

Official Newsletter of

HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER

National Railway Historical Society P. O. Box 1361 Altoona, PA 16603-1361

SPRING 2011

CHAPTER OFFICERS

President: Francix X. Givler Jr., 114 Scott Avenue, Altoona, PA 16602 [NOTE: All time-sensitive correspondence should be sent to this address. ottodocfacs@atlanticbb.net

Vice-President: Joseph K. Harella, 3812 5th Avenue, Altoona, PA 16602 jkharella@pennswoods.net

National Director: M. Richard Charlesworth, 903 Penn St., Hollidaysburg, PA 16648 charlesworth2@verizon.net

Treasurer: Denny Walls, 123 Sandcastle Ln, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648 <u>d63w@aol.com</u>

Secretary: Karin Givler, 114 Scott Ave., Altoona, PA 16602 kackiefrass@atlanticbb.net

Chapter Historian/Editor: David W. Seidel, 2011 14th St., Altoona, PA 16601-3020 dwsnrhs@aol.com

Webmaster: Christopher J. Behe, Severn, MD

UNDER THE WIRE Leonard E. Alwine

"Tree Fallen on Catenary" – "Train TV-21 standing with pantographs burnt fast to catenary"; "Everything under water, nothing moving"; These were some of the transmissions from the train cabs to the control towers on June 22, 1972. No, they were not transmitted from Logan Valley trolley cars. They were transmitted from GG-1 cabs on the Penn Central Railroad during Hurricane Agnes, June 1972.

With all the rain we have been having lately, making my job at work very hard and miserable with trucks stuck in the mud and collapsed walls in excavations, we began joking about how it could become another flood of '72 situation. That caused me to think about some stories I read about the railroad during that flood and what it meant to the electric lines used by PCRR and how water and electricity don't always work well together. So, I thought an article about that would be fitting for this issue of "Under the Wire", as we near the anniversary date of that terrible flood. We will get back to the Altoona & Logan Valley Electric Railway in the next issue.

Tropical Storm Agnes began in the south and hit Florida June 18, 1972 with hurricane force. It then traveled up toward the Virginia coast and headed out to sea June 20th. But instead of just dving-out as is usually the case. Agnes turned and headed for New York and Pennsylvania on June 21st. The storm ran head-on against a mass of cold air above the Susquehanna River Valley and stayed there for two days, discharging all it's accumulation of moisture. A normal four month rain came down in two days on an area which was already soaked with heavy rains from the previous weeks storms. The run-off transformed streams and rivers into raging torrents with record high water marks throughout the states. Many rivers were 15 to 20 feet above the flood stage.

The RECORD FOR HIGH WATER MARK IN Harrisburg had been 30.3 feet set in 1936 which was also a terrible flood. Most all of the equipment for the electrified lines was then re-built on stilts two feet higher than the 1936 record thinking that there would never be a

flood that deep again. However, Agnes topped out on June 24th at 34 feet in Harrisburg. Even the high stilted infrastructure was under water by two feet. Relays and sub-stations were knocked-out by the water and raging rivers washed-out trees which fell on the wire bringing poles down also. It was hazardous for repair crews to try to get to the scene due to highway wash-outs and electric current in wet conditions, particularly for sub-stations only partially disabled. These sub-stations received 132,000 volts and transformed it into 11,000 volts, transmitted to electric catenary or third rail. Robert Grab, Foreman of the substations, actually roade a motorboat over 9 ft high fences to reach these substations in the Harrisburg area. And, later, as the water receded, the dirt and mud left behind inside relays and switches rendered them useless.

Of course, the electric lines were not the only things affected. According to Mr. William Moore, President of the Penn Central at that time, over 4,000 miles of the system were affected. The main lines were cut, 68 branch lines either washed out or under mudslides, and 25 bridges demolished and 23 others damaged and unusable.

Two of the largest bridges on the main lines were: crossing the Chemung River in New York and the stone-arch bridge over the Susquehanna River at Shocks Mills near Harrisburg.

On the Chemung Bridge the raging water had been pounding at it's bases for two days. The bridge was a little unsteady but crews gently placed 15 loaded hopper cars on the bridge to hold it down. Things seemed to be going OK until 5:20 AM on the 24th when nature won and the three steel spans plus the hopper cars fell into the water and were carried down stream. It was estimated that it would cost \$1Million dollars to rebuild.

The stone arch bridge at Shocks Mills was another stssory. It held out for quite a long time as the Susquehanna River pounded at it's bases. The bridge had 28 stone arches and was built in 1904. On June 27th, Engineer William Madar took train PF-6 with 90 cars of mixed freight out of Enola Yard bound for Philadelphia. As he turned the train onto the bridge, something didn't look right so he sstopped the train and he and brakeman

Albert Miller climbed out of the cab and walked out onto the bridge. As they made their way to the middle of the bridge, they found out that it had sunk about six inches. They hurried across this section and then ran to the wayside phone on the east end of the bridge and called an operator at the nearby block tower. Word went out to immediately close the bridge to traffic. The bridge held out but workers couldn't do anything to shore it up due to the high and swift waters. At dawn, Sunday, July 2nd, six of the middle spans collapsed into the roaring Susquehanna River. Quick action had prevented a train from being dumped into the river.

In other areas, the train crews were not so lucky. Near Sunbury, PA., a train with four units and the first three cars went into the stream when a bridge collapsed from washout at it's ends. Near Blacklick PA., another train and the first 15 coal cars went into the drink when a mudslide moved the track leading ont the bridge.

Near Tyrone, Pa., the report was 1,500 ft of No. 1 track washed out, 1,500 ft of No. 2 track washed half way under the track, and No. 3 track completely covered with water and mud and washouts.

Things were summed up by President Moore in his report of Augusts 2nd. Besides the locomotives and cars lost in the crashes, a total of 22 locomotives needed heavy repairs due to water submersion. 1,400 other locomotives had been sitting in water and needed bearing and traction motors rebuilt. Also, 2,291 freight cars also were in water and needed cleaning and lubrication. Many of these cars were from Buttonwood Yard near WilkesBarre PA which, at the height of the flood, was under 20 feet of water.

President Moore estimated it would take over \$14.5 million to rebuilt the track and bridges and \$2.5 million to service the locomotives and cars. He also estimated that nearly \$2.9 million would need to be spent on infrastructure that had been lost in the flood. In addition, he predicted that nearly \$10 million in lost revenue as a a result of the flood till things could be rehabilitated (1972 dollars).

It was an expensive flood for the Penn Central. Sending crews into damaged areas was difficult; roads were washed out and food stores and supply businesses were also gone; therefore crews had to bring everything they needed. Making things more difficult were personal losses sustained by crew members and their families.

The flood was a devastating blow to the Penn Central Railroad, but they did get things back to order in a reasonable period of time...a tribute to the railroad men and women who accomplished the tasts required.

Source material: September 1972 Penn Central Post.



Penn Central RR Class U-30C (General Electric) at Altoona, PA (Fourth Street). Photo by chapter member (Rev.) Frank Oessenich (deceased).

Editor's Addendum:

Hurricane Agnes also severely impacted the "Bedford Branch" which ran south from Altoona and Hollidaysburg to Bedford, PA and thence onto Hydman, PA, and its interchange with the Baltimore & Ohio (now CSX). Flooding washed out parts of the line which actually extended directly into Cumberland at State Line in the PRR days. Penn Centrals deteriorating financial condition prohibited repairs to the line which severely curtailed services, including severance with the Everett Railroad at Everett, Pa., successor to the old Huntingdon and Broad Top Mountain Railroad.

Only a portion of the Bedford Branch remains today, south from Hollidaysburg, PA to the village of Sproul. It is now part of the Everett Railroad Company, the shortline railroad with which it once interchanged at Mt. Dallas, PA.

As the soon-to-be saga of Hurricane Agnes was unfolding, your editor and family, including Chapter Member Mary Josephine Wahl (deceased), were on a trip to Florida which included our first-ever trip south on the then privately operated Auto-Train. While the trip was great in all respects, we found ourselves on the Blue Ridge Parkway enroute home just two days ahead of Hurricane Agnes. On our final travel day, we awoke at a lodge on the mountain along the parkway in pea-soup fog which forced us down off the mountain to the Shenandoah Valley to Interstate 81. In constant rain we started north to Pennsylvania, finally driving out of the weather, and arriving home at the end of the day. However, the following day, it began to rain in Altoona and this continued for a week-plus, resulting in the flooding reported above. In 2011 at this writing, our vacation vehicle, a 1967 Buick Electra, has just accrued 60,000 actual miles on the odometer and is still good as new.

RAILROADER'S MEMORIAL MUSEUM NEWS

Horseshoe Curve National Historic Site has opened for the season effected April 1st, and Railroader's Memorial Museum has opened for the season effective May 7, 2011.

Progress is continuing with the roundhouse project. Advertisements to Bid were published recently with bids to be opened on May 16th. Those bids are under evaluations at this time. Construction should begin shortly thereafter. The roundhouse will be named for Mr. William Henry (Harry) Bennett, an early Master Mechanic in Altoona. As a preamble to this, a bronze tablet has been affixed to the entrance wall of Railroader's Memorial Museum (Master Mechanic Building) honoring Mr. Bennett. Another tablet will be placed on the roundhouse upon completion. The text of the tablet follows:

Juniata Shops

"By 1889, the Pennsylvania Railroad had outgrown the capacity of the shop complex here at 12th street. Soon the facilities here would be complemented by new buildings in the nearby borough of Juniata, not yet a part of the City of Altoona. That shop would also have its own Master Mechanic."

New Shop – New Leadership

"The first foreman appointed at the new Juniata Erection shop complex was William Henry (Harry) Bennett. Born in Canada in 1853, Mr. Bennett rose through the ranks of the Pennsylvania Railroad serving in apprenticeships in Gouverneur, NY and Carlisle, PA before coming to Altoona as a machinist in the local shops."

Juniata Master Mechanic

"On January 20, 1901 Harry Bennett was promoted to Master Mechanic, a position he occupied until December, 1921, when he joined the staff of the Chief of Motive Power. He occupied this post until his retirement on June 1, 1922. His tenure as Masster Mechanic in Juniata saw some of the most rapid growth on the Pennsylvania System."

Note: It is coincidental but interesting that Harry Bennett's birth in Canada was just 4 years after Altoona's founding and approximately one year prior to the successful opening of the new mountain railroad west of Altoona, including Horseshoe Curve.





The cast-iron station sign "Huntingdon" was installed in the lobby of Railroader's Memorial Museum on May 6, 2011 to coincide with the season opening. The sign was previously donated to the museum by David and Virginia Seidel of the Horseshoe Curve Chapter, NRHS. The sign was restored with gold leaf in 2010 by Seidel's nephew, Joseph Dixon of Portland, ME. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. James Dixon of Altoona. The sign was originally cast at the PRR's South Altoona Foundry.



Larry Salon, Executive Director, Railroader's Memorial Museum, accepts the Huntingdon sign from David Seidel, (center) and Joseph Dixon, who restored the sign to original condition (August 2010).



Spring view of Railroader's Memorial Museum.



RAILFEST, an annual event that previously was associated with two days of excursions over Horseshoe Curve, will not be a 2011 activity according to a news release May 16th. Logistical issues and costs associated with leasing a suitable train-set for the weekend are primary factors. In addition, the summer construction of the quarter-roundhouse will make the museum yard hazardous for the time period involved. However, this does not preclude the possibility of special events at a later time.

ALSO

Summer events at the museum include a return of the concert series "Alive At Five" with the following tentative schedule:

"Alive @ 5 summer concert series at the Altoona Railroaders Memorial Museum:

June 11th is the summer kickoff party with Mix94.7 annual giveaway. Immediately following the giveaway we will have 2 local bands. The first band of the day is TBA and following them will be IENEMY to open for Battery, the number 1 Metallica tribute band. Doors will open at 3:00 tickets are \$10 advance/\$15 gate

June 24th is the 80's rockband FIREHOUSE and, opening, will be Altoona's own Flight 19. Gates open at 5:00 Tickets \$10 advance/\$15 gate

July 16th is country Music night TBA Gates open at 5:00 Tickets \$10 advance/\$15 gate

July 30th straight from Pittsburgh is The Clarks with opening band Chris Vipond and the Stanley Street Band. Gates open at 5:00 Tickets \$10 advance/\$15 gate."

For more information refer to the museum's website at www.railroadcity.com.

EAST BROAD TOP RAILROAD EVENTS Visit ebtrr.com for details:

Be an Engineer for an Hour! Must be age 18. See website for details.

See *THOMAS THE TANK ENGINE!* July 1-2-3-4, and July 9-10. Come see Thomas and his friends at the EBT. Advance tickets available.

Fireworks Train – evening run. July 16th.

HIGH IRON UNIVERSITY – a 5 day experience working on the railroad. Limited availability so sign up early!

COMMUNITY APPRECIATION WEEKEND August 13 and 14th. Special Events.

FALL SPECTACULAR October 7-8-9 2011. Always a great autumn experience.

POLAR EXPRESS Trains 2011:

November 25-26-27 December 2-3-4 December 9-10-11 December 16-17-18 December 23rd.

CHAPTER NEWS

Regular monthly meetings continue on the Fourth Tuesday, 7:30 PM in the theatre of Railroader's Memorial Museum.

Summer maintenance projects on rolling stock at Railroader's Memorial Museum will commence soon. Saturday mornings and Monday evenings. Check with Chapter Officers for details. Use 12th street gate.

<u>TWENTY-FIVE YEAR PINS</u> were awarded at the April 24th meeting:

President Francis X. Givler Kevin Burket Paul Williard (Harrisburg) Anna Leopold State Representative Rick Geist Bernard and Carol Linkhauer

Prior 25 year members were:

REG, 2737, David W. Seidel, 1968
93, REG, 3224, Larry G. Mc Kee, 1970
93, REG, 3242, William H. Temple, 1970
93, REG, 6324, M. Richard Charlesworth, 1977
93, FAM, 60398, Toni B. Charlesworth, 1979
93, REG, 10501, Gordon P. Wrenn, 1981
93, REG, 12918, Eugene F. Bearer, 1982
93, REG, 15450, H. Wayne Burket, 1983
93, REG, 15775, Peter J. Hart, 1984
93, REG, 17340, Christopher J. Behe, 1984
93, REG, 19097, Gregory W. Miller, 1985
93, REG, 20343, Dennis E. Walls, 1986
93, REG, 56851, Lou Leopold, 1985 (Deceased)

WELCOME TO NEWER MEMBERS at the April Meeting: David Reigh Robert Speck

MAY 11, 2011 marks the start of the chapters 43rd YEAR!

Chapter Director Dick Charlesworth is operating a bus/train tour to Harrisburg and Lancaster June 11th to <u>benefit Alto Model</u>
<u>Train Museum.</u> At this writing, the bus trip is sold-out but you can always check for last minute cancellations/openings: 814-695-2201.

A Chapter Summer Picnic will be announced later.

THE HENRIETTA ACCOMODATION

In the early 20th century, the Pennsylvania Railroad maintained passenger service on the H & P Branch (Hollidaysburg and Petersburg), New Portage (Junction at Wye Switches), all of which tied into the Bedford Branch (southward to Bedford, PA., [with interchange at Mt. Dallas with the Huntingdon and Broad Top RR] and points south to Hyndman, State Line and Cumberland MD (B&O); in addition, another branch known as the Cove Secondary departed the Bedford Branch at Brookes Mills just south of Hollidaysburg and serviced Roaring Spring, Martinsburg, and Curryville. In these early years, this Cove Secondary terminated in the village/hamlet of Henrietta which had a small turntable. In order to bring patrons into Altoona as well as shop workers for the Pennsylvania Railroad shops, a daily train known as the "Henrietta Accomodation operated for this purpose. The Cove Secondary (PRR) today terminates at Curryville and is now known as The Everett Railroad Company, as is the remaining line of the Bedford Branch which terminates at Sproul, PA.

Your editor recently acquired the following photograph on eBay depicting PRR Class E-5 # 6536 (Built in Juniata 1911). The photograph was taken at the Juniata Locomotive shops. The caption indicates this locomotive (and one other E-5 class) was used on the Henrietta run daily. A review of Pennsy Power I reveals that there were only 12 Class E-5 locomotives built...a transition from the Atlantic Class E-3 to the E-6, the latter of which set speed records. Twelve such units were built between 1910 and 1913 around the same time that the Class K-4 was being developed.



PRR Class E-5 # 6537 at Juniata Shop. One of two of this class used on the Henrietta Local. The following timetable except is from the April 1925 issue, courtesy of Chapter Director M. Richard Charlesworth.

Trains on the (then) Cove Secondary would have stopped at the Roaring Spring passenger station on all occasions. At this writing, the Roaring Spring passenger station is the only surviving Pennsylvania Railroad passenger station in Blair County, from which Horseshoe Curve Chapter operates special occasion excursions, utilizing Everett Railroad Company motive power and crews. Our most popular is the annual Santa Trains in November each year...and Santa Claus approves too!

NEXT CHAPTER MEETING <u>TUESDAY, MAY 24, 2011</u>, 7:30 pm RAILROADER'S MEMORIAL MUSEUM THEATRE

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