

Official Newsletter
of



NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

Summer 2019

CHAPTER OFFICERS

PRESIDENT: Francis X. Givler, Jr., 114 Scott Avenue, Altoona, PA 16602

NOTE: **time-sensitive correspondence should be sent to this address**
ottodocfac@atlanticbb.net

VICE-PRESIDENT, CHAPTER DELEGATE TO NRHS & WEBMASTER: Joseph A. DeFrancesco
1266 Lincoln Avenue, Tyrone, PA 16686
jdefrancesco5@verizon.net

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

TREASURER: Denny Walls, 123 Sandcastle Lane, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648
d63w@aol.com

CHAPTER HISTORIAN/EDITOR: Leonard E. Alwine, 212 N. 11th Avenue, Altoona, PA 16601

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.

AN ALMOST RAIL TO TRAIL PROJECT

by Leonard E. Alwine

There has been a lot of action around the area lately over “Rail to Trails” projects. Taking old railroad beds and making them into hiking and biking trails. By doing so they create places for exercise and also help to preserve some of the history of the railroads of the area.

In our area they have created these trails from Water Street to Williamsburg and maybe a little further. We also have a trail in the Nanty Glo area and one along the old Portage line from Cresson to Foot of Ten and another section of that roadbed about two miles along and through Stapel Bend Tunnel near South Fork.

We also have proposed trails being considered from Bellwood to Pinecroft along the old Logan Valley Trolley line and one from Bellwood to Blandburg along the old PRR branch line.

The purpose of this line is to highlight another proposed trail on a line that never really had any rails laid located in South Central Pennsylvania.

That rail line is the Old South Penn Railway which had beginnings way back in the 1850's. Back then there was competition between the PRR, NYC, and B&O Railroads to become the main transportation system for goods and passengers from New York City to Chicago. The three railroads kept lowering rates until none could really make any money doing this service.

During the 1870's, NYC's Mr. Vanderbilt and Pittsburgh Steel Magnets Carnegie and Frick decided to build a new railroad right through the state and the PRR territory. The new line would be 49 miles shorter which meant quicker and cheaper service.

Construction of this line (proposed to cost \$15,000,000.00 in dollars at that time) began in 1883 after two years of surveying. By 1885 the road bed was 60% complete and the 9 tunnels along the route were all started. Some had entrance way stone cased by that time but none were holed through.

It was then that J.P. Morgan stepped in and used his finance logic to explain that neither the NYC or the PRR could survive this venture. In the Fall of 1885, both lines agreed with Mr. Morgan terms and construction was abruptly stopped.

About 50 miles of the South Penn right of way was sold to the Southern Pennsylvania Railway and Mining Company, a PRR controlled operation. The remaining 100 or so miles were sold to the Fulton, Bedford, and Somerset Railway, a subsidiary of the B&O Railroad.

In 1899, The Pittsburgh, Westmoreland, and Ligonier Railroad, a lumber hauling line, did use a section of the South Penn right of way and one tunnel, the 80 foot Quemahoning was completed. This line lasted until about 1917.

Nothing more was done with the right of way of the other tunnels and they were left to return to nature.

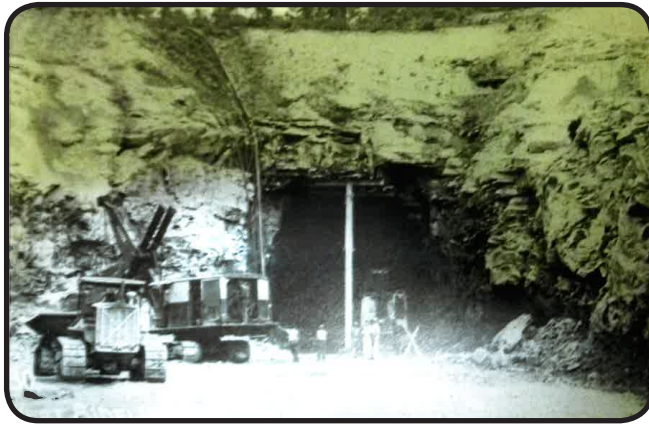
Fast forward to the late 1930's when the state of Pennsylvania was looking to build a better all weather highway across the state. The WPA and the PA Highway Department did a lot of surveying and planning and decided to use most of the old South Penn right of way for this highway. The PRR and the B&O sold their shares of the right of way to the new Turnpike Commission of \$1,000,000.00 each. Construction began October 26, 1938 and by using 155 different contractors following the same designs, the new road was opened to traffic October 1, 1940. The completed 160 mile road used 7 of the old South Penn tunnels after holing them through.



The Sideling Hill Tunnel as found by the Turnpike Surveyors in 1938.



Construction of the road and work began on the tunnel in the Fall of 1938.



Digging out the Sideling Hill Tunnel begins the next Spring and some bracing had to be employed as work progressed.



The entrance to Sideling Hill has been built and the road bed for the turnpike leveled.



In the Summer of 1940, the roadbed has been cemented and the tunnel entrance completed with the exhaust fan second story built.



The completed road and tunnel opened for traffic in the Fall of 1940.

Things worked fairly well for the new road until the late 1960's. By then the turnpike was being used by more vehicles in one day than had used it in a year at the beginning. The problem was that the 4 lane turnpike had to be reduced to 2 lanes at each tunnel. This produced a bottle neck and backed up traffic at the tunnel entrances. Also, the traffic inside the tunnels was two way with only a couple of feet between lanes.

To eliminate this problem the turnpike commission decided to double tunnel several tunnels and build a bypass road around two of the tunnels. This was accomplished by 1968-70 and the problem was cured.

But this left several miles of road and two tunnels near Breezewood abandoned and they sat there that way for about 50 years until today. That portion of the old turnpike is now being proposed as a trail project. Since it never really had any rails laid on that area I would call this an "Almost Rails" to trails project.

This author would like to really see this happen because of the many times I have traveled through these tunnels, especially the Sideling Hill Tunnel. I have rode, driven and walked through this tunnel.

In the late 1950's, my father started a trucking company and during the Summer I would ride with him in the trucks. I always liked the tunnels as they were exciting to me. Later, when I began to drive that excitement turned into a nerve wracking event as you tried to keep going straight in your lane with traffic coming at you in the opposite direction only a couple of feet away.

The in 1970 while visiting a cottage with my brother-in-law I had the chance to walk through this tunnel. His father's cottage was only about 300 feet into the woods from this old turnpike. One day we hiked through the woods to the turnpike and then to the Sideling Hill Tunnel. We then walked through it and then back to the cottage. I think the tunnel was about one mile long so it was an all afternoon hike. Of course, I was much younger then.

What amazed me at that time was that it was all there, just sitting empty of traffic. Many years later these tunnels were sealed off to keep people from entering them.

A while ago a friend of mine gave me some photos he had of this tunnel and also ones he had taken in 2007 when he visited it again before it was sealed. That started me reminiscing and resulted in this article.

There is an effort to get these tunnels opened again and make this a trail project. It may take a long time and lots of money to do this but it will result in a very interesting "rails" to trails path.



Sideling Hill Tunnel as it looked in 2007 after vandals have painted things and stolen some items.



Inside the second story fan room with huge fans still there in 2007 used to rid the vehicle exhausts when in use.



A beautiful sunset taken from inside the Sideling Hill Tunnel in 2007. Perhaps this is not the sunset on this tunnel but just the light at the end of the tunnel for future use?

But even more than the proposed trail on this part of the turnpike is the recent news that the turnpike is being sued by the trucking associations.

The turnpike commission makes payment to Penn Dot in the amount of 100's of millions of dollars per year. This is then distributed by Penn Dot to help transit systems and rail lines in the state of Pennsylvania.

Recently, several trucking associations have sued the turnpike commission opposing the use of these tolls collected to fund non-turnpike related items. They feel that lower tolls could be charged or better maintenance could be instituted on the turnpike roads.

Not knowing the outcome of this lawsuit, the Turnpike Commission has curtailed payments to Penn Dot for the past 3 fiscal quarters. Without these funds, Penn Dot will not be able to hand out monies as before.

This could and will have an impact on local transit authorities around the state. Also it will impact Amtrak as well. Without these funds, the Pennsylvanian, a train running from Pittsburgh to New York through Altoona could be affected or even stopped. One half of the funds given to Amtrak to keep this train running come from the turnpikes payments.

Who would have ever thought that 150 years later a railroad that really never laid down a rail could possibly have such a big impact on today's local rail transportation system.



West bound Pennsylvanian
arrives at the Altoona Station
(21 minutes late) on March 30, 2019

READ ANY GOOD BOOKS LATELY?

by Leonard E. Alwine

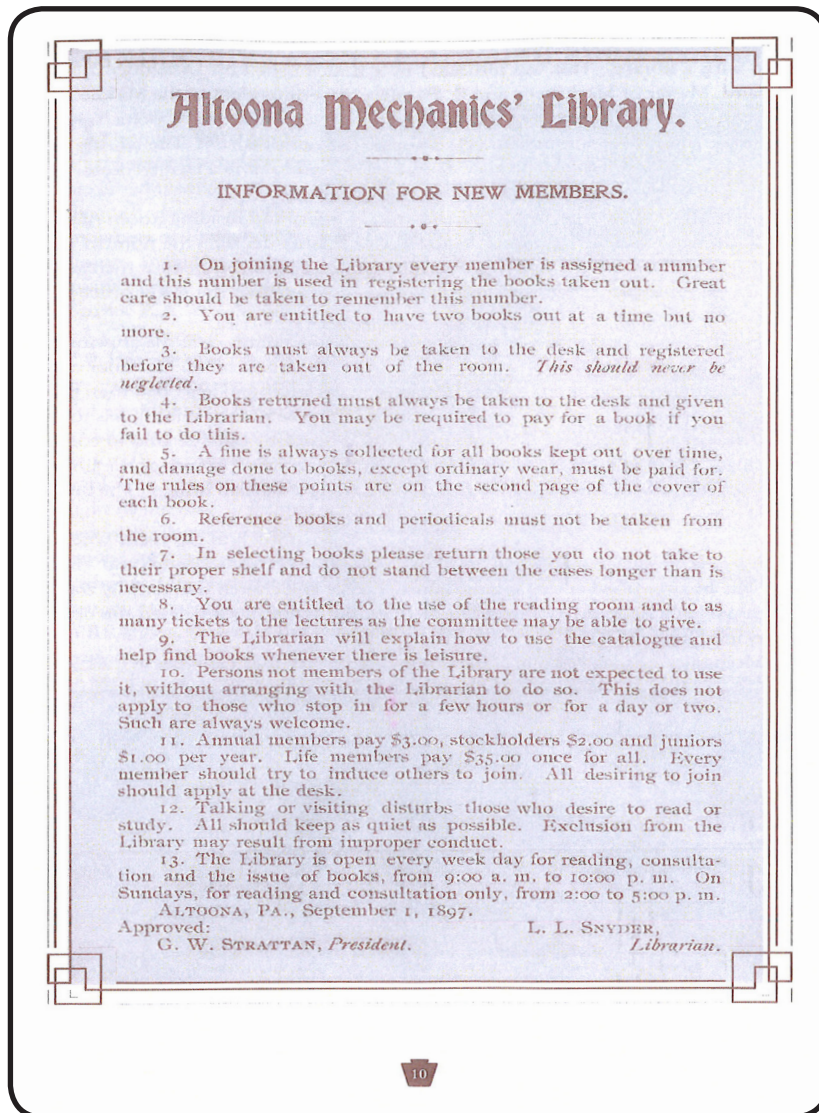
Long before the days of “Google” and having information about anything as close as your finger tips, libraries played a very important role in “self” education and pleasure.

They were the place where you could learn about different subjects and also read stories just to have a quiet time alone to let your mind drift into fantasy land.

Not every town had a library. Smaller town depended upon traveling libraries built into buses and trucks to visit them on a regular schedule. Of course, it costs money to build and stock libraries and finding funding was usually a problem for smaller towns.

In Altoona we are lucky that a large library is still here and many people and businesses still support it. But where did it come from?

On August 7, 1858, Thomas Burchinell organized a meeting of concerned members of the Pennsylvania Railroad and community members to consider ways and means of establishing a library and providing for a place of lecture courses for the railroad employees and interested citizens. Mr. Burchinell, who was the foreman of the PRR Carpenter Shops, was elected President and in September 1858 The Mechanics Library and Reading Room Association was formed.



A copy of the original
operating by-laws of the
Altoona Mechanics' Library
- Collection of Leonard Alwine

Originally the primary purpose was to benefit the PRR employees. It was also opened to employees families and for a membership fee, also to the citizens of the public.

The library opened in the upper room of the PRR Motive Power Office located along 11th Avenue in downtown Altoona. It was opened with a supply of 200-300 books, most donated by Ambros Ward from his private collection. J.B. Brown and Richard Gill also acquired books of scientific, historical, and political works and donated them to the library.

From 1860 - 1885, the library was housed on the second floor of the PRR Altoona train station. This building was not a good location due to the noise from operating trains right outside.

By 1885 the library's collection of books numbered close to 65,000 and it outgrew the station site. The library was then moved into the Logan House first floor which was located near the train station in 1885. While this location provided more and quieter room it still was an operating hotel and not the ideal location for a library.

In 1900, the PRR purchased the Old Presbyterian Church along 11th Avenue and after some remodeling moved the library there June 9, 1900.

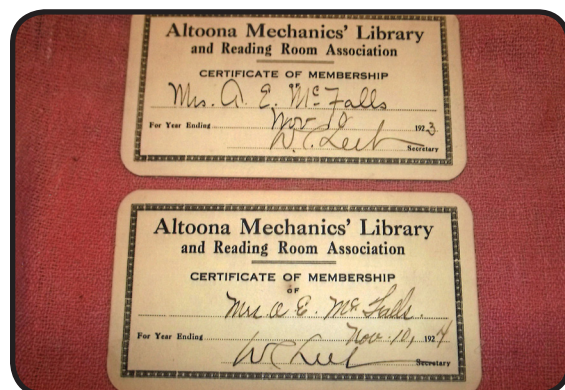


The first real home of the library along 11th Avenue in downtown Altoona.

The Mechanic's Library was one of the first and largest technical libraries in the country. Many people came to Altoona just to read and study the books located there. Many of the books were also printed in German and French languages to help the early settlers learn about railroading and engineering. The library also housed a large collection on local history and geology surveys.

Things went well for about twenty five years but by 1926 the PRR had to shut down the library due to the building become "unsafe" to use. The PRR tried different options to keep the library intact and finally the Altoona School District agreed to "temporarily" house the collection. The library was moved the Roosevelt Junior High School and the PRR gave the school district \$20,000.00 to help it establish a free public library.

Cards from the Mechanic's Library from 1923 and 1924 from the collection of Leonard Alwine



About one half of the collection was placed in the Roosevelt building on shelves and the other half stored in the basements of Roosevelt and Lincoln buildings.

The new public library continued to grow with the addition of many books that were not railroad or engineering related. The original PRR books were somewhat outdated by this time anyway.

In 1953, the Mechanics Library and Reading Room Association was officially dissolved. In April 1953, The Altoona School Board decided to disperse most of the PRR technical and engineering books. About 30,000 were given to the PRR library in Philadelphia and the Penn State University Library and the Carnegie Library in Pittsburgh. These were the most used and best books in the collection. The remaining 16,000 books were sold to a book dealer and a local book sale held by the Salvation Army. This sale brought in \$17,000.00 for the local public library.

The free public library continued to use the Roosevelt location with over 83,000 books on the shelves but non railroading subjects. It had become a library for the citizens of Altoona.

After 43 years of “temporarily” housing the library, in 1968-69 a new library building was constructed at 17th Street and 6th Avenue. In a unique move, the Roosevelt ninth grade class held a “book walk” on May 23, 1969, and hand carried the entire collection of the library from those temporary shelves across the avenue to the new shelves at the library building’s new home.

So if you have the time to read a good book, stop by the library in Altoona and while there realize that it all began with the PRR in downtown Altoona 161 years ago.

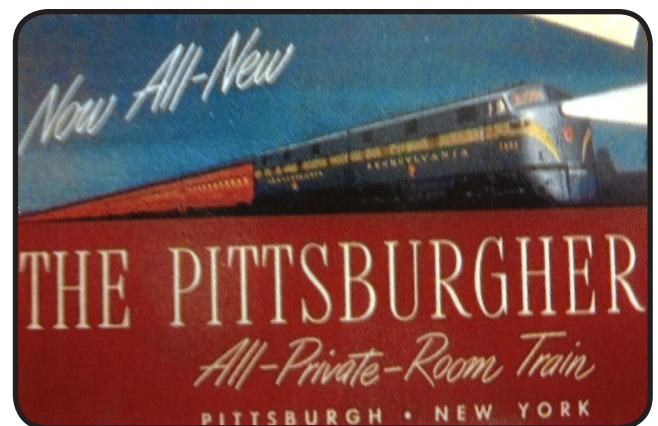
EDITOR’S NOTE: Information for this article was gleaned from a history of the Altoona Library written by Erin Powers and Patricia Shirley in 2006.

THE “NITE” TRAIN **by Leonard E. Alwine**

There was a train that went through Altoona everyday that very few people or rail fans ever saw. Actually there were two trains that ran (#60 east and #61 west) for 40 years from January 14, 1924 to September 13, 1964 and even the high class passengers carried on these trains for the most part never even saw the scenery that they were passing.

These trains catered to the business executives who traveled between Pittsburgh and New York City back in the days when business was conducted in person. The passengers using these trains were the industrial officers and the Wall Street banking people who needed to complete deals with each other before the days of airline travel and computer emails.

The trains were called “The Pittsburgher” and they were an all first class extra fare very limited stop consist.



The all Pullman train #60 left Pittsburgh at 11:00 pm and arrived in New York at 8:24 am. Train #61 left New York at 11:24 pm and arrive in Pittsburgh at 9:15 am.

The consist was K-4 powered followed by six pullman cars with a diner car added in Harrisburg for breakfast each way. At East Liberty, PA the power was changed from steam to electric and vice versa. The only other stop along the 439 mile route was at Latrobe or Greensburg, PA, IF a member of the Mellon banker family needed a ride.

The train eventually grew in size to 10 sleepers, a dinner, bar/lounge car and a head end baggage car for mail hauling. During the 1950's usually 138-158 passengers used the trains daily.

In the late 1950's, 22 heritage sleeps were built for use on these trains which were now pulled by new dark green E-7 diesels and GG-1s, on the electrical side from Harrisburg to New York.

The only tragic footnote to the service provided by these trains was when a fire began in one of the sleeper cars. Pullman Porter Samuel W. Robinson got all the passengers safely out of that car and into adjacent cars as the train stopped in South Fork for the fire company to extinguish the fire. Sadly the next day, Mr. Robinson died of smoke inhalation.

By 1964 there were only 36-49 passengers using the train each day. Service on weekends and holidays was stopped. The train was still making a profit for the PRR due to the mail hauling on the head end which was bringing in \$400,000.00 annually.

But it wasn't enough to keep this special service train running. Even with the addition of 5 coaches for the World's Fair travelers in 1964, the end was within sight.

The mail service was merged into "The Pennsylvania Limited" west) and "The Manhattan Limited" (east) during the summer months. The PRR filed papers with the PUC to stop the train July 29, 1964 and they were approved September 9, 1964. September 13, 1964 the last Pittsburgher trains ran with only 5 sleepers and one diner car.

With that came the close of the Nite train service, across Pennsylvania and around the Horseshoe Curve, the train most fans never saw.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Information for this article was gleaned from a history by Dan Cupper.

CHAPTER MEETING REPORTS BY JOE HARELLA

HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS

REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

APRIL 23, 2019

The regular monthly meeting of the Horseshoe Curve Chapter NRHS was held on April 23, 2019. The meeting was called to order by President Frank Givler at 7:30 P.M..

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved by Ron Givler, second by Gary Price, the motion passed.

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

OLD BUSINESS

1. Email to Josh Guerney- Pres. Givler emailed Josh to see what his intentions are. Josh said that he does not plan on coming down to see the Duquense at this time. If he does not make a decision soon, the car will be scrapped.
2. Memorial Plaque- Pres. Givler informed everyone that the plaque has been finished and all of the names have been added. He brought the plaque with him so everyone could take a look at it.
3. Cumberland Bus Trip- Dick said that he has about 40 people signed up so far. He and Joe Harella attended a Cumberland Chapter meeting to hear a report on the engine #1309. The engine is almost ready for a test run. Dick also sent an email to Brad Bender of the Cumberland Valley chapter in Chambersburg offering them what tickets we have left.
4. Roaring Spring Historical Society- Since the window blind project was donated to the society, and since we were going to make a donation towards that project, Dick made a motion that we give the proceeds from the bus trip to the Historical Society, Don Goebel second, the motion passed.
5. Speeders- In an attempt to get our speeder up and running, Dick Charlesworth sent a text to Dr. Andy Mulhollen asking him if we could work on the speeder in the round house? He said for us to check with Joe Defrancesco, but he has no problem with it.
6. Keystone Restoration and Preservation- Joe Defrancesco has now completed all of the paper work necessary for KRAP to turn over all of its' assets to the Horseshoe Curve Chapter NRHS.
7. Museum Roof Repairs- In a new development, a very generous party has stepped up and pledged to make a large donation towards the roof repair. However, another project, the K4 tender, is in need of \$6000 to finish it. Dick Charlesworth made a motion to spend up to and not exceed \$6000 to finish the tender, Ron Givler second, the motion passed. Joe Defrancesco said that all sandblasting will be done outside of the roundhouse. Dick Charlesworth also suggested having a plaque made up recognizing that the chapter helped to fund this project.

8. Film Conversion- Jeff Holland spoke to the members about converting a number of railroad films over to digital. He said that we have about 7000 feet of film all together. The cost to convert all of the films would be about \$3500. He then explained what happens when you convert films to digital. Most of the films that we have are railfan films, and a lot of people have taken pictures of the same thing. He recommended not to convert those. The Huntingdon and Broad Top film though would be the one to keep. The cost to convert it would be about \$600. This film may have already been converted. Dick will try to find out . We will discuss this at the next meeting.

NEWBUSINESS

1. Volunteer Accident Insurance- Pres. Givler said that this insurance policy now has a lower premium of \$300. He asked the members if we should keep this insurance? A brief discussion was held. The Chapter decided to keep the insurance.
2. Joint Dinner Meeting- Dick Charlesworth through out for discussion the possibility of holding a joint dinner meeting with the Cumberland Chapter sometime this summer or fall. We did this a number of years ago, and we met at a restaurant in Bedford. More on this later.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. Train Show- Mardorff Methodist Church- May 8,9,10 & 11TH. Chuck Swenson said that he is still looking for more modules and layouts to be set up.

Bob Airhart then made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ron Givler second, the meeting was adjourned at 8:12 P.M.- 22 Members Present.

Jeff Holland then showed the film on the Huntingdon and Broad Top Railroad. It was especially interesting since it included footage of engine #38, which is currently being restored by the Everett Railroad. Thanks goes out to Jeff for showing the film, and also to Frank and Dick for providing us with coffee and doughnuts.,

Attendance: Don Goebel, Gary Price, Larry Leer, John Gardner, Bob Airhart, Nick Martino, Dana Martino, Dewayne Miller, Mike Walls, Paul Campbell, Dave Seidel, Chuck Swenson, Dick Charlesworth, Rebecca Holland, Jeff Holland, Denny Walls, Ron Givler, Larry McKee, John Fisher, Frank Givler, Jim Caum, Joe Harella

JOSEPH HARELLA
RECORDING SECRETARY
HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS

LOCAL YARD NEWS

by Leonard E. Alwine

FROM DAVID SEIDEL:

The N.S. business train left Altoona April 2, 2019 and traveled the Horseshoe Curve and around the loop and back as it left for the Masters Golf Tournament.

The next trip for the train will be The Kentucky Derby in May. The train was 18 cars long and sported new paint on many of them.

FROM SEN. JUDY WARD (R - BLAIR COUNTY):

Almost 3.5 million is slated to be given to local railroads in Blair, Cambria, Clearfield and Centre Counties.

Those receiving funds in Blair County are:

Curry Rail Services	\$700,000.00	
Millennium Rail LLC	\$693,357.00	
Mineral Manufacturing	\$700,000.00	
D Holdings	\$1.4 million	to be used at Hollidaysburg yard to build a loading siding

A DIFFERENT KIND OF TRAIN SHOW:

When we think of a train show around Altoona, it usually involves the selling of old and new trains. But May 8-11, 2019, a different kind of train show took place in Altoona. It was an actual showing of running model train layouts.

Chapter member Chuck Swenson set up the event which was held at Mardorf United Methodist Church in Juniata Gap near the Altoona Penn State Campus.

The layouts featured his o-gauge layout which had many 1950's Thomas, Renwell, Barner, and Acme plastic cars and tracks filling the roadways.

There were two HO gauge layouts also on display from the Clearfield Model Railroad Club. Also an LGB train was running on a table as well as an HO model of a fast train from Japan.

The show featured a silent Auction for baskets and a train set. Admission was free and the show ran from 5-8 pm Wednesday through Friday with refreshments available in the kitchen for a donation (the baked beans were excellent) and also Saturday morning from 9 to noon with the kitchen serving pancake and sausage breakfast for a cost of \$5.00.

For the first time being held in this area the show was well attended on all days. Thanks to Chuck and his wife Sallie (pastor of the church) for their efforts in bringing something new to the area.



The o-gauge layout by Chuck
at the train show
May 8-11, 2019

INTERCHANGE TRACKS

TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD CELEBRATES 150 YEARS

The first Transcontinental Railroad was completed at Promontory Summit, Utah, May 10, 1869. At that day the final spike was driven and the two trains inched forward and touched cow catchers. It was a banner day celebrated all across the United States as the telegraph messages reached other towns. Cannon fire, steam whistles, and fireworks were sounded all across the nation as this historic event took place and linked the East with the West.

Of course, this was not a “true” all rail route as passengers had to de-train at Council Bluffs, Iowa and take a ferry across the Missouri River to Omaha, Nebraska until March 22, 1872 when the bridge was completed.

There was another route that went from Denver to Comanche Crossing over the Hannibal Bridge that was completed on August 15, 1870 and was an all rail route.

So which was the first true Transcontinental Railroad? It is up to debate but the golden spike is at Promontory Point.

And that is where the 150th Anniversary is to be celebrated (or was) May 10, 2019. (If you want to celebrate twice, August 15, 2020 Comanche Crossing, now known as Strasburg, Colorado will be doing so on that date.)

For the celebration at Promontory Point this year one of the engines planned to be there in Union Pacific Big Boy number 4014. It was recently outshopped at Cheyenne, Wyoming after a five year restoration project. It left for the celebration May 4, 2019 and steamed for the celebration day at Ogden, Utah.

Of the 25 big boys built, only 8 remain not scrapped and this is the only one still operational. If you really want to get a handle on the size of these engines, visit Steamtown in Scranton, Pennsylvania and look at the one on display there.



Original Golden Spike driving
(Photo from Associated Press)



2019 Re-enactment of spike driving

UNDER THE WIRE

by Leonard E. Alwine

On February 19, 1968, the children's program "Mr. Rodger's Neighborhood" made its national debut on National Educational Television, the forerunner of PBS today.

The show was created by and starred Fred Rogers from Pittsburgh and lasted a total of 31 season on the air.

Today, the show Daniel Tigers Neighborhood runs in its place using many of the old ideas including the trolley car.

A LOOK BACK

by Leonard E. Alwine

50 YEARS AGO - Three PRR baggage cars built in Altoona were overhauled to be used as exhibit cars on the 10 car Golden Spike Limited Centennial Train that was to travel to Promontory Point, Utah.

50 YEARS AGO - Central District Pennsylvania Funeral Directors met at the Penn Alto Hotel with Penn Central Railroad Officials to discuss the railroad's plans to discontinue baggage service transportation of deceased person's remains.

25 YEARS AGO - Bids were being received to convert the former PRR Master Mechanics building into the new Railroaders Memorial Museum.

1 YEAR AGO - The Horseshoe Curve Chapter NRHS celebrated its 50th Anniversary and as part of that celebration a 48 page book was published detailing the history of the chapter in photos and script. These are still available for sale. See Frank Givler to purchase your copy or one for a friend.

EMAIL UPDATES: If you have a new email, or have updated your email, please submit it to Frank Givler at ottodocfac@atlanticbb.net. This helps ensure you receive the newsletter as well as any important information in a timely manner. Thank you!