

A Tale of Two Gauges

This photo of a train standing outside the Glendale depot taken in 1863 has been featured multiple times. It appeared in the book, *The Village of Glendale 1855 - 2005*, celebrating Glendale's sesquicentennial. It is also to be found as a mural on the side of the JackRabbit running shoe store in the village. But have you looked at it closely? Have you noticed there are two sets of tracks, one inside the other, separated by a few inches. Since trains run on single pair of rails, why would there be double rails on either side? Therein lies a story. I shall call it *A Tale of Two Gauges*.

The set of double rails was brought to my attention by David Oroszi. He had requested a copy of the photo, having spotted it in the Glendale Heritage Preservation online archive. Oroszi is himself an archivist for Dayton History at Carillon Park, specializing in railroads and trolleys. He is currently researching an article on the Erie Railroad for the Erie Lackawanna Historical Society.

In constructing the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton (CH&D) Railroad, which runs through Glendale, the company chose a gauge, the inside distance between rails, of 4 foot 10 inches, know as "Ohio gauge." By 1878, CH&D had converted to a standard gauge. According to Oroszi "There are all kinds of theories as to how they came up with the 4 foot 8½ inches gauge, which is called 'standard gauge,' from the spacing of early wagon wheels to the spacing of the Roman chariots. We will probably never know now, but it is what it is and probably will never change."

Another railroad, the Atlantic & Great Western (A&GW) Railroad, wanted to develop a southern route from Marion, Ohio to Cincinnati using the CH&D track from Dayton. There was only one problem: A&GW used a 6 foot gauge. "So," according to Oroszi "rather than build another line between Cincinnati and Dayton they made arrangements with the CH&D to lay their 'wide gauge' rail outside the CH&D's 'Ohio gauge' tracks. This is called 'straddle rail.' This was actually a common practice back in the early days of railroading when there were so many gauges being built and nobody could decide which one was best."

Back to Oroszi's research project that started this tale of two gauges. According to Oroszi "The Erie Railroad started in New York and wanted to get to Cincinnati to connect with the Ohio & Mississippi Railroad that went from Cincinnati to St Louis." Like A&GW, the Erie used a 6 foot gauge. So, they also used the CH&D 6 foot gauge track from Dayton to reach Cincinnati.

Oroszi says "Your pic at Glendale is one of the very few that show the Erie's tracks outside the CH&D's between Dayton and Cincinnati. In fact I can only think of one other and it is at the CH&D depot in Cincinnati. So you have a very rare photo!"