



Official Newsletter
of



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

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Chapter meetings are always on the fourth Tuesday of each month at Railroader's Memorial Museum, 1300 9th Avenue, Altoona, PA, beginning at 7:30 PM EXCEPT DECEMBER.

UNDER THE WIRE

by
Leonard E. Alwine

In this issue of Under the Wire, we will take a look at a new (old) piece of Logan Valley (Altoona & Logan Valley Electric Railway) which has recently been preserved. That piece is a plaque (tablet) made in 1912-1913 which documented the Logan Valley as one of the builders of the recently demolished 7th St. Bridge in Altoona.

The saga of this preserved plaque begins back in 1913 when the said bridge was dedicated and opened to traffic. Prior to this date, there had been two other bridges across the PRR tracks at this location: the original was built in 1874, and a successor bridge in 1885 which incorporated steel and wood planks for the deck. Up to this time, Logan Valley street cars could not use this bridge but relied upon the 17th street bridge to the west, to get to the other side of the Pennsylvania Railroad mainline which bisected the city. The new (third) bridge at 7th Street would change all that.

In 1912, the City of Altoona, Pennsylvania Railroad, and the 'Logan Valley' embarked on a joint venture to build a new three lane wide steel and concrete bridge. The old bridge (1885 version) was actually used as a base to mount a traveling crane to build the new bridge super-structure. Afterward, the old bridge was removed from under the new. For the first time, Logan Valley trolley tracks were embedded into the structure and once opened, Logan Valley now had two ways to cross the PRR in Altoona, although they could also cross at the 8th Street *Juniata* bridge (once a separate borough, one mile to the east) which in essence provided three ways to cross the PRR mainline. The new 7th Street bridge was opened on September 20, 1913 and two plaques (tablets) citing the joint venture were dedicated, placed at opposite ends of the bridge (girder) super-structure.

By the year 2000, the bridge was having almost 16,000 vehicles and trucks and buses cross it daily. Trolleys ceased using the bridge with the end of that service, in 1954. A new bridge was planned to replace it in the 21st century due to deterioration.

In 2002, with the support of the Horseshoe Curve Chapter NRHS, I sent a letter to PA State Representative Rick Geist asking for the two plaques to preserve them to display with

the Logan Valley Service Truck No. 18, which the Chapter owned. I was informed that we could have them for that purpose. In 2004, when actual demolition began, I again contacted Mr. Geist, who informed me that Altoona City Hall had come up with other plans for the tablets. A letter and many calls to city Hall finally informed me that they were going to be preserved in a park at the end of the (new) bridge.

In 2005, when the new bridge was opened, no park had been built, although funds were "in place" to do so. One of the plaques was actually given to Mr. George Sheedy, owner of Klesius and Sheedy Heating (Roofing, Heating, Air Conditioning Contractors) because the name of his grandfather, George A. Sheedy (then a City Councilman) was on the plaque. After repeated calls to City Hall, I was told that the other plaque was being restored and would eventually be installed at the yet to be built park.



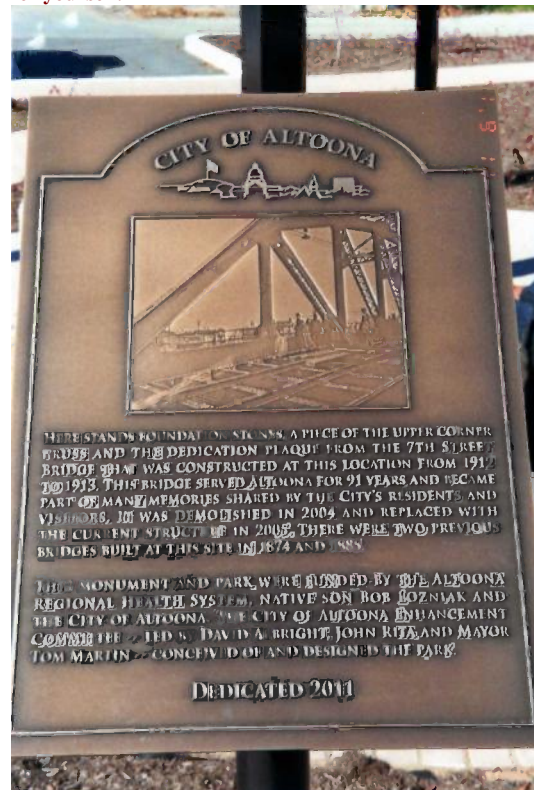
7th St. Park combines stones, steel and plaques from old 7th Street Bridge.

On Thursday, October 27, 2011, the park was dedicated and the plaque, along with several stones from the foundation of the old bridge and a piece of the old bridge were erected in the new park. Also, a plaque telling the history of the old bridge and the persons actually responsible for the design and funding of the project (to build the park) was dedicated. The outstanding feature of this plaque is a copy of a photo showing the old bridge being built in 1912 right after the trolley tracks were laid on the structure.

Photos for this article by Leonard E. Alwine

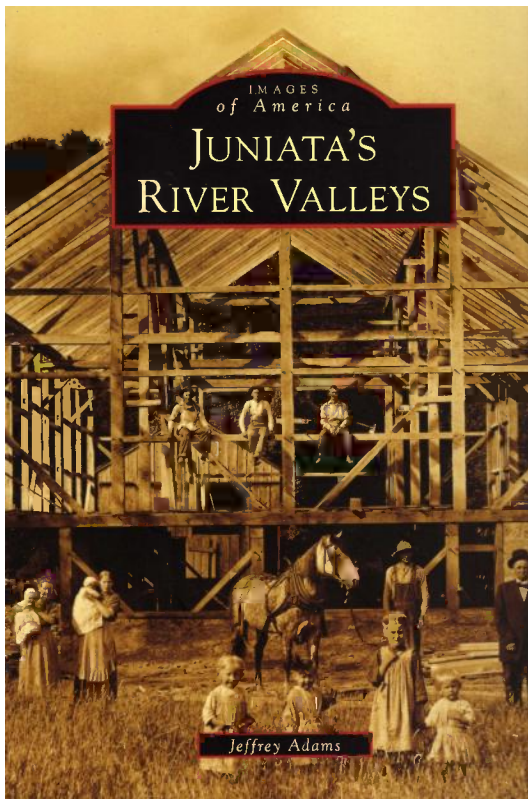


While the project took some time to happen, Altoona now has another small piece of Logan Valley Electric Railway preserved. Lets hope the vandals will not destroy it. If you have a few minutes as you travel, stop and see this history for yourself.



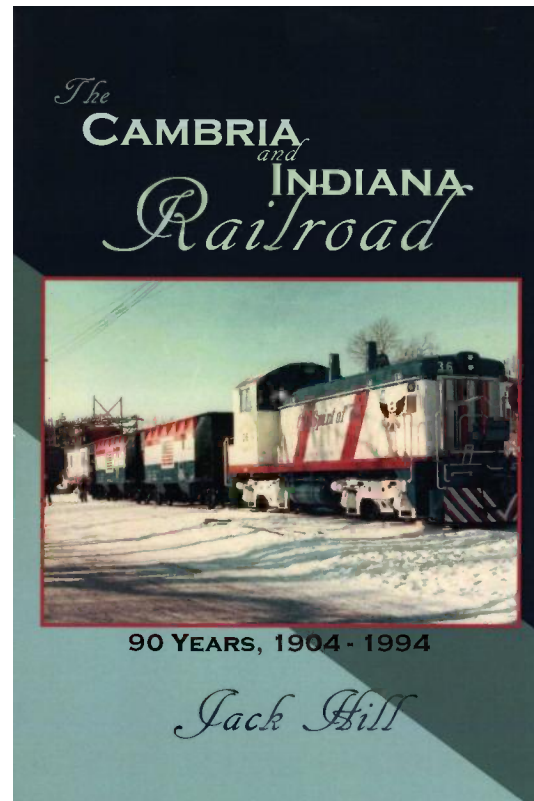
BOOKS WORTHY OF YOUR CONSIDERATION

“Juniata’s River Valleys” by Jeffrey Adams. Adams is a native of Tyrone and has produced yet another masterful work for Arcadia Publishing Co’s *Images of America* series. As might be expected, the book captures some of the early PRR history since the mainline paralleled the Juniata River Valley. One exceptional view is that of a meet with the PRR by the H&BTMRR at Huntingdon. The book is available at area retailers, or at www.amazon.com, or www.arcadiapublishing.com at the price of \$21.99.



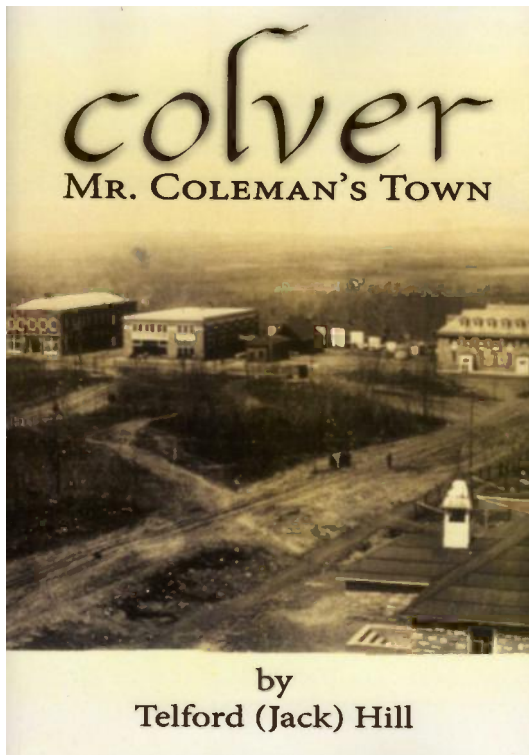
Also

“The Cambria and Indiana Railroad” by Jack Hill. This should be available at area retailers or via www.amazon.com. For more information, go to www.trainweb.org/cambriaindiana, (paperback) similar in format to Arcadia books. *The journey from Colver to Revloc.*



As you can see by the sub-title, the line ended in 1994 with the closing of BethEnergy Mine # 33 in Ebensburg and other coal resources many controlled by Bethlehem Mines, which had their general offices in Ebensburg, PA. In conjunction with this, Bethlehem Steel Corp in Johnstown was closing permanently (circa 1993), a project this editor was involved with to direct services to the affected employees (white collar/blue collar). The book and the webpage include C&I in the steam era as well. A must-have for area railfans, and history enthusiasts.

Bethlehem Steel, as most of us know, was founded by Charles M. Schwab, who maintained his summer estate in Loretto, PA (Cambria County); Railroader’s Memorial Museum in Altoona maintains the second of his two private railcars “Loretto”, whose exterior was restored in 2009-2010 by Horseshoe Curve Chapter, NRHS. Royalties of the Arcadia Book “Horseshoe Curve” by this editor continues to help provide funds for the continued preservation of the railcar “Loretto”. Charles M. Schwab died in 1939 following the great depression. His magnificent estate *Immergrun* remains intact, now owned and maintained by the Franciscan Friars, T.O.R.

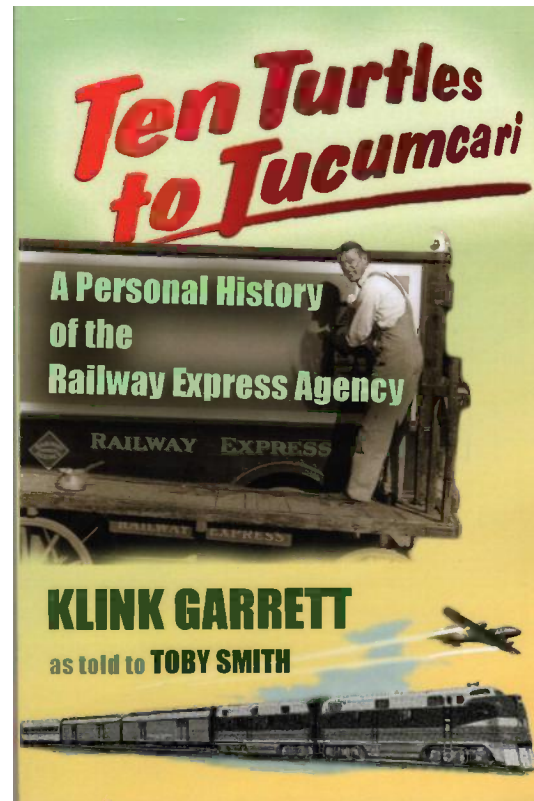


A riveting companion book to "The Cambria & Indiana Railroad" which chronicles the history of the town of Colver in Cambria County, Pennsylvania and the home of the Cambria and Indiana RR and whose life-blood was tied to the mining industry. Colver was a planned community to serve the mines and the railroad, which operated for 90 years between the towns of Colver and Revloc (Colver spelled backwards).

For those of us who live in and around Altoona, Colver and Revloc are within a 20-25 mile radius and most of us have witnessed the decline of the coal industry and the cessation of the railroad which interchanged at Ebensburg with the PRR and its successors, Penn Central and Conrail. Alas it did not last into the Norfolk Southern era, which began locally on June 1, 1999.

In the 1970's, when Horseshoe Curve Chapter was young, we often visited the Cambria and Indiana as well as Colver and Revloc, when S.B. Dixon and J. J. Young were the railroad superintendents (ex-PRR). We enjoyed that memorable occasion of a journey via rail-truck from Colver toward Ebensburg. Unfortunately, we de-railed near Belsano when a bearing failed on the road-railer equipment. But, it was an adventure.

Available via www.amazon.com for \$16.99 + sh. Paperback.



Available via www.amazon.com. No Kindle edition. Paperback.



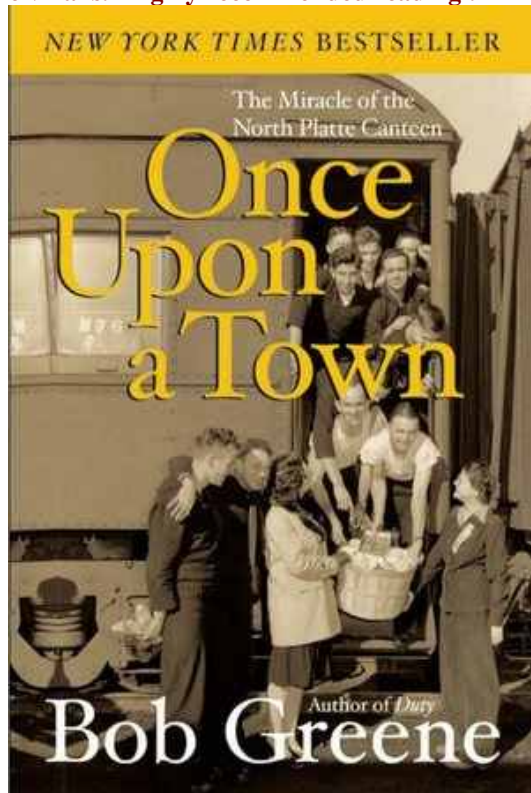
From Editor's Collection

This is perhaps the definitive history of Railway Express Agency as little remains of the company's archives. Had Railway Express survived the end of the passenger train era, it could have been the UPS or FedEx of today.

ONCE UPON A TOWN
by Bob Greene

A spell-binding story about North Platte, Nebraska's effort during WWII to meet EVERY troop train and provide food and refreshment to everyone aboard during a

mere ten minute stopover. This was a remarkable effort during WWII rationing for civilians. Highly recommended reading !



Available via amazon.com, ebay and any major retailer for about \$11.00 or less.

CHAPTER MEETING Tuesday Nov 22, 2011

Most of the evening involved critiquing of the Chapter's Annual SANTA TRAIN operations and ticket sales. As most know, the trips operated on two weekends, November 19, 20, 26, 27, operating from Roaring Spring to Martinsburg and return (although, at meeting time, the second weekend remained to be done. Ticket sales were in excess of 3,000 and represents a doubling over the 2010 operations by adding Sunday operations on the Everett Railroad, and the train was sold out. We received a major assist from Railroaders Memorial Museum this year as they handled on-line credit card orders for us.

Discussion included the annual election of officers. With one exception, the current slate of officers was re-elected for the 2012 term. National Director, Dick Charlesworth stepped down from that position after decades of service to the Chapter.

Following the meeting, we adjourned to King's Restaurant for pie and coffee and more

talking....as usual, which is representative of the great fellowship we experience at every meeting.



l-r: Jeff Holland, Bill Burket, Karin Givler, Bill Temple, Dick Charlesworth, Frank Givler



r-l: Larry McKee, Dave Reigh. Bob Speck, Frank Givler

ANNUAL CHAPTER CHRISTMAS DINNER

Was held on Saturday, December 10, 2011, at the Geeseytown Fire Hall, HQ for our Chapter Treasurer, Denny Walls, who is also the Geeseytown VFD Chief. The dinner was GREAT (Turkey and Beef) with all the trimmings and cake for dessert ! The Hall was decorated appropriately and centerpieces were actual railroad kerosene lanterns (illuminated too!). Denny also displayed some of his vintage railroad memorabilia on a display table which added to the theme of the evening. Unfortunately, everything was inventoried and everyone was checked going out the door...ha ha.

Geeseytown Fire Hall has been a venue for many of the chapter's social events during our 43 years of operation including the Chapter's 40th anniversary celebration. We have enjoyed the hospitality and good cooking for over four decades...and we thank them very much.



Lisa & Mark Yingling, Ron Givler (l); Frank, Karin and Mrs. RuthAnn Givler (r).



Friends from The Alto Model Train Museum Assn.



Joe DeFrancesco's program on RailCamp.

Joe DeFrancesco presented a digital slide program and commentary on past RailCamp experiences, highlighting the trip to Ely, NV at the Nevada and Northern Rwy which was most informative.

Dave Seidel presented a "vintage" slide program on the Harrisburg/Enola facilities from the end of the PRR into early Conrail highlighting the end of the electrified railroad

era. This program will be digitized at some future time.



2011 SANTA TRAIN PROGRAM

A big THANK YOU to everyone who assisted this year, not just on the train and in the station but the behind the scenes tasks leading to the actual trips. This included preparing over 1700 treat bags for the children, as well as duck food bags for the children who visited Roaring Spring Dam opposite the station; ticket sales, and, especially, preparing and mailing all those return letters from Santa to the children. Kudos to the staff and crews of the Everett Railroad Company for their kindness, courtesy and efficiency. Coordination of most of these efforts was under the leadership of outgoing Chapter Director, Dick Charlesworth.

The Santa Train attracts not just adults with children, but the adult population as well. One only needs to observe the faces and the packed seats to realize this is a highlight of the year for the passengers and we receive many complimentary remarks from passengers. The effort is intense for those who are involved in preparations and operations, but the appreciation is apparent from our guests and we are still accident-free.

And, our biggest THANK YOU goes to, of course, SANTA CLAUS !



Santa visited each child, collecting letters and furnishing treat bags.



Nicholas Martino assisting Santa Claus collect the Letters to Santa.

The 2011 Santa Train operations included church choirs on each trip which certainly adds to the festivities. For the first time, we added Sunday trips to the Saturday Schedule which was a challenge, but the train was sold out once again.

MESSAGE FROM CHAPTER PRESIDENT, FRANK GIVLER

Many thanks to all who helped in any manner to further the chapter cause in 2011. We made significant progress in upgrading our equipment and will strive to continue that in 2012. We also enjoyed another successful year with our Santa Train week-

ends, and I would give extra thanks to Dick Charlesworth and Virginia Seidel for their efforts with the phone calls and ticket sales; without their endless hours of answering the phones and returning calls ,we would not enjoy the success that we have. To my painting and mechanical crew (Amalgamated Metal Finishers and Pigment Applicators, Local 1361) , thank you too. Our equipment looks nicer than it has in years.

CHRISTMAS NRHS

As most members know, each year Horseshoe Curve Chapter sponsors a tree at the local Ramada Inn to benefit local charities. Ramada has a program each Christmas season where organizations can participate by having a small tree displayed for a monetary sum that benefits local charities and the Chapter has participated each year. Following is our representation in Ramada's Gallery of Trees. The tree was located near the entrance to the Courtyard Restaurant. And, as you all know, the Ramada Inn in Altoona is noted for their huge Christmas Tree and superior decorations in the Courtyard Restaurant.



NORFOLK SOUTHERN-ALTOONA

NSRR has been working most of 2011 making significant infrastructure changes to signaling and interlocking systems between CP ANTIS (east end of Altoona) and SLOPE to the west, a distance of about 5 miles. And, just short of SLOPE in

downtown Altoona, ALTO Tower will be de-commissioned removing the last operating signal block tower between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh, and the operators job with it. ALTO has been a fixture in downtown Altoona for well over a century and it will be a sad change to the Altoona landscape. Plans for the tower are still tentative.

In a nutshell, the Pennsylvania Railroad's Position Light Signal System is and will be a thing of the past. New pedestal and cantilever style signal bridges have been erected, all of which utilize the more modern Safe-tran color light systems. We wonder about the newly erected westbound signal bridge slightly west of ALTO which is hidden from view by the 17th Street highway bridge, cab signals notwithstanding. Most interlocking switches have been replaced and re-configured which will be a major improvement. But, we cannot help but notice that February 1, 2012 will mark the 44th year since the Pennsylvania Railroad ceased to exist...and...younger railfans of today did not have the opportunity to witness the Standard Railroad of the World in operation.



Replacing SLOPE interlocking 9-23-2011. Photo by Jamey Rickens; used with permission.



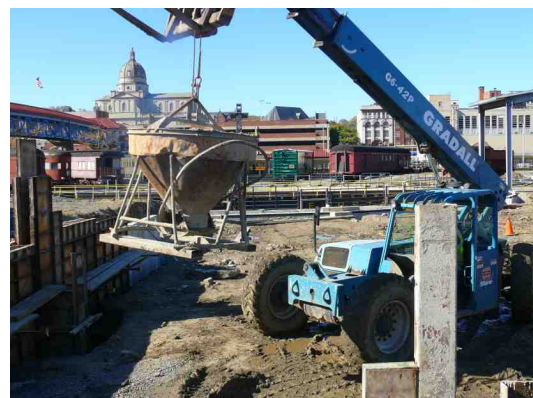
CP-WORKS cantilever bridge, 4th St., Altoona awaiting completion...and a swing 90 degrees out over the Main, October 25, 2011.



ALTO Tower Oct 23, 2011 & military humvees train.

RAILROADER'S MEMORIAL MUSEUM ROUNDHOUSE CONSTRUCTION

Construction of the new roundhouse at Railroader's Memorial Museum in Altoona has been progressing at light-speed during the months of November and December. The project has been blessed by excellent weather and steel erection has progressed rapidly. Following are a series of views on the project. Of interest, excavation of the footers occasionally revealed old foundations and utility tunnels for the predecessor Pennsylvania Railroad shops and facilities which offered a glimpse into the heritage of the site. This same phenonema was demonstrated during excavation for the turntable in 2006, an exercise in industrial archaeology and history-unearthed.





GG-1 No. 4913 sits on the 105' turntable during construction.

The roundhouse will incorporate laboratory space for Penn-State Altoona's new four year curriculum on Railroad Technologies and will complete the electrification system for the turntable. The adage about 'history repeating itself' given the rich railroad heritage this site encompasses, is evident here. As most of us know, the PRR established its base of operations, and later, shops, on this site when they founded the town of Altoona.



Mr. Larry Salone, Executive Director of Railroader's Memorial Museum reports that the roundhouse is about 60% complete as of December 31, 2011; basic completion is forecast for the end of February 2012 and full completion by April 2012. Following full completion, the components of steam locomotive class K-4 No. 1361 will be moved into the roundhouse from the adjacent shop (formerly Memorial Hall) and re-assembly will begin. Thus far, there are no major issues with the locomotive, and the tender is ready for painting.

HAPPY NEW YEAR – 2012 !



ALTO TOWER January 3, 2012, replete with Christmas wreaths and candy canes which are illuminated at night. (New signal foreground)

