

French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society

411 Chestnut Street Meadville, PA 16335

SPRING 2008

Newsletter of the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society

Volume 3 Number 1

VALLEY EXPRESS



Fig. 1

M, CL & L Engine 2 at Meadville, 1890 (R. Beaver, "The Bessemer & Lake Erie Railroad", 1969)

MEADVILLE'S OTHER RAILROAD

In a two-part series, we will embark on the history of Meadville's other railroad- The Meadville Railway. From its beginnings in 1878 until its abandonment by the Bessemer & Lake Erie in 1977, this railroad played a key role in Crawford County as well as Erie Railroad history during its years of existence. Part 2 will be presented in the Fall issue.

By 1862 the first trains to arrive in Crawford County were those of the broad-gauge Atlantic & Great Western Railroad (A&GW). Within two years, the Erie & Pittsburgh Railroad (PRR) was completed through Linesville and Conneautville, in the western part of the county. For local farmers and industrialists these were good times. Now their goods could reach new markets all year long, no longer

subject to the vagaries of canal and wagon travel during the winter months in this part of the state. The communities served by these pioneer railroads prospered, but for many small farming communities such as Evansburg (Renamed Conneaut Lake in 1885) it meant hauling their goods several miles to reach the railhead. For Evansburg, it meant a trip of either 3 miles south to the A&GW station, or 5 miles west to the E&P connection at Linesville, an inconvenience that remained for several years due to a lack of funds.

Meanwhile, shippers on the now bankrupt A&GW in Meadville were becoming increasingly unhappy with the service. Freight rates were inconsistent, leading many to believe the A&GW had a take-it or leave-it attitude toward shippers. So, in April 1878 several local businessmen met to discuss the problem. As a result, a branch line was proposed to secure a connection with a second trunk line.

A suggested route south to Stoneboro would connect with both the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern (NYC) and the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR). Such connections would allow goods to reach markets as far south as Pittsburgh and the Ohio Valley, and north to Erie and the Great Lakes region. Although well conceived, nothing further developed from this proposal. Another proposal called for building a line from Meadville to Conneautville, where it would connect with the E&P line to Erie.

Then in 1880, discussions were underway to build a route west of Meadville, through Evansburg to a connection with the E&P at Linesville, a distance of 20.5 miles. With that route, the Meadville Railway Company was organized in August of that year, starting with a capital investment of \$125,000, and J.J. Shryock was named its first president. Construction would be made easy, since the tracks would be laid on the abandoned French Creek Feeder Canal towpath all the way to Shermansville, where the former feeder canal connected with the north-south oriented Erie Extension Canal. But despite an immediate start-up, construction proved slow. So, in August 1881 the line was leased to the Pennsylvania Railroad. With the Linesville connection completed, operations officially began in October 1881. When the first train arrived in Meadville, track was not completed up West Street to the station at Mead Avenue, so the citizens met the train upon its arrival at the wooden truss bridge over French Creek. It is interesting to note that at this time there was no track connection made with the A&GW.

By 1883 the Meadville Railway Company was losing money. In January 1884 it was sold to A.C.

(continued on page 5)



From the Stationmaster's Office

Summer is here! That means it's time to get outside and pursue your railroad travels! And, though the high cost of fuel may keep many of us from taking those long trips, you can still travel to many rail-theme sites for less than a tank of gas.

If your interests are in riding the high iron, then maybe the Oil Creek and Titusville Railroad in Titusville, PA or the Ashtabula, Carson and Jefferson Railroad in nearby Jefferson, OH is just the ticket. Both operations offer great scenery, clean passenger cars and the great sounds of Alco-powered engines pulling up front.



Maybe local railroad history is your choice! The Greenville Museum in Greenville, PA offers lots of Bessemer & Lake Erie and Shenango Valley railroad history. Or, in Northeast, PA, our friends at the Lake Shore Railroad Museum display not only lots of New York Central and Nickel Plate Railroad pictures and artifacts, but they also have some of the best trackside action (CSX, NS) in the eastern United States. Don't forget your camera!

If you like to follow former railroad right-of-ways and get close to nature, then don't pass up the chance to walk or bike the 5-mile long Ernst Bike Trail, starting at the parking area off Rte #322 adjacent to Home Depot and across from Park Avenue Plaza in Meadville. The former Meadville-Linesville Railroad right-of-way is now paved and offers a great adventure for the entire family. The trail sports a small picnic pavilion just east of the Mercer Pike parking area located south of Mt Pleasants Road, as well as benches sited at strategic vistas throughout. Parking is also available off Rte #19 south of Meadville at Krider Road.

And, don't forget your society's own Caboose EL 356! Bring your lawn chair, sit, relax and enjoy the company of your friends and neighbors telling stories of their railroad adventures. Why, if you sit there long enough you just might see a Western New York & Pennsylvania coal train roll by or some hot air balloons pass overhead. Whatever your railroad pursuits, I hope your summer will be right on track!

Dennis Mead

CONTRIBUTIONS

*A special note
of thanks to:*

- Crawford Heritage Foundation
- Crawford County Redevelopment Authority

French Creek Valley Express

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French Creek Valley Railroad
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Contact Information

411 Chestnut St.
Meadville, PA 16335

Website: www.fcvrrhs.org

French Creek Valley Express is published Spring and Fall. Those wishing to submit material must do so no later than 30 days prior to publication, i.e. by April 1st or October 1st. All submissions are subject to editing for length and clarity. Queries must include full name, address, and daytime phone number or e-mail address. Individual membership dues are \$15.00/ year (\$1.00 juniors to 18 years) for the period July 1- Jun 30. New member dues received after January 1 are good through the following full year period. Support from local businesses is welcomed: Gold, Silver and Bronze levels at \$500.00, \$250.00, and \$100.00, respectively, are available.

Budget and Finance

You may recall FCV was offered a matching grant to help with the Locomotive #518 project. I am happy to report we were successful in raising the \$4000.00 match. We were assisted by a \$1000.00 grant from the Harold A. Heist Foundation. On top of the \$8000.00 grant/match we also received an additional \$1500.00 grant from the Crawford Heritage Foundation to assist with moving expenses. Still, our treasury report showed us to be a bit short for the project. Luckily, on April 15 our funding shortfall for the #518 outdoor display project was made up by a Crawford County Redevelopment Authority grant of \$14,000 - all from local sources.

Thank you to the many members and friends who have contributed to the project.

Recently the Society received a framed print of the Meadville Depot. This gift was donated by Mr. John Spear of Fullerton, CA and is a print of a painting done by local artist A. Fugali. Thank you Mr. Spear!

As you know, because the IRS has ruled FCV a public charity, all donations are tax deductible.

-Ed Cronin

Museum

The Northwestern Railroad and Tooling Heritage Center continues to move forward. Early in 2008 we applied for grants to pay for the feasibility study and business plan for the Museum. Once completed, these studies will establish the size of the facility that can be sustained long-term and a budget for the first

five years of operation. Recently we met with state officials from the Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED). They put us in touch with a firm from Pittsburgh which can do both the feasibility study and business plan. We believe we have the funding for both projects and expect them to be completed by the middle of next year. The week of March 17, we submitted another grant application for the civil engineering required for the site. This project will examine elevations, possible changes in the streets, flood plane concerns, parking lots and parking/turning for buses, and will confirm that the caboose location is viable before we add locomotive #518 to the site.

With the studies and engineering completed, it will be time for serious fundraising. Let's hope the economy picks up before then!

We have begun talks with the Steel City Railway Historical Society about acquiring several pieces from their collection. The first is a B&LE locomotive. It is the last of the Bessemer steam locomotives and was their largest. It has been restored and is looking for a home! It is a Texas type steam locomotive with a 2-10-4 wheel arrangement (See Figure 2). We would design the building around this locomotive to capitalize on its WOW factor. By charging the boiler with compressed air we could move the engine several hundred yards under its own power. A second item held by 'Steel City' is the President's Car from the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad, which President Eisenhower used in 1956 to travel to the Greenbrier Hotel in WV for a summit meeting with the Prime Minister of Canada and the President

of Mexico. The car has been totally restored both inside and out and would add to the WOW factor of the B&LE Locomotive.

Recently, the trustees of the Museum authorized the establishment of an endowment fund managed by the Crawford Heritage Foundation. Giving potential donors choices for their donation is helpful and I encourage the FCV Board to consider doing the same.

Optimist that I am, I expect the studies and engineering work to be completed by December of 2009 and serious fundraising to commence by Spring 2010. With a successful fundraising program completed in 2010, by 2011 we could be moving dirt and by 2012 - four years from now, our museum could be a reality.

-Ed Cronin



Membership

Our membership continues to grow. To date we have 54 members. Lately many new folks have been recruited by existing members. Keep up the good work! Our newest members since November 1, 2007, include (in alphabetical order) Marceline Antinore, Jeff Barnhart, Richard Biemer, Ed Blenner, John Hoffman, Chuck Leaderer, Austin Prosek, and Jesse Thompson. **Welcome Aboard!**

-Ed Cronin

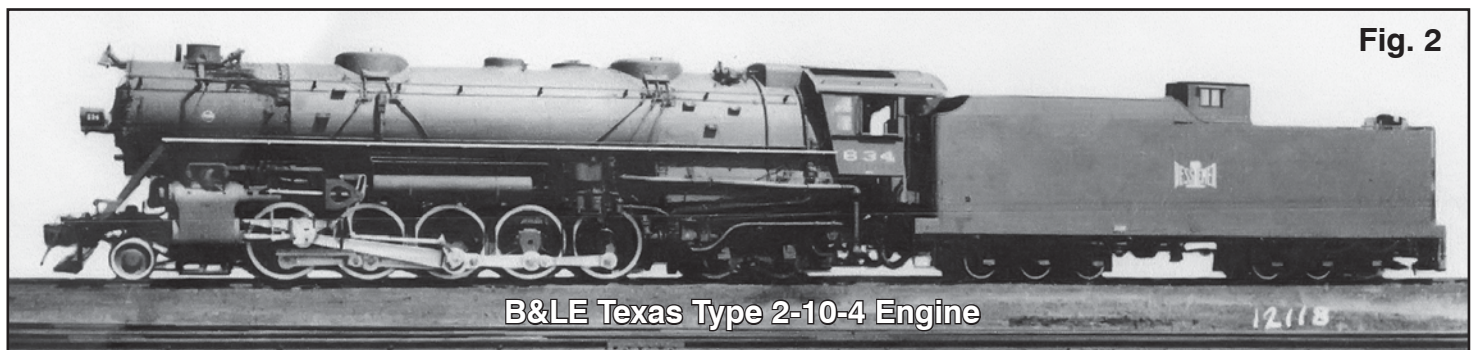


Fig. 2

Fig. 3



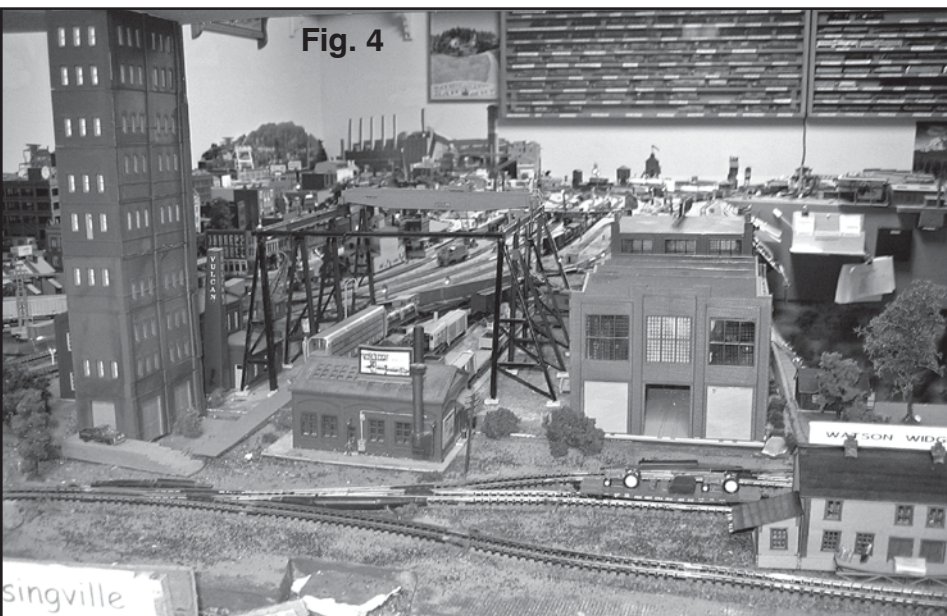
Model Railroading

Until Tom C. can outflank the alligators and rejoin the committee, we'll continue to highlight interesting layouts in the area. For this issue we are delighted to present retired Navy ET Ed Blenner's "Erie County Southern RR", featuring 130-ft of mainline in N-Scale, and sited in McKean, PA. Businesses depicted in Ed's diorama include farming, meat packing/transporting, coal mining, and 'Car Trans'. His DCC controlled world is especially interesting after sundown - witness his city with cycling traffic

lights, neon 'come-ons' and arc-welding activities. In Figure 3, owner and NMRA member Ed eyeballs a 'Springtown' - bound Erie freight, powered by 2 Alco PA units, flanking a caravan of trucks servicing the meat packing industry, while Figure 4 gives us a view of the PRR sheds adjacent the 'Car-Trans' complex and farm in 'Altoona, PA.'

Tips on countering old O-Gauge switch problems were provided by retired GE designer Al Notarione of Harborcreek, PA. Al recommends upping the voltage to, say, 20 V and changing bulbs to match. Lazy non-derailing function can be

Fig. 4



improved by installing fiber pins one track section upstream of the usual switch 'broken rail' spot.

The Society's portable layout, currently housed at US Bronze on Brakeshoe Road, will be overhauled over the next few months. Volunteers are welcome to assist the committee.

-Bill McComas

Special Events / Programs

The annual Railroad Roundhouse has been rescheduled to 28 June '08, as the original date conflicted with the One-Day Museum event in Titusville. The 'Roundhouse' will be held at the Downtown Mall in Meadville. Roundhouse talks include: **History of Meadville 1930-60** by Nate Clark, and **PA Rail 1860-present** by Tom Collard and Bill Burt.

The caboose will be open for public viewing beginning Memorial Day weekend and continue throughout the summer on Sunday afternoons only.

-Dan Higham



Public Relations

Our Society has - for the past two Erie Train Shows held at Rainbow Gardens - manned a table to advertise our efforts, recruit new members, and to compare notes with other like-minded groups bent on preserving our rich railroad heritage. A modicum of success has encouraged us to continue this interaction.

The decision to reduce membership dues to school age youth has proven fruitful. Beginning this summer, we intend to foster programs that will allow pursuit of two levels of scouting merit badges associated with railroading, including caboose savvy. The first scout troop is scheduled to tour the caboose on April 30th.

-Dennis Mead

(continued from page 1)

Huidekoper and G.W. Deleter for \$150,000, and in February of the same year was renamed the Meadville & Linesville Railway Company. The lease arrangement with the PRR was then cancelled and two days later the PRR removed the switches between the railroads at Linesville, leaving the railroad isolated. By June 1885 the railroad had a new outside connection- this time with the standard-gauge New York, Pennsylvania & Ohio Railroad - A&GW's 1880 successor in Meadville.

Financial conditions continued to plague the line, so on June 22, 1891 it was again reorganized as the Meadville, Conneaut Lake & Linesville Railway Company (Figure 1 presents MCL&L 4-4-0 Engine 2 at Meadville). Nine days later the new railway was leased to the Pittsburgh, Shenango & Lake Erie Railroad (PSLE). This railroad, later to become the Bessemer & Lake Erie (BLE), was built north from Greenville to Girard Junction, following the now abandoned Erie Extension towpath, mentioned earlier. In January of 1891 the line had reached Shermansville, and the crossing of the MCL&L. This intersection became known as Meadville Junction. The new lease for the railroad came with conditions for the PSLE. The iron rail that was originally laid for the railroad was to be replaced with steel rail, and the wooden bridge over French Creek in Meadville was to be replaced with a new 279-ft steel bridge. The same year the lease was executed, the bridge was replaced.

Over the next 82 years, the railroad would operate as the Meadville Branch. In our next issue, we will look at the history unfolding in the twentieth century, until its abandonment. We will also discuss the present and future use of this former railroad right-of-way.

-Dennis Mead

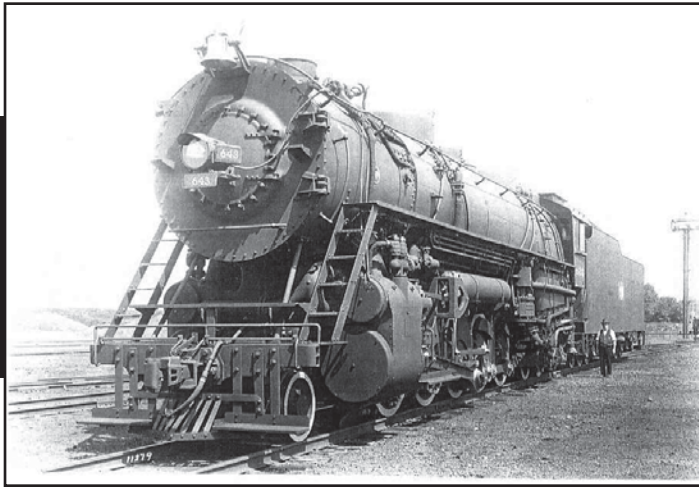


Fig. 5
B&LE
Texas Type
2-10-4
Engine

History and Archives

The possible opportunity to obtain a 'Reefer' car for our Meadville bypass display may provide additional space to archive materials.

Hopefully, the series of talks given to East End Elementary 4th graders can be continued at other schools.

-Pete Gifford

Property and Equipment

The planned acquisition of the Alco S2 diesel shell is still on track for this summer, albeit possibly delayed until engineering studies confirm approval of the site. To this end, Jack S. is arranging for topsoil and fence removals, and possible relocation of the vintage shop equipment on display.

Electric power to the caboose site is still unavailable, as Penelec no longer accepts outside lighting service requests. Therefore, we may have to pursue the connection as a private user.

A 'Reefer' from Lakeshore Railroad Historical Society and/or a PRR class X29 boxcar will hopefully be acquired to expand our caboose display.

-Al Reibel

Western New York & PA Railroad Update

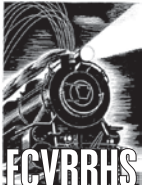
In spite of a general economic slowdown, business on the WNYP continues to grow. In Crawford County our Meadville local, ME-1,

has been operating 6-7 days weekly just to keep up with the volume of cars arriving on Norfolk Southern Train C23. Locally, AIM Recycling in the West Mead Industrial Park has just ordered its first empty cars for loading. Although the track on their property is not yet ready for service, they are temporarily using our Meadville Public Delivery Track located just east of the Smock Highway Bridge (that's railroad east toward Jersey City, but compass north.) An existing patron in Franklin has just announced that it will more than double its fleet of private tank cars. Other customers have increased their business volume as well. On a calendar year basis, the number of cars originating or terminating at businesses in the Meadville, Oil City, and Saegertown areas is up over 20% in 2007 vs. 2006.

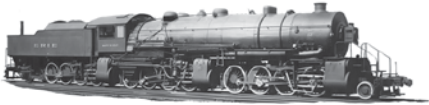
The Meadville Yard rehabilitation project has started with reconstruction of the turnouts on the east end yard lead. About 3,000 new ties will be installed in the body of the yard. Track surfacing will be done later in the maintenance season. Elsewhere on the Mainline in Pennsylvania 12,000 new ties will be installed. Other work, including a new run-around track in Rouseville, is contemplated as well.

It looks like another good year on the Atlantic & Great Western (Oops, sorry...on the WNYP).

-Tom Collard, VP & GM of WNYP



French Creek Valley
Railroad Historical Society
411 Chestnut Street
Meadville, PA 16335



Class P-I Articulated Pusher
Locomotive

French Creek Valley Railroad
Historical Society
Program & Events Schedule

April 30 - 6:30 pm
Scouts visit Caboose

May 15 - 6:00 pm
May Mtg. @ U. S. Bronze

May 25 - Summer 1 to 4 pm
Caboose Open to Visitors Sundays

May 28 - 10 am to 4:00 pm
Railroad Roundhouse @ Downtown Mall

June 12 - 6:00 pm
Annual Dinner



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