

F.A.H.P. News, July 1, 2013

The Race from Washington to New York: The Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore (PW&B) Railroad was built in the 1840s and encountered very few grades as it followed the Fall Line (between the Coastal Plain and the Piedmont Plateau). Connecting in the Pennsylvania city with railroads north along the Delaware River and across mostly level New Jersey to Perth Amboy and the cities opposite New York, it provided excellent service over what is now part of the Northeast Corridor. There was no bridge across the Susquehanna River, however, and passengers had to get off one train, be ferried over the river, and board another on the other side. In the winter of 1852, there was enough ice on the river to build the track across the ice from Havre de Grace to Perryville, Maryland, which convenience lasted about six weeks (the first railroad bridge was built in 1855). At the time of the Civil War, this was the only way to move troops (and the newly elected Abraham Lincoln) by rail from the north to Baltimore, and a change of stations in the Maryland city was necessary to go on to the nation's capital.

The Baltimore & Ohio Railroad (B&O) was older, and it operated the only rail service between Baltimore and Washington, but most of its lines were west, and it had no trackage northeast of Baltimore until 1883. During the Civil War, it was the only railroad serving the nation's capital. In 1861, "Stonewall" Jackson stole over 100 B&O locomotives at Harper's Ferry and transported them by horse-and-wagon to a southern rail head at Strasburg, Virginia.

Soon after the Civil War, the fast-expanding Pennsylvania Railroad, built across the Alleghenies in the late 1840s, snapped up the PW&B and its New York connections and built its own line from Baltimore to Washington. The B&O, serving both these cities from the West, expanded its main line to Philadelphia, where it connected with the Reading Company to provide through trains from Washington to Jersey City, with a ferry connection into Manhattan. And so, the race was on: which railroad, the B&O or the "Pennsy," could provide the better and faster service. In this race, they competed for about 75 years.

The Pennsy seemed to have the upper hand. Its route was more level, as the B&O skirted the edge of the Piedmont, usually one or two miles away from and alongside its competitor. Both lines provided stops in Baltimore, Wilmington, Philadelphia, and Trenton (the B&O, using the Reading Line, called its station "West Trenton"). Both had delays getting into Manhattan. As mentioned, B&O passengers were ferried from Jersey City and given a free omnibus ride to Columbus Circle. The Pennsy owned a tunnel under the Hudson River, but steam locomotives were banned because of their smoke, so they were cut off at a place in the Jersey meadows called "Manhattan Transfer," and slow-moving electrics pulled the trains through the tunnel to Pennsylvania Station at 33rd Street and 7th Avenue.

Wilmington passengers could take the B&O's "Capital Limited" to Chicago and its "National Limited" to St. Louis without change. They could take one of several Pennsy trains each day to Boston and to Florida. But on the Washington-New York run, nothing else compared with the rivalry between the B&O's "Royal Blue" and the Pennsy's "Congressional." Every effort was made to keep these trains on time.

Having more grades and a few extra miles, in the 1940s, the "Royal Blue" left Washington's Union Station at 3:45 each afternoon. Stopping at two Baltimore stations (Camden and Mount Royal, with a one-mile tunnel between), it left Wilmington at 5:32 and after its Philadelphia stop at 24th and Chestnut, arrived at Jersey City at 7:35, just under four hours for the 230-mile trip. The "Congressional" left Washington's Union Station at 4:00, stopped in Baltimore and Wilmington, and had two stops in the Quaker city, 30th Street Station and North Philadelphia. It was due at Penn Station in New York at 7:35. The southbound trips were similar; the Pennsy train was slightly faster. In the 1950s, just before the opening of the New Jersey Turnpike and I-95, the Congressional usually carried about 18 cars; the Royal Blue about 8.

It would seem the Pennsylvania Railroad had the upper hand, and in many ways it did. However, many passengers preferred the food in the dining car and found the overall service much more friendly on the B&O.

The Pennsy line was electrified in 1935, which eliminated Manhattan Transfer, but the B&O ran steam locomotives until World War II. This portion of the Pennsylvania is now part of Amtrak's Northeast Corridor, and the B&O was absorbed into CSX Corporation. B&O passenger trains northeast of Baltimore were discontinued in 1958, and the Pennsylvania Railroad, along with the New York Central and the New Haven, were merged into the short-lived Penn Central in 1968.

Work Report: A total of 22 volunteers were on hand Tuesday night, 6/25, as follows: Steve Bryce (in charge), Bob McGovern, Ted Kamen, Dennis Dragon, Emil Christofano, Tim Ward, Jerry Lucas, Jerry Novak, Jeff Pollock, Steve Glazier, Jay Williams, Ken Ricketts, Dan Citron, Dave Leon, Bill Schwoebel, Devon Hall, Paul Kratunis, Bob Jordan, Brent McDougall, Jonathan Rickerman, Pete Higgins, and Tom Marshall. The A.V.R.R. crew worked on track repairs after having another derailment with Locomotive 402 on a trial run. Weed killer was sprayed on the parking lines across the road from Auburn Heights.

Sound-deadening work on the electric train layout continued. The 735 was fired up, but the condenser still leaks, so it will be removed again and sent to a radiator shop. In checking the oil leak in the rear of this car, it was discovered that a jack had been lifted under the copper engine case, and two holes were evident. The case was subsequently removed and cleaned up for a soldering repair. It was announced that the arrival of our "new" Stanley Model 750, a gift from Helga Knox, is expected on Thursday. This car, Serial #24094, was sold by Clarence Marshall to the late George Knox about 1952, and it has never been restored. Since it is so original, changes to this car should be carefully considered, and it should be protected as an important museum artifact.

A meeting on safety and shop procedures was conducted by Steve Bryce, assisted by Jerry Novak, and almost everyone attended. It was well received by our volunteers. Proper safety equipment, safe storage of volatile fuels, and knowledge of the jobs to be undertaken were outlined. Improved housekeeping and storage of tools and parts was mentioned. It was pointed out that good common sense is the key to a safe shop, and no volunteer should take on a job unless he is confident he knows how to do it properly.

On Thursday, June 27, the following 15 volunteers were on hand: Bill Schwoebel (in charge), Greg Landrey, Brent McDougall, Art Wallace, Dave Leon, Tim Ward, Steve Bryce, Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Paul Kratunis, Devon Hall, Bob Stransky, Gene Maute, Gerhard Maute, and Tom Marshall. The Model 750, mentioned above, arrived on time about 1:30, and it was placed safely in our upper garage and draped with a protective cover. All its tires are at least 75 years old, and the two rear ones are octagonal. The leather, top, paint, and boiler covering appear to be original. We will do little more than clean it up until a decision has been made on how and whether to restore it.

The 402 was cleaned up from its use on Tuesday, and more shop rags were cut up. The condenser was removed from the 735, preparative to sending it away for repair. The lights, electric, gas, and kerosene were checked on all the cars expected to be used for our weekend tour July 12-14. The museum floor was swept in its entirety. Work continued on the Model 607; it's looking more like a car all the time. The gauge glass on the water tank had to be re-fit so it will clear the splash apron, and some brake rods needed repositioning to clear running board brackets.

We expect four steamers and our Rauch & Lang electric to participate in Hockessin's July Fourth Parade at 3 P.M. on Thursday.