw the city of Pittsburg a total mass of black buildings silhouetted against a low back day. Rain fell steadily and thru the inky darkness, flash lights (sic) of soldiers bobbed here and there. Nearly all the downtown streets were roped off, as the water was up to the seond story windows on Liberty Ave. Here and there a rowboat skimmed silently past, with an eerie splash of the oars, manned by a trooper.

In the Fort Pitt Hotel, the manager and 200 of his guests were marchooned in the upper floors, with all the lights out, and the waters flooding the panty. They were taken out in rowboats in the early morning hours.

At the same time, a darky danced on a street corner in his bare feet as he played a banjo and accepted pennies from the crowd. As he danced the edge of the flood splashed on the curb at his feet. And all around a swirling sea of muddy icy waters rose higher and higher.

Today the flood is receding. The city has assumed a holiday atmosphere with thousands of motorists blocking all high ways. Hot dog stands lend a wild west touch to the scene. Food is scarce, ---“

13th day – Saturday (21st)

Cold with snow flurries.

Finish shop picture A.M. Grimshaw & his assistant Brenneman in to see it at noon. Mail picture at 1:00. After lunch drive to (Tyrone) to see effects of flood. Rather surprisingly I do not find it particularly interesting or picturesque. Just a messy ghastly confusion. Streets like the wildest creek beds, porches smashed. Windows in stores gapping jaggedly; trees poles & other debris scattered about – iron bridge swept from their places shattered like straw, railroad twisted like shoe-strings, automobiles half buried in sand-bars – the looks on the faces of the people still one of bewilderment or fright. I was glad to get away, and as I came into the wooded hills near Altoona I was glad to be in the comparative peace of an orderly nature.

14th Day – Sunday (22nd)

A.M. to R.R. near hump making studies of signals etc for small sketches. A cold clear sunshiny day, very fresh.

P.M. working up little sketches.

Evening walkover bridge at Round-house. Night scenes of rail-road activities thrilling –

15th Day – Monday (23rd)

A.M. to R.R. yards to renew impression of signals; then to E&M shop for more studies of “wheel” . Finish signal paintings. P.M. start color sketch of “wheel”

16th Day – Tuesday (24th)

A.M. Finish “wheel” study – decide suddenly to drive to Pittsburg (sic). After showing it to Brenneman, I mailed it, went to hotel, packed hurriedly and started out, rather light heartedly.

It was a quiet dreamy springish afternoon, half sunlight. The road was a straight thru route, and in good condition.

The romance was gone when I got to Pittsburg (sic) at dusk. On asking how to get to Fort Pitt Hotel, I was informed I probably could not get to it. I call up Denehey who is not in. His wife directs me to W M (Wuilliam) Penn Hotel.

I arrive there, and find new lights in the street, general confusion. When I went into the lobby of the hotel, water dripping down on steps, with buckets to catch it (this I thot part of the flood but it was not) few lights on; only a handful of people. I learned there were no lights in the rooms. Candles around on most counters. Depressed, I went outside again, and after parking my car, I stood on a corner and tried to think what to do. The feeling of desolation was complete. Once I had the wild idea of embarking at once for home, but only as a fleeting thought. Finally go back to hotel, and secure a room. After I am in it, and learn there is hot water, it seems not so bad, and begins to feel like an adventure.

After calling home, and Denehey, I go to dining room – or grill – which is jammed with people who are laughing and chatting gaily (sic). Only half the lights are on, the air full of smoke.

After dinner, walk down Grant Street towards river. All the streets leading to down-town guarded by troopers; Pumps going, buildings black and lifeless; a chill damp. Out on bridge over river. Here signs & building of flood are gone.

17th Day – Wednesday (25th)

A.M. to see Denehey – to see station master Kurl and we go to see passenger station – view from end of one platform seems interesting to me. After lunch with Denehey go out boulevard to see how station looks from above. Not as interesting as below; makes studies all afternoon. Get new room at hotel with outside northern window. Make tracing of study for the [n.d.] work.

Evening walk as before out over bridge as nothing else to do. The new moon sliver upside down in the sky above the darkened flood area.

18th Day – Thursday (26th)

A.M. New studies of station – lunch with Denehey – P.M> start work on picture – a growing sickness bothers me – a walk down 14 flights of stairs had made me nervous in the morning. I seemed to get nowhere with the sketch, and by evening it seems hopeless. However after dinner and a walk, the study seems to assume possibilities.

All night I toss to & fro in the bed, wooing sleep without success. Warm, and a raining (sic) falling. Continual roar of sounds from below – fire sirens, grinding of trucks, newsboys, shouting, roar of trains, a bedlam – 4:30 before I doze-off.

19th Day – Friday (27th)

A.M. Grit my teeth and finish work on picture – show it to Denehey – decide suddenly to drive home. Inquire route of railroad men and after bidding Denehey goodbye and mailing picture, I checkout, and start out.

A misty foggy day, with pale sunshine struggling thru – a light wind. I lose my route going out of Pittsburg, and only get onto the Erie route after many questionings and turnings. As I start out on the wide cement road northwards I become more and more light-hearted. A feeling of Saturday afternoon in the air, of boy hoods Saturday. Damp woods look inviting, but I go on (wishing) to reach route 20 by sundown. A long drive to Erie with few events, aside from two detours. About 10 miles south of Meadville, a low creek flooding the flat valley; pick up man with Marchket basket bound for Meadville.

Sun setting as I approach Route 20 at Fairview – the golden yellow sunlight streaming thru Marchshes lighting up the bustling willows.

Most of Route 20 driven in darkness; uneventful, but more or less nerve wracking, as the road is narrow and many trucks on the road. Pause at Ripley for sandwiches & coffee, and to call Bertha. Arrive home at 10:00.

Charles E. Burchfield, Journals, Volume 39, Pg. 116 – 127.

Note: There are some words in the text with old-style spelling & punctuation, but were duplicated as written. Also, the spelling of Mr. Denehey (Denehy) was not consistent.. Within Pennsylvania, recollections of the St. Patrick Day Flood of 1936 is legendary, and while the artist did not visit Johnstown, there is considerable documentation, especially by the Pennsylvania Railroad, of the extensive damage done to system lines statewide. However, there are the impressions of the artist as a visitor to Altoona during that time, providing the human experience perspective.

Thanks to chapter member William Burket for the source material.

Charles Ephraim Burchfield (April 9, 1893 – January 10, 1967) was an [American painter](#) and [visionary artist](#), known for his passionate [watercolors](#) of [nature](#) scenes and

[townscapes](#). The largest collection of Burchfield's paintings, archives and journals are in the collection of the [Burchfield Penney Art Center](#) in [Buffalo](#). His paintings are in the collections of many major museums in the USA and have been the subject of exhibitions at the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#), the [Whitney Museum of American Art](#), the [Hammer Museum](#), and the [Museum of Modern Art](#), as well as other prominent institutions.

AGE OF STEAM ROUNDHOUSE

On Saturday, April 16th, we (David & Virginia Seidel) had the opportunity to tour the Age of Steam Roundhouse in Sugarcreek, OH, as part of an invitation to members of the Fort Wayne Railway Historical Society of NKP 765 fame.

Age of Steam Roundhouse is a genuine (and relatively new) operating railroad roundhouse, but built to exacting PRR design standards, along the right of way of the Ohio Central RR (formerly the Panhandle Division of the PRR), the main line between Pittsburgh and St. Louis. Age of Steam Roundhouse is a magnificent facility in the heart of Ohio Amish Farm Country which is in stark contrast to its surroundings.

Some statistics:

The roundhouse currently has 18 stalls, but if future needs warrant, can be doubled in size. Each stall has two massive oak doors, handcrafted by Amish craftsmen. The height of each door is approximately 30 feet and weighs about 1,000 lbs, each mounted on hand-crafted wrought-iron custom hinges. As you will see, each stall of the roundhouse is filled with locomotives of many classes. The turntable is 115 ft in length (in case anyone builds something like a new T-1 to PRR specs) ! All other buildings are built to exacting PRR architectural design standards, primarily by brick and rough-cut lumber (perhaps timber would be the better word). The facility has a complete machine shop for any task, including profiling the massive driving wheels of a typical steam locomotive, or the " fire ring" for placement of new locomotive drive-wheel tires...very specialized machine tools which hit the scrap piles of major railroads years ago.

Age of Steam Roundhouse is NOT open to the public. You cannot show up and expect to be admitted. They do accommodate, occasionally, special groups under controlled circumstances on non-working days, and everyone must sign releases of liability to be admitted to the property. Tours are by escort only and no one is permitted to walk about individually. In addition, the release form includes specifics that any photography be for personal use only and NOT appear on the internet or publications. I therefore have to ask that you be careful with any photo printed here as they cannot appear in any public forum. I do have permission to use them in this newsletter, however.

I can only describe this opportunity as "breath-taking". It was like being in such a facility in 1940, except perhaps that everything was too clean. Alas, we did not have the opportunity to meet the roundhouse cat..Felix. I had to observe to one of the crew members escorting us, that most people in our group no doubt wished we were at least 25 years younger and had the skills and the opportunity to work there !

I am very appreciative of having had the opportunity to tour the Age of Steam Roundhouse, which was arranged specifically for members of the Fort Wayne Railway

Historical Society. Particular thanks go to Wayne York of Ft.WRHS and to John Corns of Age of Steam Roundhouse (www.ageofsteamroundhouse.com). It was a privilege to have had this opportunity.

THANK YOU FT WAYNE RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND AGE OF STEAM ROUNDHOUSE !





NKP 763 on the 115' turntable







Age of Steam Roundhouse is located amidst spectacular Amish farm country, near Sugarcreek, OH.



**John Corns – Age of Steam Roundhouse
Wayne York – Fort Wayne Railway Historical Society**



Former Pennsylvania Railroad Depot, Denison, OH (Penhandle Division)



PRR Business Car NOL 7528, the Williamsport, which is one of several displayed at the Denison OH Depot. Imagine the *SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS* making a station stop here, a train I rode in the fall of 1956 in USAF days traveling between Altoona and St. Louis and nearby Scott Air Force Base, Belleville, IL., many moons ago...



**Chesapeake and Ohio 2700
Denison, OH**

2700 Data – From the Internet

For many years, 2700 was displayed in Coonskin Park in Charleston, WV. While displayed in the park, 2700 was neglected and vandalized. The area where 2700 was displayed was adjacent to the B&O line that ran from Charleston to Sutton. In the early 1970s, the St. Albans Fire Department restored and moved 2700 to St. Albans, WV. When 2700 was moved, it was pulled along this same line to the mainline of the NYC and up river cross the Kanawha at Deep Water approximately 45 miles east of Charleston. It was then brought back down the C&O mainline to St. Albans. The closer bridge across the Kanawha in Charleston was unable to carry both 2700 and the locomotives needed to pull her.



Today, 2700 is stored on a siding blocked by several baggage cars near the Dennison Railroad Museum in Dennison, OH. She has been completely stripped of all the gauges, valves, name plates, windows, bell, whistle and anything else you can think of. Many of these items were donated by individuals during the campaign to restore her back in the 70s. Unfortunately, she is in worse shape today than after enduring years of vandalism in Coonskin Park.

In August, 2001, the Dennison Depot Museum was making preparations to put 2700 next to the depot. The museum is planning on restoring the cars but the future of 2700 doesn't look good. In 2002 I was told that the parts that were taken off of 2700 (including the side rods) are being used in restoration effort on the 2716. In 2009 I

was told that cosmetic restoration of 2700 would be in 2010....which has not occurred.

It would seem that C&O 2700 needs a better home; it would look great at Sugarcreek OH in the Age of Steam Roundhouse, which certainly could handle the restoration...after NKP 763, of course. *Just a personal observation of this Editor who is not familiar with local efforts and protocols.*

APRIL CHAPTER MEETING

Included a special audio-visual program by Russell Love, of Verona, PA, whose topic was the history of the South Penn Railway. This Railway, which is now primarily on, or, in alignment with, the present day Pennsylvania Turnpike, was never completely built. It was an early effort by Cornelius Vanderbilt of the New York Central RR to circumvent or compete with the Pennsylvania Railroad's cross-Pennsylvania route. The South Penn Railway, at the behest of New York financier J. P. Morgan, was never completed although right-of-way grading and tunnels were started during the early construction efforts.

MAY 2016 CHAPTER MEETING

Is scheduled for Tuesday, May 24, 7:30 PM, at Railroader's Memorial Museum, 1300 9th Avenue, Altoona...as usual, on the 4th Tuesday. Alas, May is another one of those months with FIVE Tuesdays.

CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP

The National Railway Historical Society is surveying all member chapters to validate their national membership listings. If you have not already done so, please contact President Givler (see officer's listings on page one) to clarify your class of membership (national and/or local), as soon as possible. Thank you.

