

French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society

P.O. Box 632 Meadville, PA 16335



SPRING 2011

Newsletter of the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society

Volume 6 Number 1

VALLEY EXPRESS

The Erie RR Coal Tipple & Former Coaling Methods Used Locally

By Stuart Ladner

The tipple was a huge barrel shaped concrete structure built over the two main tracks a short distance south of the Mercer Street crossing. It straddled the Mains so that passenger train engines could take on coal and water in the shortest possible time. There was an iron stairway from the ground up almost to the top so that the operator, Bill Blakely, could climb up and look down into the tipple when necessary.

On the back side of the tipple was a track on which loaded hoppers would be placed. This track had a deep pit over which a car would be spotted, the hopper doors opened, and the coal drop into the pit, where it would be carried to the top of the tipple by means of an endless chain of buckets - all of which was covered to protect from weather. Each hopper held 60-70 tons of coal and the tipple held hundreds of tons.

In addition, there was an oil-fired drying oven, through which sand had to pass before it was fit to be used in the sand boxes of locomotives. The dried sand was then blown up into the 'Sand House', which had a long tubular spout on the bottom that could reach the sand boxes on the

engines. Damp sand would not run readily down through the sand pipes on engines when needed to prevent the driving wheels from losing traction when rails were wet.

Then, there was the water crane which filled the engine tenders or 'tanks'. Almost all water stations on the railroad were equipped with water treatment tanks, in which chemical balls were dissolved to reduce scaling in the boilers, similar to what housewives found in their tea kettles.



When an engineer on a passenger train made the stop at the coal tipple, he had to spot the train so that the tank was directly under the coal chute and water spout. There was a leeway of about 10-12 feet. The operator would get up on a

platform and drop the coal chute down into the coal space of the tank and pull a rod to open the chute. The locomotive Fireman, at the same time, was up on the tank and opened one of the oval shaped lids, pulled the water crane spout down into the water space, and pulled the rope to open the valve. The spout was about 10-12 inches in diameter, and the force of the water coming out required the Fireman to have his foot on it or else it would fly up in the air.

While this was going on, a laborer was up on the engine to pull down the spout from the sand house and place it in the opened sand box on top of the engine. He would then pull a rod that started the sand running, filling it so that the Engineer wouldn't run out when he needed it.

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Local Rail Activity

Nate Clark, Jr reports that Norfolk Southern is currently doing site work to begin replacement of the former ERIE RR lattice truss bridge that crosses the Shenango River just south of Greenville. The century-old structure will be replaced with a new girder style bridge. NS also plans to replace a similar style bridge crossing the Shenango River in Sharon in the very near future.

PennDot released drawings, for public review, involving the removal of the Peters Road Bridge over the WNY&PA tracks north of Saegertown. Plans call for a grade crossing to replace the current deteriorating bridge structure.

-Dennis Mead



Beginning with this issue, the Society is privileged to share with the readers a number of railroad articles written by the late Stuart Ladner, who began his railroad career in 1927 at the age of 19. He worked on the Dynamometer Car for several years, making many trips the length of the Erie line - New York to Chicago. Later, he worked in the Test Department and was Assistant Engineer of Tests until his retirement in 1973 - a span of 46 years. He was well known for his photography of events in and around the Erie, and participation in building the 1/8 scale model of Meadville's earliest engine - located in the Downtown Mall. He was always willing to talk up the old days until his death in 2005 at the age of 97.



From the Stationmaster's Office

The past six months has proven to be one of the most productive periods in a long time. Work has been progressing on the 518 at a very fast pace - the fastest since the project began. We brought together a team of volunteers this year that has successfully dismantled the switcher as if they were professional locomotive scrappers. As I write this column, the 518 remains in Jefferson, Ohio - minus many of its former appliances, as well as exterior features such as handrails and pilot steps. All that is left to remove is the prime mover, generator and air compressor.



It was hoped that the engine would be moved to Meadville by the time of this publication, but at this point we are stalled. Ed Cronin has worked many hours locating riggers and haulers. In the past weeks we have had everyone involved lined up to begin the movement, only to have one of the parties back out. We are not giving up, though. It is our hope to have the engine on the display track before the end of the year. It's just that close to happening.

Another bright spot in this period of time is the completion and printing of our first Society calendar. I am happy to say we are receiving rave reviews from those who have bought their calendars. We have actually ordered a second run printed because they are selling so well. If you have not seen one yet, you can contact Carl Timko, or simply stop by Tom's Train Terminal to review and purchase your copy.

At this time I would like to wish everyone a great Thanksgiving, as well as a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Dennis Mead

CONTRIBUTIONS & GIFTS

- Weber Electric Supply
- Staples Copy & Print
- Lloyd's Rental & Sales
- Crawford County Historical Society
- Tom's Train Terminal
- Western New York & PA RR
- Susi Building Supplies
- US Bronze Foundry & Machine
- AC & J RR, Jefferson, OH
- LakeShore Railway Historical Society
- Bob Bingham family
- Bill McComas Family
- Carl Timko Family
- Anne W. Stewart
- Tom Collard Family
- Ed Cronin Family
- Pipp Graphics & Design
- Jack Sheets Family
- Joe Mazzone
- Moss Family

There's lots more information as well as interesting photos and stories on our website! Check it out at www.fcvrrhs.org



French Creek Valley Express

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French Creek Valley Railroad
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Budget and Finance

Lead by example. I don't know who came up with that statement, but I think it is an excellent idea - one of the basics of good management. It could be that our president, Denny, believes it too. You see, not only does Denny travel down from Erie to lead our Society, and not only does he spend a lot of time working on FCV business, but he and Donna also make a cash donation to FCV - *every quarter*. Up until now, only he and I knew, but now I'm letting the cat out of the bag! As your treasurer I love to see money coming into our treasury and I cringe when I have to write a check for expenses. You may have seen Denny hand me a check at one of our meetings. Nothing is ever said but it makes me smile!

-Ed Cronin

Membership

We welcome four new members, including two juniors. They are: Patrick Stevens (Jr), an 'O'-Scaler from Meadville; John Nagurney, an 'O'-Scaler from Conneaut Lake; Robert Symons, an 'O'-Scaler from Conneaut Lake; and Shawn McIver (Jr), an HO-Scaler from Titusville. *Welcome aboard!*

-Carl Timko

Museum

The planning project for The Northwestern Pennsylvania Railroad & Tooling Museum is complete. In December of 2010 Porter Consulting Engineers (PCE) completed their contract for site engineering, project rendering, and presentation drawings. In Mr. Porter's words:

"As the committee has discussed, the building concept has not progressed to the point where meaningful interior layout and finish details can be developed. However, in order to provide a useful marketing tool for the project, we have developed the building and site concepts as a 3-dimensional computer model representation of both the interior and exterior of the building as well as the site. The model was developed using the

powerful and popular Sketch Up Pro software program and the program will allow interactive modification of the building and the addition of interior building and exhibit details as your building concept is further developed. The program can also be utilized to prepare 'walking tour' video clips of the building exterior and interior as well as 'fly-around' video clips of the building and site."

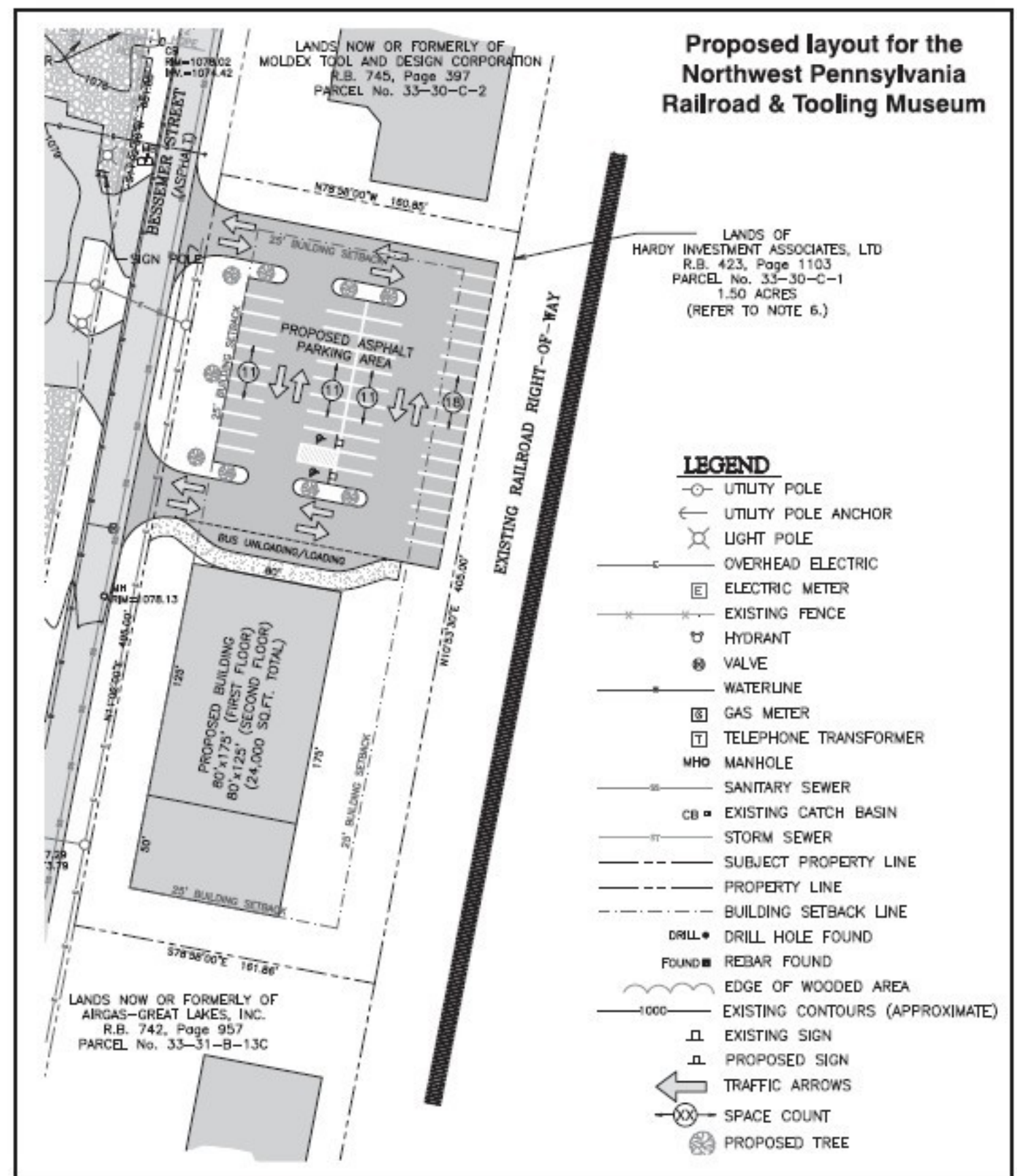
During a demonstration of the computer model, we *saw* the inside of the building and were able to *look out* of the windows. By using **Google Maps** to download the location we will be able to *look out* any window and *see* neighboring buildings or downtown Meadville. What a powerful marketing tool!

While we still intend to occupy the former 84 Lumber property, we decided it would be more practical, more cost effective, and manageable

if we purchased the 1.5 acre parcel between Bessemer St. and the tracks and erect a new building tailored to our needs. The schematic below suggests a possible site layout that would provide a 24,000 square foot building after all three phases of construction are completed.

The first phase would be site preparation and construction of an 80' x 125' (10,000 sq. ft.) building. Phase 2 would add a second floor, while Phase 3 would complete an 80' x 50' addition on the south end of the building. In December we made an offer on the property to 84. They were not interested in selling the 1.5 acre parcel by itself. And so we are now working with another party which is interested in the 8 acres on the west side of Bessemer Street. Stay tuned!

-Ed Cronin



Model Railroad

By now members with e-mail addresses on file should have received the first issue of our committee newsletter, the FCV Main Line News. In our first issue President Dennis Mead talks about his introduction to model railroading as a boy and how this experience lead to his current outdoor G-Scale railroad with an Erie-Lackawanna theme. Bill McComas writes about his unique O-Scale layout with a Navy theme based on Baltimore Harbor and the Chesapeake Bay. Al Reibel has written two articles. One is about the history of Scale in the days of A.C. Gilbert - right up to some of the great models being produced by a whole new group of manufacturers. His second article is dedicated to TT Scale, starting with Hay Joyce and HP Products and the renewed interest in the scale that has developed since the onset of resin casting. Ed Cronin has written extensively on HO-Scale. Ed's railroad is truly a wonder to behold. Having seen it in person, it is probably the finest model railroad I have ever seen. The only model railroad that comes close is the one built years ago by the New York Society of Model Engineers in the DL&W Hoboken Terminal. Not to be left out, Scott Wilson has not only written a great introduction to N-Scale but has also prepared an N-Scale product review and an All-Scale Modeler's Tip. Thanks to everybody who contributed!

Now for the big news! The French Creek Valley Model Railroad Club is now being formed. With Board approval, the Committee has acquired space in the @ the Bank building at 940 Park Avenue in downtown Meadville. Plans include building a new modular HO-Scale Christmas layout to replace the one we have been displaying at the Downtown Mall for some years and to build a much smaller N-Scale layout for display during the holiday season. This past Christmas we also had a small N-Scale layout on display in the window @ the Bank. With a little luck we may be able to have an open house in our clubroom this year.

In addition to the two displays, the club plans to build both HO and



Nick Ozorak demonstrates Virtual Railroading

N-Scale railroads in the club room that could eventually be moved to the proposed museum. There has been some thought to erecting a small TT-Scale railroad also. Very few people have ever seen TT-Scale, so it would really be something unique. You can bet that Tom Collard and Al Riebel will be pushing to include TT.

Dues for the model railroad club are \$3.00/month or \$30.00/year. Scott Wilson is our very first paid member. Thanks, Scott! A very generous Board Member has agreed to underwrite some of the club room rental while we get started. A special thanks to him also! One of our commitments is to focus on teaching model railroad skills to our younger members and encouraging them to participate in this great hobby. As an example, we tutored three youngsters and several adults on building a home model kit using the latest glues.

Our Second Friday Bull Sessions @ the Bank, open to modelers and railroaders of all ages, has continually proved interesting and educational. Recently we were treated to a visit

with Bob Lane of Conneaut Lake. He shared some winter experiences while an Engineer in snowy Minnesota and also demonstrated his impressive scratch built HO-Scale wooden trestle bridge. Built of basswood and balsa scale timbers on a 40-inch radius curvature, the bridge simulated a height of 133 feet and a length of some 400 feet. He also helped build a cedar shake doll house for wife Alma, who collects and shows dolls, and remains Bob's number one fan.

Most recently, the Bull Session featured Nick Ozorak's virtual railroading using a computer. This technique enables a user to select a favorite rail flag and type engine, together with consist, season of year and GPS region. Amazingly, the computer output provides the viewer a very lifelike rendition.

-Tom Collard

Special Events / Programs

Completion of the G-Scale Garden Rail Layout at the Erie Zoo last Fall has resulted in significantly increased attendance at the Zoo, according to President Denny Mead.

In anticipation of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the A&GW Railroad in Meadville, the Society is looking into the design and purchase of A&GW T-Shirts. The Society may also partner with the Crawford County Historical Society in seeking to obtain a historical marker from the State/County to commemorate the occasion. Such a marker would likely be erected at the Downtown Mall at the site of the old train depot.

-Dan Higham

Bob Lane displays his HO Scale wooden trestle bridge at our Second Friday Bull Session



dismantling the Alco. By the Spring issue of this newsletter we may hope to admire a newly painted S2 in Erie livery alongside its consort- caboose 365- as we motor along Meadville's arterial highway.

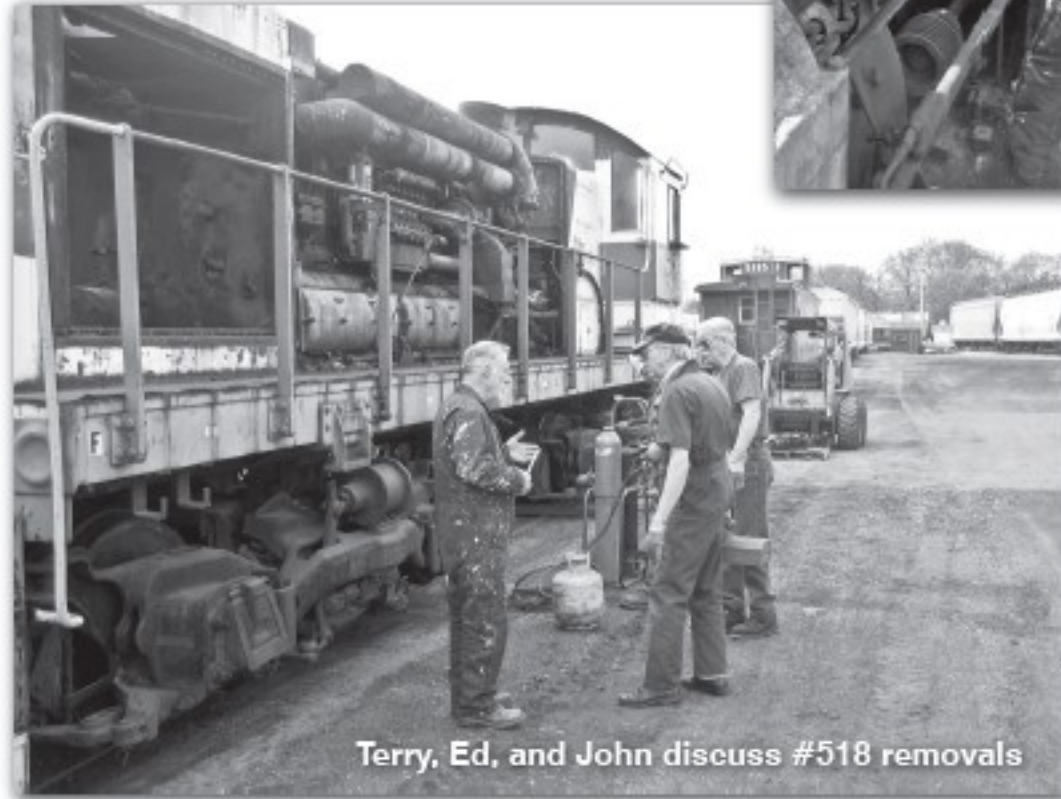
Additionally, the Erie Railroad coal tower diamond has been stabilized and is now set up for viewing at the caboose.

-Al Reibel & Jack Sheets

Terry persuades an obstinate bolt



Stan Niwa burns a stubborn item off the #518



Terry, Ed, and John discuss #518 removals



Prez Denny removes relays and contacts from Alco cab

(continued from page 1)

The head Brakeman stepped down from the engine and opened the west switch of the eastbound passing track, and then as an extra precaution, walked ahead to the west switch of the westbound passing track to make sure it was properly closed. Assuming the eastbound passing track was clear, he then returned to the engine. Moments after the engineer of Third No. 86 had left the tower to go back to his engine, the engine of First No. 72 hit the rear of his train. The resulting collision crushed the wooden caboose of Third No. 86 on impact. The wreckage then caught on fire and spread to the car ahead of it, destroying it. Engine 4129 was only slightly damaged, as the estimated speed of the collision was between 5 and 6 mph. Sadly though, the conductor, middle brakeman, and the end flagman were killed in the accident.

On March 30, 1926 the Interstate Commerce Commission issued File No. 1247 Accident Investigation

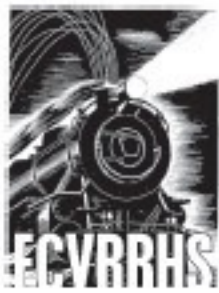
Report. In its findings, it reported the description of the Second District of the Meadville Division between Meadville, PA and Kent, OH. They describe the location of the accident, the trains, and their crews, and summarize the evidence taken from those involved. In the end they conclude the accident was caused by "failure of the crew of train Third No. 86 to take proper precautions for the safety of their train in view of the existing weather conditions". In particular, the Head Brakeman was cited for failure to

carry out his orders given to him by the operator. It was not his duty to raise any questions as to how the Dispatcher was running the railroad.

Another thing that will never be fully understood is why the caboose crew of Third No. 86 never stepped off the caboose to proceed forward looking over the train. Were they asleep in the caboose, or did they assume the following train was heading in on the westbound passing track? I guess we will never know.



Engine 4129 of Eastbound Erie Freight First No. 72



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Meadville Coaling Tower
See story on Page 1

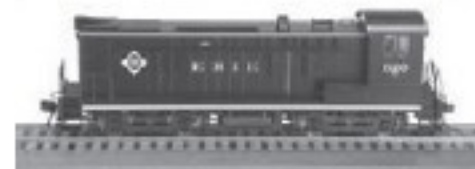
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for an informal "Bull Session"
at Tom's Train Terminal on the
second Friday of each month!

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