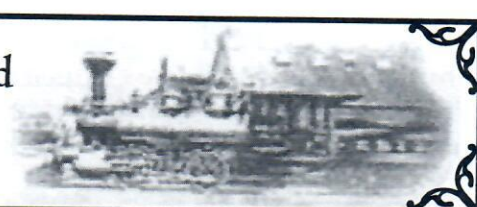


# French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society

P.O. Box 632 Meadville, PA 16335



SPRING 2017

Newsletter of the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society

Volume 12 Number 1

# VALLEY EXPRESS

## The Circus Came To Meadville One Last Time

On January 17th news came out that the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus was closing forever in May of this year after 146 years of operation. For many of us it was hard to imagine that this could happen to an American institution older than Coca-Cola and baseball. Time and different venues of entertainment, along with pressure to stop using performing animals, aka, elephants, had caught up with the circus. For the railfan followers comes the loss of the long, colorful circus trains that travel the rails to the four corners of this nation every year.

Meadville was one of many small towns in the country that the circus came to visit. The last time Ringling Brothers visited was on July 11, 1956. The day before it had entertained young and old in Erie before moving by rail to Meadville. It was brought to town by the Bessemer & Lake Erie and handed over to the Erie Railroad for unloading. Typically they unloaded the trains at the freight house on Clark Road, then (in 1956) moved everything over the streets to the Crawford County Fair Grounds.

Ringling Brothers had made a science of how to move its circus early on. In the beginning, they used horse and wagon teams to move from town to town, but by the late 1890's had developed an efficient system using rail. They were so good at moving mass materials and people that the Federal Government, during World War I made a study to apply this practice to moving soldiers and equipment. In the mid-1950's the circus was moving by rail in three sections. In later years, after expanding their operations, they had two complete trains moving two individual circuses, the Red and the Blue units.



End of train, Ringling Bros., Dean Jct., Erie PA 1989 Ken Brubaker Photo

The mid-1950's movement featured the first section, 22 cars long and was known as the Flying Squadron, carrying the workers, horses (96 in all), the menagerie of animals and float wagons, the cookhouse tent and cooking equipment, besides miscellaneous equipment necessary for setting up. The first section was always the first train to be loaded and leave for the next town, as well as being the first unit to be unloaded upon arrival.

(continued on page 5)

### Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus Route July 1956

- 1 Geneva, N.Y.\*
- 2 Elmira, N.Y.
- 3 Olean, N. Y.
- 4 Dunkirk, N.Y.
- 5 Niagara Falls, N.Y.
- 6 Batavia, N.Y.
- 7-8 Buffalo, N.Y.
- 9 Warren, Pa.
- 10 Erie, Pa.
- 11 Meadville, Pa.
- 12 Youngstown, O.
- 13 Akron, O.
- 14 Canton, O.
- 15 Alliance, O.
- 16 Pittsburgh, Pa.

Season closed.

Big top struck for last time.

Home Run.

\*Afternoon only.

### Circus Train Appearances in Meadville

Besides the July 11, 1956 appearance in Meadville of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, the circus also came to town on July 15, 1921. Research also leads one to believe that although the circus did not stop in Meadville, it is possible that the circus train ran through Meadville eight different times. The following are dates and places the circus had appeared:

July 10/11, 1919 - Sharon/Erie

July 11/12, 1923 - Youngstown/Jamestown

July 2/3, 1926 - Jamestown/Youngstown

July 19/21, 1930 - Jamestown/Canton

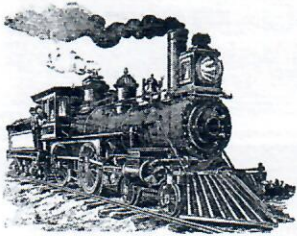
July 2/3, 1936 - Youngstown/Oil City

July 6/7, 1937 - Jamestown/New Castle

July 5/6, 1949 - Jamestown/Youngstown

(continued on page 5)





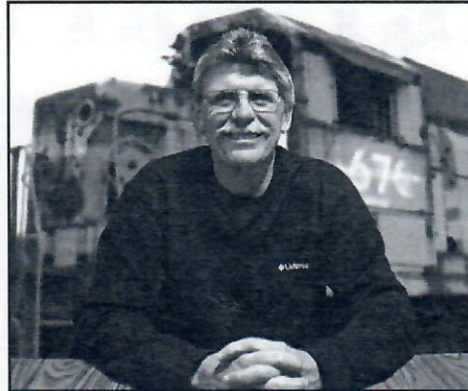
## From the Stationmaster's Office

This year promises to be a very good year for the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society. We will begin the lettering of the B&LE boxcar this spring, starting with the side facing the highway first. We also will complete the re-siding and install the hardware. There is some roofwalk work to do as well as rebuilding the doors. When that is all done, this should complete the boxcar project.

We are currently getting things arranged to bring the DL&W snowplow home to Meadville. We are very close to having everything come together to finally see the snowplow moving. We fully expect the snowplow to be in Meadville by summer. But, the project is only beginning when it gets here. We will have to survey our lot, grade and ballast it, then lay ties and rails so the snowplow can be displayed. We will need all the help we can get from our members. We had a real nice turnout last year at our work sessions and hope we can get even more people to help out this year.

We have the tool car to start working on; after the snowplow is here, of course. The FCVRRHS is also interested in getting its own place in downtown Meadville, where we can organize our archives a little bit better and be more accessible to the public. We will have to make sure we can have a steady income to support such a project. Your support and support from the public and businesses will help us achieve our mission - to preserve all aspects of railroad history of the area.

*Bernie Hanmore*



## French Creek Valley Express

A Publication of the  
French Creek Valley Railroad  
Historical Society

### Officers

Bernie Hanmore - President  
Dennis Mead - Vice President  
Ed Cronin - Treasurer  
Vanessa Timko - Asst. Treasurer  
Carl Timko - Secretary

### Directors

Bill McComas  
Jack Sheets  
John Snyder  
Tom Stewart  
Stan Niwa

### Webmaster

Dianne Jones

### Editor

Carl Timko

### Assistant Editor

Dennis Mead

### Contact Information

P.O. Box 632  
Meadville, PA 16335

Website: [www.fcrrhs.org](http://www.fcrrhs.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 \$20.00/year, family membership dues are \$35.00/year (\$1.00 for 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.

## CONTRIBUTIONS & GIFTS

- Olan Wood Products
- Staples Copy & Print
- Lloyd's Rental & Sales
- Crawford County Historical Society
- Western New York & PA RR
- Travis Burge Family
- US Bronze Foundry & Machine
- Bernie Hanmore Family
- LakeShore Railway Historical Society
- David P. Miller Family
- Adrienne Geddes
- John Snyder Family
- Cheryl Corp (in memory of Mark Phelan)
- Eleanor Davies
- Terry Martin Family
- Susan Yosten
- Mike Vickey
- Sherwin-Williams Paint
- Frontier Lumber Co.
- Bob Bingham family
- Bill McComas Family
- Scott Royer
- Ed Fine
- Carl & Vanessa Timko
- John Nagurney
- Tom Collard Family
- Ed Cronin Family
- Rick Rowlands
- Jack Sheets Family
- Audrey Lavery
- Mike Lynch Family
- Stan Niwa
- Dennis Mead Family
- Pat Winters

There's lots more information as well as interesting photos and stories on our website! Check it out at [www.fcrrhs.org](http://www.fcrrhs.org)

