

Official Newsletter  
of



NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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[www.hscnrhs.org](http://www.hscnrhs.org)

**Spring 2020**

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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 10 days after the PRR-NYC merger), evolving from the Altoona Railway Museum Club (1965-1968). We meet on the **FOURTH** Tuesday of each month except December, at the Railroaders Memorial Museum, Altoona, PA, at 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 President and 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](http://www.nrhs.com).**

## **INSIDE THIS ISSUE**

**by Leonard Alwine, Editor**

With April almost upon us, it is time to get out of the house and get railroading once again. By mid April, the museum and the Horseshoe Curve will be reopened and chapter member Joey DeFrancesco will be the new Executive Director of that organization. It could be a “new” beginning for the local area in railroad history. The chapter has also once again decided to sponsor some of the costs involved with the Alive at Five concert series held at the museum in the summer months.

The Everett Railroad will soon have it's Easter Bunny Train and also many other special train rides this year. See chapter member Nick Martino for a schedule of events.

The Rockhill Trolley Museum will also hold an Easter Bunny trolley ride April 4th and then be opened May 23rd for the summer. Also in this issue in the Under the Wire column, is the beginning of a story about Car #315 from the museum when it sat in Altoona for a few days 57 years ago. Museum President and The Retriever Editor, Joel Salomon is going to supply an article and photos of 315's restoration efforts for an upcoming summer issue of The Coal Bucket.

The Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art in downtown Altoona is displaying a collection of photos by William H. Rau until May 9, 2020. And of course, the BIG NEWS is that the East Broad Top Railroad will once again fire up and run sometime this summer for a few special runs and hopefully be back on schedule to run the full summer in 2021.

The Alto Model Railroad Club has settled into it's new home across from the Railroader's Museum on 8th Avenue and is planning the Spring Sale at the Convention Center in March.

Also in this issue is a story which I found about the Toonerville Trolley after the last issue's article, I will copy for all to see that there was an actual real car for this trolley right here in Pennsylvania. Too bad it was not saved.

I would also like to thank Dave Seidel and Joe Harella for their contributions to this issue. I wish more members would take advantage of the new Horseshoe Curve Memories column and submit your special memories.

And finally in this issue are two listings in the “In Memory” section. While neither was an actual member of our chapter, they both helped quite a bit.

George Kelcher III was the man who actually got the ball rolling in preserving Altoona's railroad heritage. It was through his efforts back in the 1960's that resulted in the forming of our chapter and also the founding of the Railroader's Museum.

The other is “Fluffy”, my cat who was always sitting on my lap helping me type the pages for The Coal Bucket and our recent 50th Anniversary History book. Even before I became the Editor, he would always help me with the Under the Wire articles. He suffered a stroke shortly after the last issue went to the printers and passed away before Thanksgiving. He was of great moral support to me.

So as you can see there is a lot to do so let's get back to railroading!

## **RUNAWAY TRAIN**

**by Dave Seidel**

At the November meeting of the Horseshoe Curve Chapter we all enjoyed viewing the film “Unstoppable”. While we were all familiar with this film, it was particularly interesting on this occasion to have it projected in the theater of the Railroader's Museum in Altoona. The museum's theater is equipped with modern technology which includes surround sound which enhanced the dramatic portions of the film. In addition, our interest is particularly heightened because of the film's fast pace and our familiarity with the film location in nearby Tyrone, PA.

What readers might not realize is that Altoona had it's own unstoppable train in 1975. According to the Altoona Mirror issue of either January or February 17, 1975, we note the following: “Penn Central Brings

Runaway to Safe Stop” - A runaway Penn Central Maintenance of Way Train composed of two diesel units and 32 cars enroute from Columbus, Ohio to Enola and loaded with ribbonrail caused considerable excitement on the railroad mainline. Office workers and residents in the downtown area saw the train speeding through the yards and the snow swirling high above the cars.

Penn Central officials said the 54 car train had been proceeding East and shortly before leaving the Horseshoe Curve, parted after the 32nd car. The air brake system became inoperative and the engines and cars began to pick up speed down the mountain. Amtrak Station attendants and waiting crewman at the station were told to evacuate the trailer-station in case the train derailed in the vicinity.

Next, a track was cleared through the Altoona area and the East Altoona Yard to Bellwood, and arrangements were made to have two diesel units to run in front of the train to attempt a hook-up.

This operation, plus track retarders, enabled the train to be brought to a stop near Homer tower, between East Altoona and Bellwood.

#### ADDENDUM:

As an aside to this report, founding chapter member, Mary Jo Wahl was reporting to work at the 11th Avenue office of Mid-State Bank when the train passed by her location that morning. While there were no follow-up reports in the newspaper, sources at that time indicated that the train lost it's brakes above Horseshoe Curve (cause unknown) although it was severe winter conditions at the time.

The noteworthy circumstance is that the train did not derail on the Horseshoe Curve. Speculation at the time was that the heavy weight of the train (ribbonrail) stabilized the movement of the train with a low center of gravity.

## **FATAL RAILROAD ACCIDENT**

**by Dave Seidel**

A railroad accident which happened between Cresson and Gallitzen on Friday, December 13, 1861 was doubly sad due to the circumstances involved. It turns out that the man killed was done so by another train which also had his brother in the cab.

The story was printed in the Altoona Tribune newspaper page 3 on Thursday, December 19, 1861. It is reprinted below for your reading.

FATAL RAIL ROAD ACCIDENT.--Michael Burgoon, a fireman on one of the freight engines on the Pennsylvania Rail Road, was killed between Cresson and Gallitzen, on Friday morning last, under the following circumstances: He had descended from the engine to recover a pick axe which had accidentally fallen from the tender; and while in the act of doing so, the Fast Line West, the approach of which he had not noticed, came upon him, the cow-catcher striking and mutilating him in a shocking manner, causing instant death. Not the least singular and painful incident connected with the sad occurrence is the fact that a brother of the unfortunate man was fireman upon the very engine which caused his death. Burgoon was a married man, and the father of six children.

## LOCAL YARD NEWS

by Joe Harella

### HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS

#### REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

NOVEMBER 26, 2019

The regular monthly meeting of the Horseshoe Curve Chapter NRHS was held on November 26, 2019. The meeting was called to order by Pres. Frank Givler at 7:30 P.M.

A social meeting was held in lieu of our regular meeting and so the regular order of business was suspended. We did however hold a short discussion on the following:

1. Mr. John Wall, our guest speaker for our Christmas dinner, will have his book on hand "Raymond Loewy", and it will be for sale. The regular price is \$39.00, however at our dinner the price will be reduced to just \$30.00.
2. Pres. Givler will be driving the REA truck in the Christmas parade on Thursday, December 5<sup>TH</sup>. Dick Charlesworth and Joe Harella along with Cindy and Sherry from the museum will be walking along side of the truck handing out candy. The candy will be provided by the chapter, Dick and Joe.
3. Denny Walls would like everyone to know that he still has some PRR calendars for sale for anyone that is interested. The cost is \$13.00.

The members then enjoyed a social meeting which included the movie 'UNSTOPPABLE' starring member Larry McKee and we also enjoyed coffee and a variety of doughnuts. Thanks goes out to Ron Givler for the coffee and to Dick Charlesworth and Larry McKee for the doughnuts.

Ken Bitten who is the new director of train operations and volunteers at the Everett Railroad also attended the meeting. Ken addressed the group, giving us some of his background and also some of his plans for the future of the Everett.

The meeting adjourned at about 9:45 P.M. - *20 members Present*

**ATTENDANCE**- Larry McKee, Dave Seidel, Virginia Seidel, Denny Walls, John Fisher, Paul Campbell, Mike Walls, Dan Summers, Ron Givler, Frank Givler, Bob Airhart, Larry Lear, guests Gary and Debrah Thomas, Dick Charlesworth, Don Goebel, Jim Caum, Chuck Swenson, Ken Bitten, Joe Harella

JOSEPH HARELLA

RECORDING SECRETARY

HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS

## **HORSESHOECURVE CHAPTER NRHS**

### **REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING**

**DECEMBER 7, 2019**

The regular monthly meeting of the Horseshoe Curve Chapter NRHS was canceled due to the Christmas holiday. The members and guests enjoyed a wonderful turkey and roast beef dinner complete with all of the trimmings including dessert. The dinner was held at the Geeseytown Fire Hall and was catered by Snappy Chef.

A special thank-you goes out to Karen Givler who coordinated the setting up of the tables. She was also responsible for creating the holiday center pieces which adorned each table.

The guest speaker for the evening was Mr. John Wall. Mr. Wall gave an excellent talk on the life and accomplishments of Raymond Lowry. Mr. Lowry was credited for his design work on the PRR's K4, S1 and T1. He also designed many products for many industries all across the country. The talk was very interesting.

The evening was very enjoyable to all. Pres. Givler then wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

JOSEPH HARELLA

RECORDING SECRETARY

HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS

## **HORSESHOECURVE CHAPTER NRHS**

### **REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING**

**JANUARY 28, 2020**

The regular monthly meeting of the Horseshoe Curve Chapter NRHS was held on January 28, 2020. The meeting was called to order by President Frank Givler at 7:29 P.M..

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved by Ralph Simpson, second by Bob Airhart, the motion passed.

The financial statements were read by Treasurer Denny Walls. Paul Campbell made a motion to accept the financial report, Gary Price second, the motion passed.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

1. President Givler asked the members if we should support the museum again this year by sponsoring the "Alive at Five" summer concerts? The donation would be for five hundred dollars. Dave Seidel made a motion that we sponsor the concerts again, Jeff Holland second, the motion passed.
2. Car Insurance- Pres. Givler informed the members that the insurance for the cars that are in the museum yard is paid in full for this year. The cost is \$1,560. The members then held a discussion on the insurance for the Walters. It is covered by a separate policy.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

1. Rail Camp- Dick Charlesworth said that he knows of a possible candidate for rail camp this year. More information on this later.
2. Nick Martino reported on his studies and also the railroad club that he belongs to.

## **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

1. Pres. Givler brought in a picture out of the newspaper of Rose Tower which was built in the late 1940's. Unfortunately, the tower burnt down in 1953.
2. Dave Seidel brought in a painted picture that his nephews painted of the REA truck parked next to an Everett Railroad passenger car. The picture was very nicely done.
3. Denny Walls said that he has heard rumors that NS wants to tear down several buildings and possibly MG tower. He also said that the F-Units from the business train have been sold.
4. Dick Charlesworth reported that WVAM's three broadcast towers may soon be reduced to one. New technology will allow the station to eliminate two of the towers. Dick said the towers are considered to be a landmark and they can be seen from the train coming down the mountain. Dick also had a bottle opener to show everyone from the Statler Hotel in New York City. The hotel was later renamed the Hotel Pennsylvania.
5. Len Alwine reminded everyone that he has created a new segment for the Coal Bucket entitled "Memories of Horseshoe Curve". Anyone who would like to share their experiences at the curve, please write something up and give it to Len.

Bob Airhart then made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ralph Simpson second, the meeting was adjourned at 8:06 P.M.- 20 Members Present.

Attendance: Jeff Holland, John Gardner, Dave Seidel, John Fisher, Larry McKee, Mike Walls, Paul Campbell, Gary Price, Denny Walls, Larry Lear, Dick Charlesworth, Dewayne Miller, Lenny Alwine, Ralph Simpson, Bob Airhart, Dana Martino, Nick Martino, Will Teeter, George Stanley, Joe Harella

JOSEPH HARELLA  
RECORDING SECRETARY  
HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS

## **HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS**

### **REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING**

**FEBRUARY 25, 2020**

The regular monthly meeting of the Horseshoe Curve Chapter NRHS was held on February 25, 2020. The meeting was called to order by Pres. Frank Givler at 7:24 P.M..

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved by Gary Price, second by Ron Givler. The motion passed with one correction. Dick Charlesworth informed everyone that the candidate that he has for rail camp is for next year, 2021.

The financial statements were read by Treasurer Denny Walls. Paul Campbell made a motion to accept the financial report, Gary Price second, the motion passed.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

1. Model Train Show- Dick Charlesworth informed everyone that once again the Alto Model Train Association will sponsor a model train show on March 8<sup>TH</sup>. The show will be held at the Blair County Convention Center. Admission is \$5.00

### **NEW BUSINESS**

1. New Executive Director- Joe Defrancesco informed everyone that he has been elevated to the position of Executive Director of the Railroader's Memorial Museum. Joe said that he has many people to thank for inspiring him over the years. He credited the Horseshoe Curve Chapter for many of his accomplishments. He also spoke about the East Broad Top railroad. He said that finally the right people are in place, and that we should see some great things happening down there.

### **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

1. Member Larry McKee reported that the January issue of the "Pennsylvania Magazine" contained black and white photos of the East Broad Top.
2. Member Paul Campbell said that he has an old railway cart that was used to haul mail bags, and he would like to give it away. Frank said that it could be a project for us to work on, but it would have to be brought into the museum first.

Paul Campbell then made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Bob Airhart second, the meeting was adjourned at 8:07 P.M.- 24 Members Present.

We then sat back and watched two movies. One was on the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the other one was primarily about the Sunbury and Williamsport areas of the state, both were very interesting.

Attendance: Dick Charlesworth, Jeff Holland, Len Alwine, Larry Lear, John Gardner, Gary Price, Gary Clare, Don Goebel, Ron Givler, Paul Campbell, Dan Summers, Mike Walls, Frank Givler, Denny Walls, Wil Teeter, Bob Airhart, Ralph Simpson, Dave Seidel, Joe Defrancesco, Larry McKee, Jim Caum, John Fisher, Karen Givler, Joe Harella.

JOSEPH HARELLA

RECORDING SECRETARY

HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS



## **INTERCHANGE TRACKS**

**by Leonard Alwine**

### **EAST BROADTOP RAILROAD TO STEAM AGAIN**

On a cold February day, the new owners and officials of the dormant East Broad Top Railroad announced that the rail line will soon be up and running again. Hopes are to get certain parts running for special times this year and then run a full schedule next year.

The new owners, East Broad Top Foundation, Inc., hope to bring back to life the railroad as more entertainment venue for the area while preserving the National Historic Landmark status.

The new board members include: Chairman - Henry Poser III from the Iowa Interstate Railroad; President - Charles Wickliffe Moorman IV, former CEO of Norfolk Southern and Amtrak Railroads; General Manager - Brad Esposito, former manager of the Buffalo and Pittsburgh Railroad; Office Manager - Dave Brightbill, former Office Manager of the EBT and the Treasurer of the new organization; Secretary - Lawrence Biemiller, a former Senior Writer for the Chronicle of Higher Education, and Board Member - Bennett Levin, owner of the Juniata Terminal Co.

On hand for the announcement were Joseph Kovalchick, the son of Nick Kovalchick, who purchased the EBT from the Rockhill Iron and Coal Company in 1956. The Kovalchicks purchased the line to preserve it. Even though they were in the scrap business their thoughts were never to scrap it but preserve it as an example of a narrow gauge railroad still basically intact at the time of its purchase. It ran trains on August 13, 1960 as part of the Orbisonia Rockhill Furnace Bicentennial. They then tried to keep the trains running as a business and maintain the heritage of the line. It was a hard thing to balance but it kept going for many years and that helped preserve all the buildings and rolling stock that were still there. It is like a gem in time just waiting for the next generations to find and explore.

This should be a boon to the local economy of Altoona. Just think now we will have two steam train rides in our area, The Everett in Hollidaysburg, and the EBT in Rockhill.

If local organizations would work together (IF), just think of the possibilities. A tourist company could provide a bus, a local hotel as a place to stay, and for a weekend railfans could come to town Friday night, stay at the hotel, be picked up Saturday morning and taken to the Everett Railroad for a ride, then taken to the Horseshoe Curve for a tour followed by a tour of the Railroader's Museum and a light dinner there, then bussed back to the hotel. Then on Sunday morning, picked up again and bussed to Rockhill for a ride on the EBT and in the afternoon go across the street to the Rockhill Trolley Museum to ride vintage streetcars - from open ones of the 1890's to modern light rail vehicles from the 2000's. Then bussed back to the hotel to either stay the night or go home, having seen and ridden many different types of vintage rail vehicles all within 60 miles of Altoona.

If such an event were to happen here, I am sure it would help all participants involved. But as I stated earlier, the big IF is whether the different groups want to work together. Time will tell! I just hope that if it does happen sometime in the future, that they will remember they heard it first here and give me a free ticket for one of the rides!

## **HORSESHOE CURVE MEMORIES**

Dave Seidel sends us his special memories of the Curve for this issue. He says he really enjoys going to the Sheetz store at 58th Street and purchasing a can of soda and an egg salad sandwich and then going up to the Curve. He takes a lawn chair and sits topside watching and listening to the trains going up and down the slopes while enjoying his "lunch".

He also remembers the special event for the 150th Anniversary of the Curve and helping to preserve mile-post 242 about 300 feet west of the Curve. (See attached article from the Altoona Mirror)

He has many other memories also but these stand out to him as special.



# A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

## Historic mile marker replaced at Horseshoe Curve

By RICK BOSTON  
For the Mirror

The long and storied history of the Pennsylvania Railroad has produced priceless memories for those who worked on it, and it left a legacy of artifacts to help current and future generations understand and appreciate the effect the railroad had on the city of Altoona.

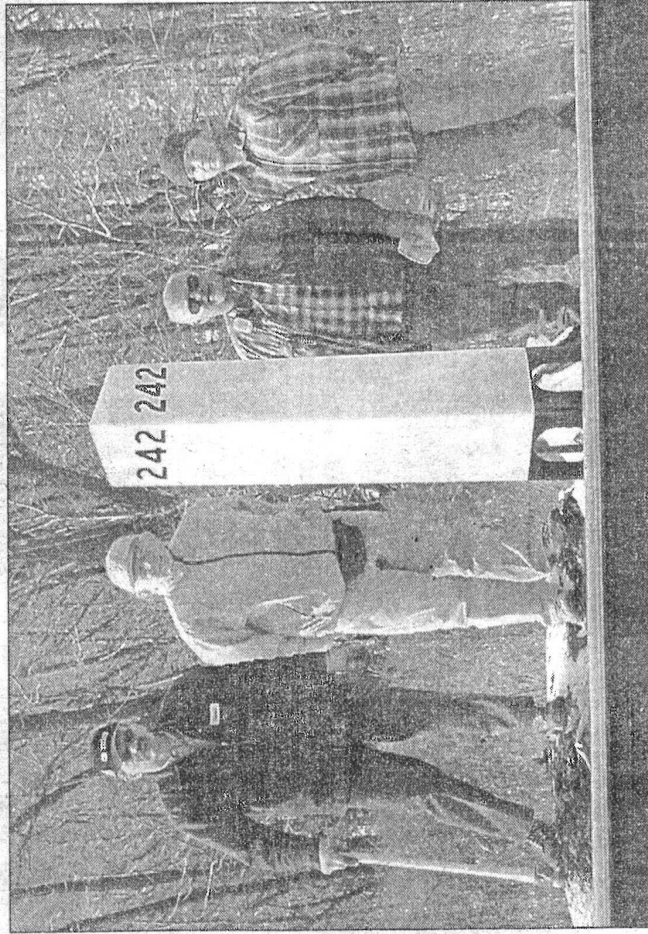
Visitors to the Railroaders Memorial Museum walk into a world that long has been gone but not forgotten by those who lived in it. A trip to the Horseshoe Curve provides visitors with a look at a railroad wonder, the PRR's direct through route between Harrisburg and Pittsburgh.

Through photographs, old railroad equipment and artifacts of things that lined the rails for more than 150 years, one can view those treasures of the past and imagine what life was like for those who were there.

Each artifact has a story to tell, and while some are more high profile than others, none is any less significant.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the opening of the complete rail route of the PRR from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh by way of the Horseshoe Curve, and to celebrate that important part of rail history, a group of railroad enthusiasts has replaced a mile marker post that designates the distance of the Curve between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

Keystone Restoration and Preservation Inc. gathered at the Horseshoe Curve Dec. 13 to replace Milepost 242, which sits about 300 feet



Courtesy photo

The installation of Milepost 242 at the Horseshoe Curve was performed by Keystone Restoration and Preservation Inc. members (from left): Frank Givler, Dave Seidel, Pat McKinney and Patrick McKinney.

west of the apex of the Horseshoe Curve.

The original post, which was made of cast iron and cast at the PRR's South Altoona Foundry, disappeared some years ago.

What happened to the original is somewhat of a mystery. It could have been stolen or simply deteriorated from the acid of the cinders from

decades of steam engines.

Why it's gone is no longer impor-

tant. What is important is that a replacement milepost — a tiny piece of railroad operations that most people would give little thought to when discussing rail history — has been placed in its original location.

Pat McKinney of Altoona was one of those involved with replacing Milepost

242, and he said although it may not seem like much, mileposts play an important role in railroads.

"A milepost is just what it says. It marks the distance you are from one place to the next," he said. "They are important because if there is trouble along a line, you need to know where, and a milepost tells you that."

McKinney said replacing Milepost 242 was important for rail historians because it marked a major step in the PRR, the opening of the Horseshoe Curve.

Dave Seidel said Milepost 242 provides a link to the origins of the PRR.

"This link was a big step for the PRR," he said.

To replace Milepost 242, the group enlisted the help of craftsmen from Norfolk Southern's Juniata Locomotive Shop. A 400-pound replacement marker was fabricated from steel and made from the original PRR standard plan. It was placed in the position of the original by using old Pennsylvania Railroad engineering valuation maps.

McKinney and Seidel said their interest in replacing Milepost 242 comes from a desire to see the rich history of the PRR preserved.

"I love the history of the industry and its impact on Altoona's history," Seidel said.

And where does a milepost, a little sign that tells you how far you have come play into that history?

"It's a big part of the PRR," McKinney said, "and replacing 242 is a nice way to recognize the 150th anniversary of the Horseshoe Curve."

## UNDER THE WIRE

by Leonard E. Alwine

Most people would agree that August 1954, marked the final trolley cars riding rails throughout Altoona and in fact, they would be correct. That was when Logan Valley had the last trolley car run in Altoona and Hollidaysburg and then switched to busses on all routes.

But, nearly ten years later another trolley car rode the rails through Altoona on it's way to Rockhill Furnace, PA. That car was a Chicago, Aurora & Elgin Electric Railway Car #315 and as it made it's way through Altoona by the PRR and for a few days stayed in the Juniata yards.

It was heading to Railways to Yesterday in Rockhill Furnace, PA after traveling from Chicago where it sat almost a year wanting to travel to it's new museum. On May 31, 1963, it made it to Altoona. Later, it went to Mt. Union where it was put on truck dollies and went by highway to Orbisonia.

The car was the last of five such wooden cars built by Kuhlman Car Company of Cleveland, Ohio for the railway. The car weighed 50 tons and could travel at speeds of 90 miles per hour. It had high empire vaulted ceilings and inlaid mahogany interior.

After years of service at Rockhill, #315 was taken out of service a few years ago and put into the shop for a complete "frame off" restoration. All the old paint and the modernizing things were removed as well as replacing any wood that was rotten. Work has progressed to the point that rebuilding is now being done. All the hundreds of parts restored and made to original again are now coming back to the car with hopes of getting it completed in a few more years. It takes a lot of time with all volunteer work mostly done on weekends a couple times a month.

Once done, it will again ride the rails from Rockhill, two miles out the tracks to Route 522, in all it's splendor of days gone by. More about this car one it's done.



Car #315 as it looked when arriving at Rockhill Trolley Museum after the repainting



Car #315 in the Fall being used during EBT Fall Spectacular Event



Car #315 being used in the Winter for the Santa Clause Event at the Museum



Car #315 at a special "Night Time" photo shoot for Members' Day



# Toonerville Trolley

By Connie Bretz

One of the popular silent film comedies shown was the Toonerville Trolley Series based on the newspaper cartoon, created by Fontaine Fox in the 1920s, which was syndicated in more than 300 newspapers.

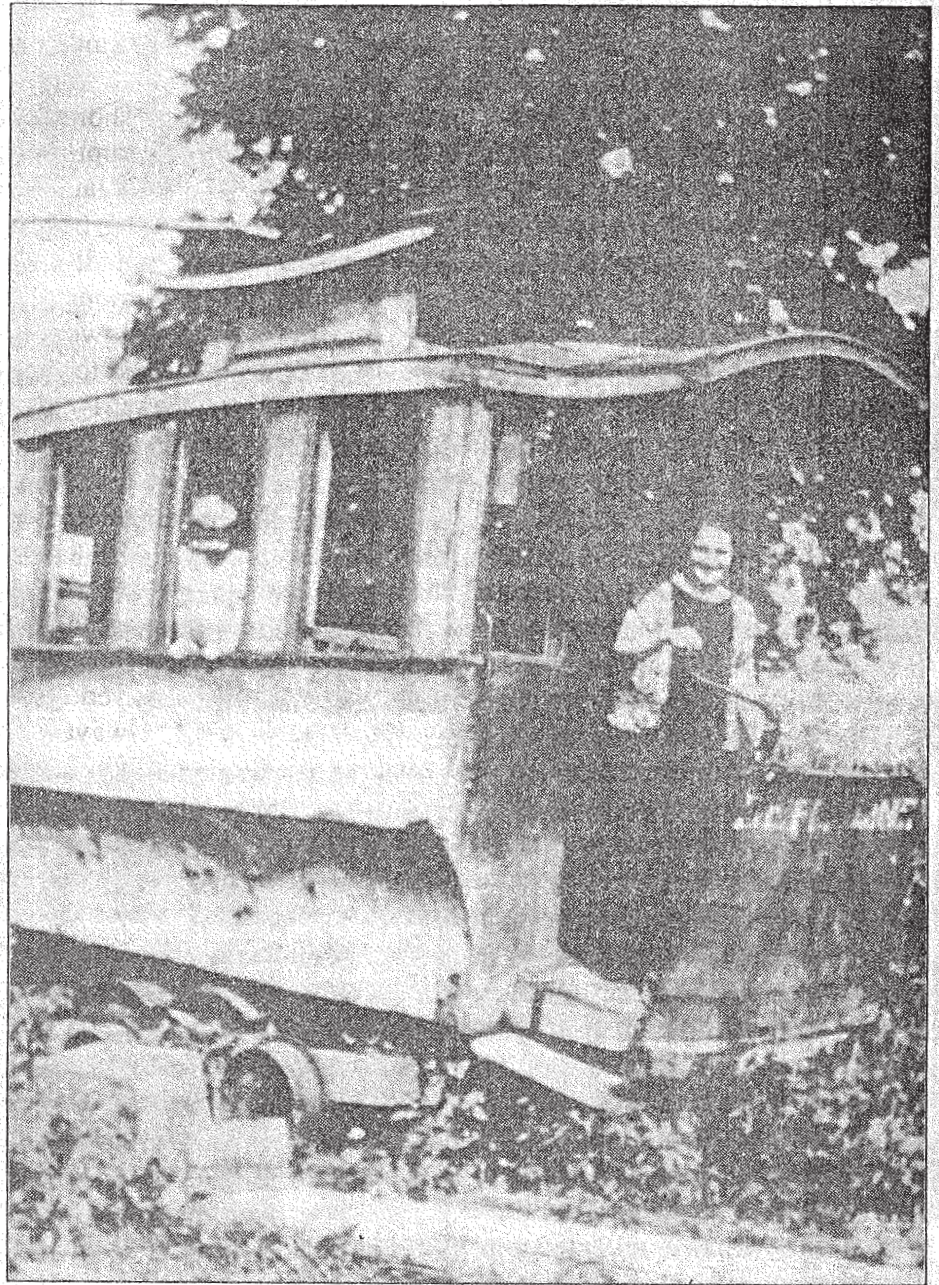
The Betzwood, Pa., studio, which produced the series, was the world's largest and best-equipped studio in 1912. Later the studio moved to Philadelphia; fire later destroyed it.

I have researched the films for many years—also, the whereabouts of this trolley today. The trolley which was the series' namesake was a humorous-looking, crooked vehicle with a bent antenna atop. The trolley was a prop on which many people from suburban Philadelphia posed.

Reeves Wetherill of Philadelphia, writing about the Toonerville Trolley, said: "When I was a kid we often went to Mill Grove Farm in Audubon, Pa. My grandfather owned it. By car we crossed the river at Betzwood and often saw movies in the making.

"After the Betzwood studio failed, I used to ride my horse from our farm and wander over the abandoned studio property.

"One day, down by the Schuylkill River, I sadly discovered the old, original Toonerville Trolley on its side and rotting away. Later, I took my father to see it, but



it was too far gone, so we had to let it rust."

Luckily, even though it no longer exists, there are still photos of the comical trolley used as a prop in the old-time movies.

Above: Photograph of the Trolley. When not in use, local people posed with the trolley. Photo courtesy Connie Bretz, Historical Society of Phoenixville.



# AMERICA'S OLDEST RAILROAD TUNNEL

by Leonard Alwine

Right here in our backyard, so to speak, is a famous railroad tunnel which most people living in the area have never seen. That is the Staple Bend Tunnel of the Old Allegheny Portage Railroad located a few miles from Johnstown, Pennsylvania. It can be accessed from Beech Hill Road by riding bicycles or walking about two miles on the old right of way to the tunnel entrance.

The tunnel was built as part of the Pennsylvania Main Line of Public Works back in 1828 as a system that linked railroads of that time with the canals of the area which went from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh.

The main railroad was the Philadelphia & Columbia which ran from Philadelphia to the Susquehanna River. From there a canal system was built to Hollidaysburg on the river to the foot of the Allegheny Mountains on the east slope. From there a system of inclines and railroads took the canal boats over the 36.7 mile route of the Allegheny & Portage Railroad to the west slope where the canal system once again took over to Pittsburgh.

Work on the system began in 1831. It was opened to traffic in 1834. Over the mountain ten sections of tracks and inclines, five on each side, lifted the canal boats by use of stationary steam engines and ropes to the summit, 2,334 feet above sea level.

Four miles east of Johnstown, at the first incline plane, the route was shortened by two miles by tunneling the first railroad tunnel in America, 901 feet through the mountains.

The tunnel work began in 1831 and was completed in 1833 at a cost of \$37,500.00. The tunnel was built with an arch of 19 feet high and 20 feet wide to accept the canal boats now riding on flat railroad cars. The inside was lined with cut stone and each end had stone portals built in Roman Revival style with Doric plasters flanking the arch. These portals actually amounted to almost one half of the tunnel cost.

The tunnel and the railroad lasted less than 25 years when the Portage Railroad was rendered obsolete by the completion of the PRR all rail route across the state in 1854. The PRR purchased the Mainline of Public Works in 1857 and dismantled the system.

In 1967, the tunnel and the Portage Railroad remaining footprints were put on the National Historic Civil Engineering Landmarks. In 2001, the National Park Service took over the sites and restored the closed tunnel by reopening it and regrouting it to preserve it.

The tunnel can be reached by walking or riding bicycles over the two mile right of way from Beech Hill Road. Along the right of way the old stone sleepers of the railroad are still visible. Once at the tunnel you can walk the 901 feet through the tunnel to the other end and then a few more hundred feet on the right of way.

My wife and I went to this tunnel on October 30, 2001. The bicycle renting place was not open so we decided to walk in. After all, two miles is just a few minutes on the Interstate! Well walking two miles took longer than we thought and then through the tunnel without flash lights. Once on the other side it was getting near supper time which in late October means it is getting darker outside. We started back and til we got to our car it was dark out. It was a nice fall day so it did not get too cold until we arrived there. I have wanted to go again but I cannot walk as far now, so maybe we will never get there again, but it was nice to see the first tunnel for railroads built in America still here after such a long time.

It is a place that all those younger bodies should take a summer day and travel to and see. I recommend taking flash lights and drinks with you!

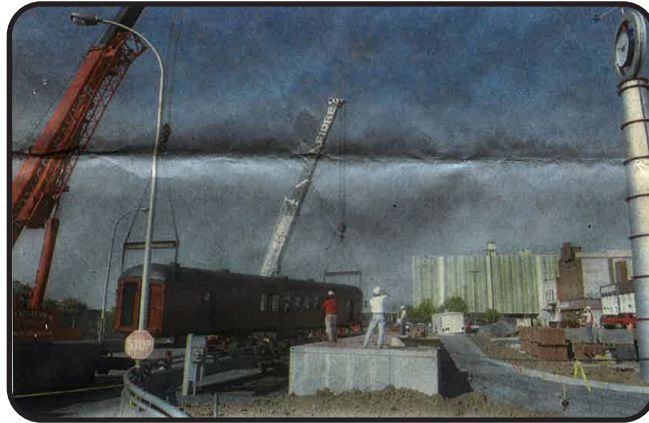


Restored Staple Bend Tunnel Entrance, October 30, 2001

- Take US-22 West
- Take the PA-271 exit toward Mundy's Corner/Nanty Glo
- Keep right at the fork in the ramp and merge on PA-271 South
- Go approximately 5 miles and turn left onto Mineral Point Road (PA-3030)
- Go approximately 2 miles and make a right on Beech Hill Road and proceed over bridge
- Go through railroad underpass; parking lot for Staple Bend Tunnel will be located on the right

## **A LOOK BACK** **by Leonard Alwine**

Remember when the 10th Avenue Expressway was closed June 11, 1997 so that a 70 foot long former mail railcar could be placed at the Heritage Plaza in Downtown Altoona?



Cranes lifting the car from the lowboy truck  
to display place

50 YEARS AGO - Clair E. Lockard was given a three year contract to operate the Horseshoe Curve Inn and act as the Curve caretaker. (He predicted then that in the future an elevator would be installed to take visitors to the top.)

The Bishop Guilfoyle High School Band played and Big John Riley was the M.C. at the Pleasant Valley Shopping Center as Santa Clause landed by helicopter and Logan Township Fire Trucks took him on a short parade.

Mrs. W. Carl Piper of Altoona won a new 1970 Plymouth Belvedere from Valley Motors in a contest by Gable & Co. Department Store which had over 200,000 entries.

A total of \$82.00 worth of pennies was gathered from a wishing well at the Horseshoe Curve and given to the Senior Citizens Activity Center, by the Lions Club of Altoona who had installed the well a year and a half prior. (Since this well was torn out at the Curve remodeling, I wonder where the bronze plaque ended up?)



Photo of the well showing the bronze plaque

25 YEARS AGO - Stroehmann Bakery in Altoona baked it's last loaves of bread and closed it's doors after laying off 112 employees. Later it was torn down to be made into a parking lot for the hospital.

Lakemont Park loaned one of the Leap the Dips cars to Kennywood Park near Pittsburgh for the summer.

## IN MEMORY

GEORGE C. KELCHNER III

July 8, 1942 - November 24, 2019

Mr. George Kelchner was not a member of our NRHS Chapter but he certainly had roots in the beginning of that Chapter and the Altoona Railroader's Memorial Museum.

Mr. Kelchner graduated from Altoona High School in 1960 and Penn State in 1964 with a degree in History. He took a job as Director of the Blair County Tourist and Convention Bureau.

In 1965, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was looking for a site for the state railroad museum and he tried to get it located here in Altoona. That attempt was unsuccessful and it was built in Lancaster instead.

In an attempt to built a museum in Altoona, Mr. Kelchner put a small ad in the Altoona Mirror inviting people interested in doing this to a meeting. Six people showed up for that meeting, mainly from a group called the Altoona Railway Museum Club. That group eventually became the Horseshoe Curve Chapter of NRHS and in 1967 Mr. Raymond Garvin came to Altoona to replace Mr. Kelchner as head of the Blair County Tourist and Convention Bureau.

Mr. Kelchner continued to work in Altoona at Curry Cannon & Company and eventually Sky Bros. Later in life, he worked for Kraft Foods of Pittsburgh. Upon retirement he moved back to Altoona.

Had it not been for him, perhaps we would not have a museum or a chapter here in Altoona.

Mr. Kelchner never married or had children. He is survived by a nephew, David Wingert of Lebanon.

May you rest in peace, George.

FLUFFY

June 15, 2007 - November 23, 2019

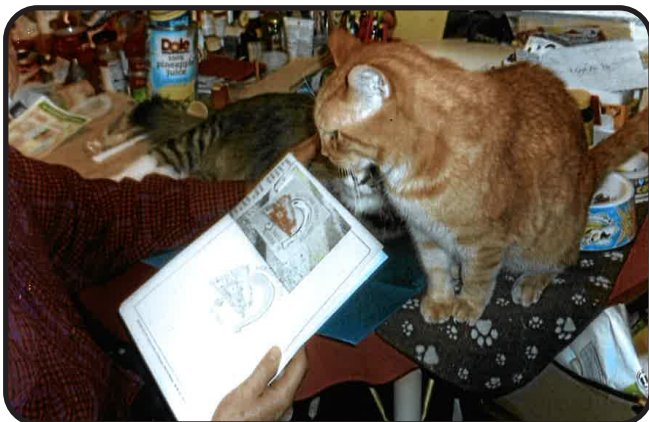
Fluffy was not an official member of the chapter although he did "help" with the making of The Coal Bucket. He was always on my lap or on the typewriter pushing the wrong keys while I was working on the issues.

He came to us as a rescue cat in June 2007 at about the age of two. He lived with us 13 years along with his two rescue brother cats who came later when Fluffy had been here with us for about eight years.

He passed away shortly after the Winter issue of The Coal Bucket went to the printers.

He is survived by his "brothers" Tiger and Mittens and is greatly missed when typing.

May you rest in peace, Fluffy.



Fluffy helping pick out the cover for the Chapter's history book February 24, 2018  
Tiger resting in the background. They were a big moral help to me, Leonard Alwine, Editor.