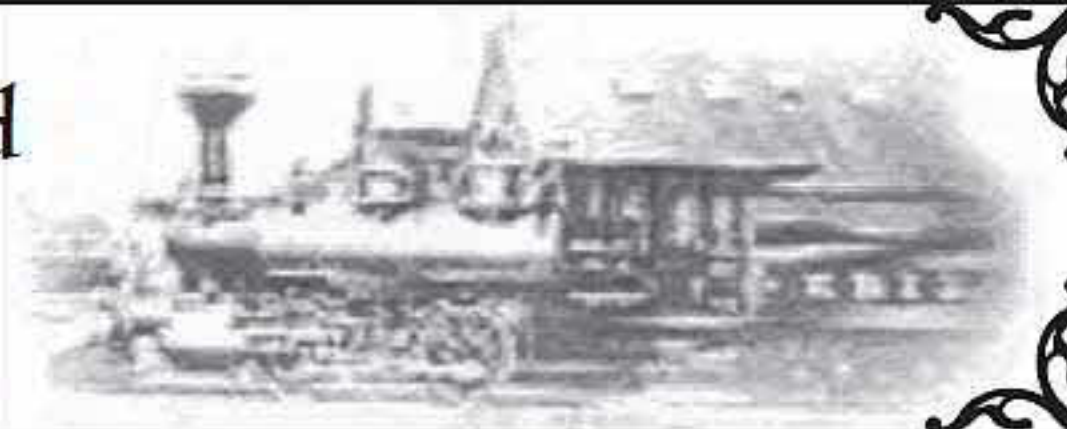




French Creek Valley Railroad
Historical Society

P.O. Box 632 Meadville, PA 16335



FALL 2016

Newsletter of the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society

Volume II Number II

||||| **VALLEY EXPRESS** |||||

The Vallonia Branch of the Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad

Editor's note: This is a follow-up story to the two-part feature titled "Meadville's Other Railroad" from the Valley Express issues Spring 2008 and Fall of 2008. These articles may be found on our website www.fcrrhs.org for reading.

As soon as the Bessemer arrived in Meadville after building a wooden truss bridge across French Creek, they reached their station and continued their trackage across Dock Street (now Mead Avenue). By 1886 they now had a siding going west to a coal shed on Sycamore Alley. It was in close proximity to the New York, Pennsylvania & Ohio RR (later Erie RR) Cullum siding which also ran west from their mainline to another coal shed off Second West Street. That siding then curved south along French Creek, ending on the north side of Dock Street. By 1896 the coal shed on the Bessemer siding had been replaced by a large business called Beman Automatic Oil Can Company. The siding also was extended across Second West Street to a new grocery warehouse.

At this same period of time, the Bessemer extended their line by placing a switch off the siding near the Dock Street crossing, and, starting northwest, intersected the NYPANO Cullum siding. Then, over French Creek on a wood trestle, the tracks continued to the Fifth Ward of Meadville. Their goal was to bring railroad service to the Meadville Pennsylvania Distilling Company, LTD at Race Street. This facility would develop into a large source of business for the railroad.



The Meadville Distillery Company (Photo by Stuart Ladner)

At this same time the Bessemer added a siding off the new extension to serve the coal sheds of S. Merrell & Co., just north of the Dock Street crossing. Then for the next decade there was little change to the trackage in that vicinity. By 1912 Betts Warehouse had been placed along the siding that served Beman.

(continued on page 5)

Local News

GE Center Cab Sold

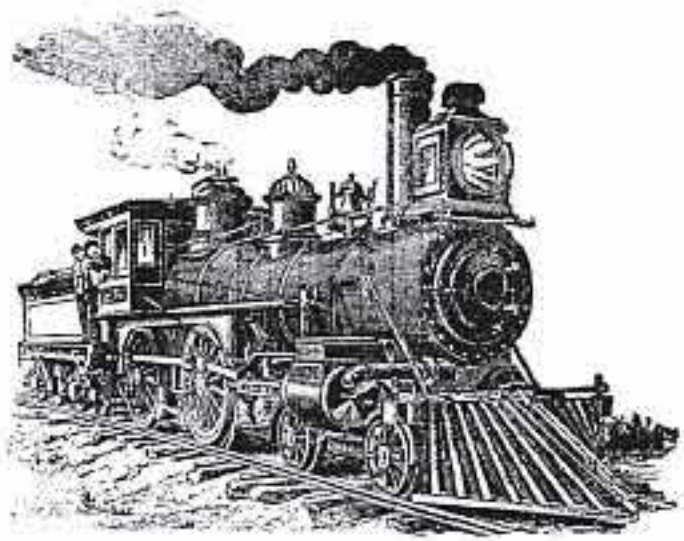
It has just been learned that the GE 80 ton center cab locomotive that has been sitting stranded at the Crawford Industrial Center (the former American Viscose) has been sold by the owner, Glenn Campbell, to the Valley Railroad, a tourist line in Essex, Connecticut which has four other GE 89 tonners. The locomotive has been sitting on a piece of track at the facility since Andover Industries closed its doors in April 2005. Several individuals were looking after it to try to keep the engine from seizing. The unit, built in April 1953, was former U.S. Navy #65-00386 and was acquired when Andover Industries (a division of Buffalo Molded Plastics) opened its facility at the old AVTEX plant. It was a sight to see 86 foot boxcars roll over the sharp turns on the Vallonia Industrial Branch. It was reported that the WNYP was interested in acquiring the 80 tonner in 2004 or 2005 to use if the WNYP were to take over operations over the Vallonia Branch, but Andover Industries went bankrupt and the whole deal was called off.

- Rick Rowlands, Steve Timko, Jr.

Erie, PA General Electric Transferring Work

Since an agreement could not be reached between the unions at the Erie General Electric locomotive facilities and General Electric, production and non-production work will begin to be transferred to other GE facilities, including some overseas. GE is planning to reconfigure its assembly practices, long asked for by employees. GE is asking for a 44% cut in wages for new employees and recalled employees, along with other concessions. This is not welcome news for the local economy. GE locomotives were the bread and butter of thousands of workers at GE and GE's parts and tool suppliers. This affects tool and die businesses here in Crawford County as well.

- Erie Times News



From the Stationmaster's Office

As fall nears, and winter looms in the not too distant future, we are proud to say we are making considerable progress at the display site. We are completing the exterior welding on the 518, with some interior work to be done and lettering yet as of this writing. In fact, only the cab numbers and striping are left to paint on the 518.



The boxcar is being coated with primer and will be painted before the leaves are all gone. The new boards should be installed and painted.

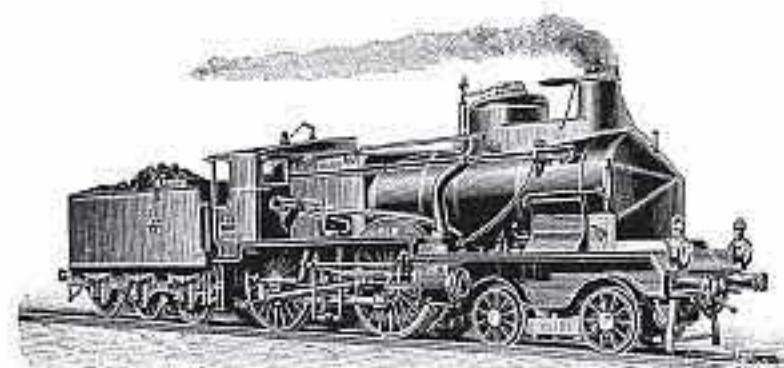
This is all coming about from our ability to work together. Everyone in the Society has their own little niche where they can help the organization grow. We need more people to join and share their talents with the Society, whether it be carpentry, painting, organizing, modeling, track work, or any other talent that would benefit the growth of the FCVRRHS or completion of our projects. Thanks to all who have given their time helped. Let's see more of our members sharing the effort and we will certainly grow.

Bernie Hanmore

CONTRIBUTIONS & GIFTS

- Weber Electrical Supply
- Staples Copy & Print
- Lloyd's Rental & Sales
- Crawford County Historical Society
- Western New York & PA RR
- Susi Building Supplies
- US Bronze Foundry & Machine
- AC & J Railroad, Jefferson, OH
- LakeShore Railway Historical Society
- David P. Miller Family
- Industrial Truck & Crane
- Anderson Enterprises
- Specialty Fabrications & Powder Coating
- Bob Bingham family
- Bill McComas Family
- Scott Royer
- Ed Fine
- Carl Timko Family
- Jan Grayson / Perfect Coat
- Tom Collard Family
- Ed Cronin Family
- Seco/Warwick (Sheet Metal)
- Jack Sheets Family
- D & M Tool
- Hafer Trucking

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



French Creek Valley Express

A Publication of the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society

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Dianne Jones

Editor

Carl Timko

Assistant Editor

Dennis Mead

Contact Information

P.O. Box 632
Meadville, PA 16335

Website: www.fcvrhrs.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.

Budget & Finance

Some online fundraising sources have been studied for certain projects. It is highly likely at least one would be used if one certain project gets the green light.

Carl Timko is working on digitizing the Erie Railroad textbook that was donated to the organization. The book will be available on cd only, as the text will be kept in the archives to preserve it. The book contains instructions, drawings, formulas, and other pertinent facts used by Erie Railroad shop workers. A price will be set for members and non-members.

One of our other means of raising funds is our merchandise. Currently, we have the Erie Railroad book of photographs from the Stuart Ladner collection, our clothing line, and the 2017 calendars. The clothing includes polo shirts, our 518 tee shirts, what is left of our original caboose tee shirts, sweatshirts, crew neck and hooded, and our hats. Merchandise that is no longer in stock can be reordered. The caboose shirts will not be reordered at this time due to the high cost of printing a three color image. If submitting an order, please allow some time for the supplier to schedule, set up and process the order. Orders can be made through the website at www.fcvrhs.org.

- Vanessa Timko, Carl Timko

History & Archives

The Erie Railroad text book that was donated by Pat Winters, is a virtual treasure trove of information on the courses new hires in the Erie Railroad shops had to learn. The book contains lessons on casting, fabricating, milling, lathe work, electrical work and all the needed mathematics to produce parts for locomotives. The book is being digitally copied onto cds by Carl Timko. Prices will be discussed when the project is completed. There will be separate members and non-members prices. A date has not been targeted to announce the availability, but it is hoped to be ready before the year ends.

Several small items were donated

recently. Some railroad rule books, and timetables were donated by member Ron Stafford. A small photo album of mostly Erie Lackawanna trains was donated by Mr. David First. These items will be kept in the archives, and as time permits will be digitally copied if no copyright, trademark, or other rights will be infringed upon.

- Carl Timko

Membership

Members who still owe their dues are asked to please send in their remittances. The dues help offset expenses for operations and projects, such as for paint and equipment for the display site.

It is hoped our members can entice people they know in joining the organization. Younger and more able members are needed. There are a few young members, but not many.

The holiday season is right around the corner. Those that will help out with operating the model railroad layout can help by handing membership applications to all who are genuinely interested.

Our members can take advantage of a couple of great discount opportunities. The FCVRRHS hats are available to members for \$15 each. Non-members are charged \$20 for each hat. Possibly by the end of the year or so, compact discs of the Erie Railroad Shops text book will be available. Members will pay \$5 less than non-member purchasers will. A price has not been set yet.

- Carl Timko

Model Railroad

At a recent membership meeting, a suggestion was made to adopt a program that the I-80 (model railroad) Group is using. They collect no dues, have no meetings, with the exception of gathering at a model railroader's residence to operate the layout. Since there is no model railroad club any more, this would be an ideal way to see how other model railroaders build and operate their layouts. There may be techniques that can be incorporated into a modeler's own layout. Those that attended the meeting were all in favor of initiating this program. It

may not start until the colder weather sets in.

- John Snyder

Museum

The Northwest Pennsylvania Heritage Partnership had its annual meeting at the Cambridge Springs trolley station on Monday, September 12, 2016. Approximately 45 people attended the event. Patricia Winsor, the Heritage Partnership treasurer was awarded the Volunteer of the Year Award. Organization of the Year was awarded to the Crawford County Convention and Visitor's Bureau. Accepting were Juanita Hampton and Kevin Parsons. The Anne W. Stewart Historical Research Award was given to Robert D. Ilisevich, who co-wrote the book "European Capital, British Iron and an American Dream" with Pete Gifford.

Renovations to the trolley station are 75% complete thanks largely to a grant from the Harold Heist Foundation and donations from many Cambridge Springs residents as well as others from outside Cambridge Springs. Projects remaining include installing brick columns around the new steel supports under the portico, renovate the men's room, paint the back room, install signage, install a French drain and new concrete in the basement. Plans are in the works to construct a 2/3 scale replica of a two axle trolley for an outdoor display on which children's parties could be hosted.

The Penncrest School Board held their monthly meeting at the trolley station on September 21. This marks the first event that starts the clock for operating the station as a charitable purpose, which will allow the organization to apply for property tax exemptions in the near future.

- Ed Cronin



John Snyder painting on the upper stripes of the 518.

Property and Equipment

At the time this publication was being written, great progress is being made at the railroad display site in Pomona Park, Meadville, PA. On Tuesday, September 20, Dennis Mead with assistance from John Snyder, Ed Cronin, and Carl Timko, began lettering the #518. The number on the nose, the lettering on the back end of the cab, and lettering and the diamond logo were painted on. It is expected to have the numbering on the cab completed the following week. Striping would be all that is left to do. A crew painted the cab black and the trucks on Thursday, September 22. It is amazing how much better the #518 looks!

(Editor's note: Just before this issue went to the graphic editor, painting of the #518 was completed on Tuesday, September 27! The crew that finished the painting included Dennis Mead, John Snyder, Jack Sheets, and Carl Timko. Thanks to all who have supported with this project. A photo can be seen on this page. That picture will soon be on the 2017 calendar, our website at www.fcrrhs.org, and on the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society Facebook site that can be accessed through the website.)

Also on Tuesday, September 20, a crew of Jack Sheets, Stan Niwa, and Terry Martin sprayed on the final coat of boxcar red paint on the side facing the highway and the two ends, and the frame. The next job will be tearing off the old boards on the west side and replacing them with new boards. Discussions have occurred on how to paint the Bessemer & Lake Erie logo on the two sides. Stencilling may be the best choice, especially after seeing how nice the #518 turned out.

At the membership meeting held at Pomona Park on Thursday, September 15, Attorney John Nagurney presented the board with the deed to the former Charles Smock property across Water St. Extension, which is near the WNYP tracks. If nothing else, the tool car may be displayed there.

The FCVRRHS, represented by President Bernie Hanmore and Director Jack Sheets did not sign a



The 518 just after the last paint had been applied.

Photo by Carl Timko

lease agreement for the bell of the Erie Railroad 2-8-4 #3378. It belongs to the city of Meadville which asked that the FCVRRHS pay for the insurance on it.

It was deemed unwise to pay for insuring the bell when the FCVRRHS did not own it. It is expected that the city will display the bell in the Downtown Mall along with the Erie Railroad scale replica of the A&GW #5, which is enclosed in glass.

Public Relations & Education

As you read this column, the new 2017 Calendars should be available. Mike Vickey and I have finalized the picture selection. This calendar will be the last featuring the Stuart Ladner collection. We are very thankful for the family of Stuart allowing us to use his photo collection for producing the calendars from 2012 to 2017. 2015 was the only year we did not release a calendar. You should check the website for pricing and availability. In addition, don't forget our Erie Railroad Historical Photographs from the Stuart Ladner Collection. We compiled the pictures from the first three calendars to make this successful book.

In addition to our website, be sure and visit our tables at the next Erie Railroadiana and Model Train Show on Sunday, November 6, 2016 at Rainbow Gardens, Waldameer Park. Along with the calendars and books, we have many other items for sale. Help us make this another successful event.

One last item, our train display at Pomona Park has drawn interest in organizations requesting photo shoots near the equipment. We have

had inquiries for photo sessions from a ballet dance group, as well as a pastor. I hope we are able to see the results of their work.

- Dennis Mead

The website (www.fcrrhs.org) is undergoing a makeover and will be ready to launch very soon. Webmaster Dianne Jones of Holdstill Productions is working with Carl Timko to upgrade the website so it is more user friendly. Watch for an announcement in your email or in the *Second Section*.

- Carl Timko

Special Events & Programs

The French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society will have a table at the Erie Train Show at Rainbow Gardens in Waldameer Park, on Sunday November 6th. Our line of shirts and hats will be featured along with our 2017 calendars, Erie Railroad photo book, magazines, model railroad supplies and a few items our members would like to sell. We are to have the same location as we had in March. Come to the show and look for us!

The HO layout will be on display in the Meadville Downtown Mall in the old John's Hallmark Shoppe across from Eddie's Footlongs. We will share the store with the Local Artisans shop as we did last year. We expect to have it up by the Friday after Thanksgiving.

The listing of train shows is on page 6 of this newsletter. For more information, check our website, www.fcrrhs.org or the Railserve website at www.railserve.com and click on Model Railroad Shows.

- Carl Timko

The Vallonia Branch

(continued from page 1)

The wood trestle crossing over French Creek soon needed replacement, so the Bessemer removed Bridge 36 on their mainline in Shenango, PA and reassembled it in Meadville in 1910 for that replacement. Built originally in 1897, the structure was 184' long, and had a gross weight limit of 120,000 pounds. The replacement necessitated new concrete piers in French Creek, as well as new wood approach trestles on each end. (In 1952 the Erie Railroad had to rebuild the concrete piers because of deterioration.)

The Real Estate Department of the Erie Railroad was working along with the City to bring the American Viscose Company to Meadville, and in 1928 had announced that they were successful in bringing the company to town. The site chosen was the old Vallonia racetrack property on Rogers Ferry Road. To reach the site the Erie extended the Bessemer rails from Race Street into the new facility. By 1930 the Viscose was making rayon, and the Erie was moving coal and chemicals into the plant in volume.

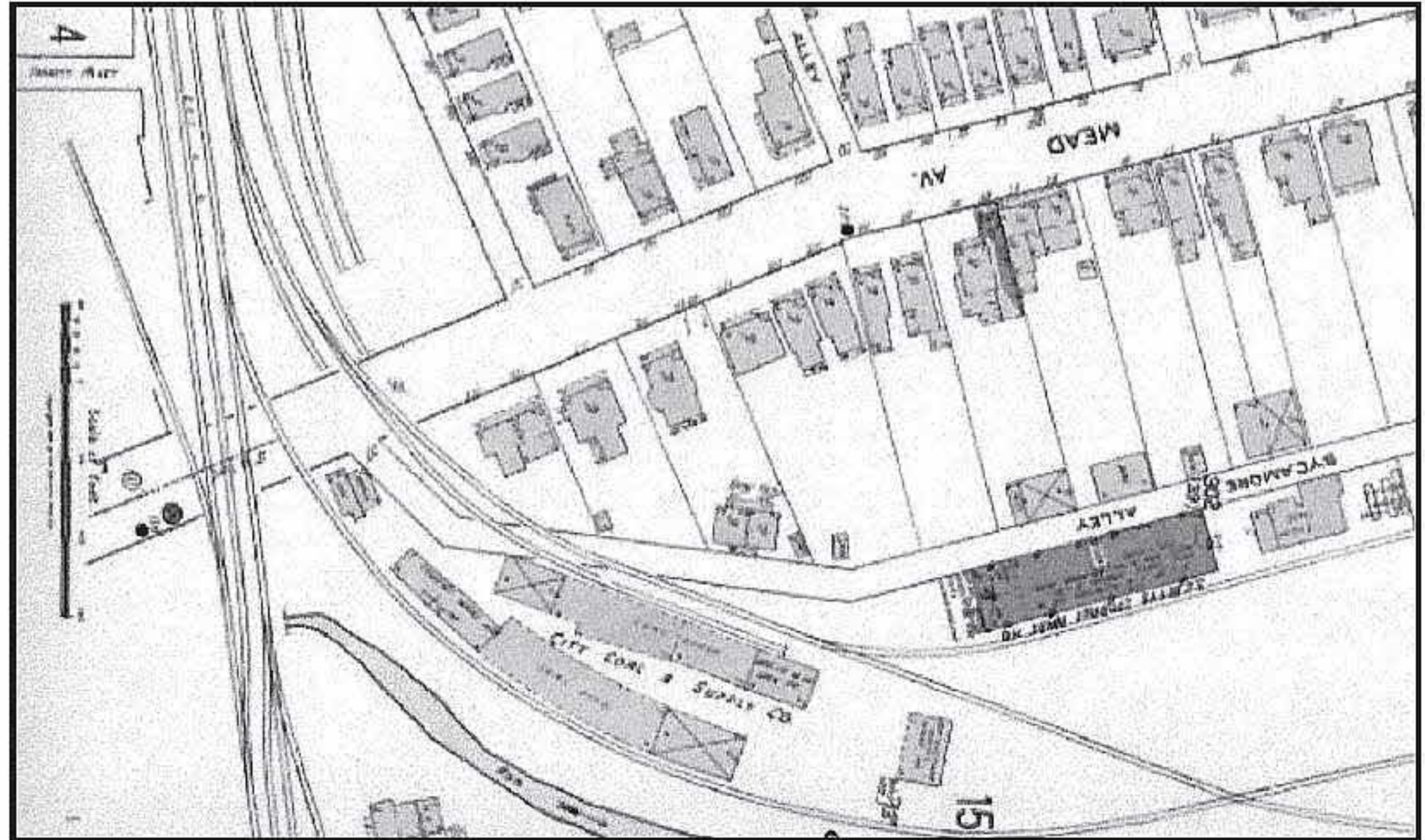
The distillery shut down in the mid-1940's, and although there was suggestions of reopening the facility for other purposes, the operations were ended. For the Bessemer it was a loss of traffic, leaving only the Erie operation to the Viscose. So, in 1947 the Erie took over the branch, leaving the Bessemer ownership stopping at the east end of the bridge over French Creek.

As was told in the Fall 2008 Valley Express article, the Bessemer finally abandoned train service to Meadville in 1977, but the branch continued to be operated by Conrail to the now-Meadville Area Industrial Authority site, where tenant

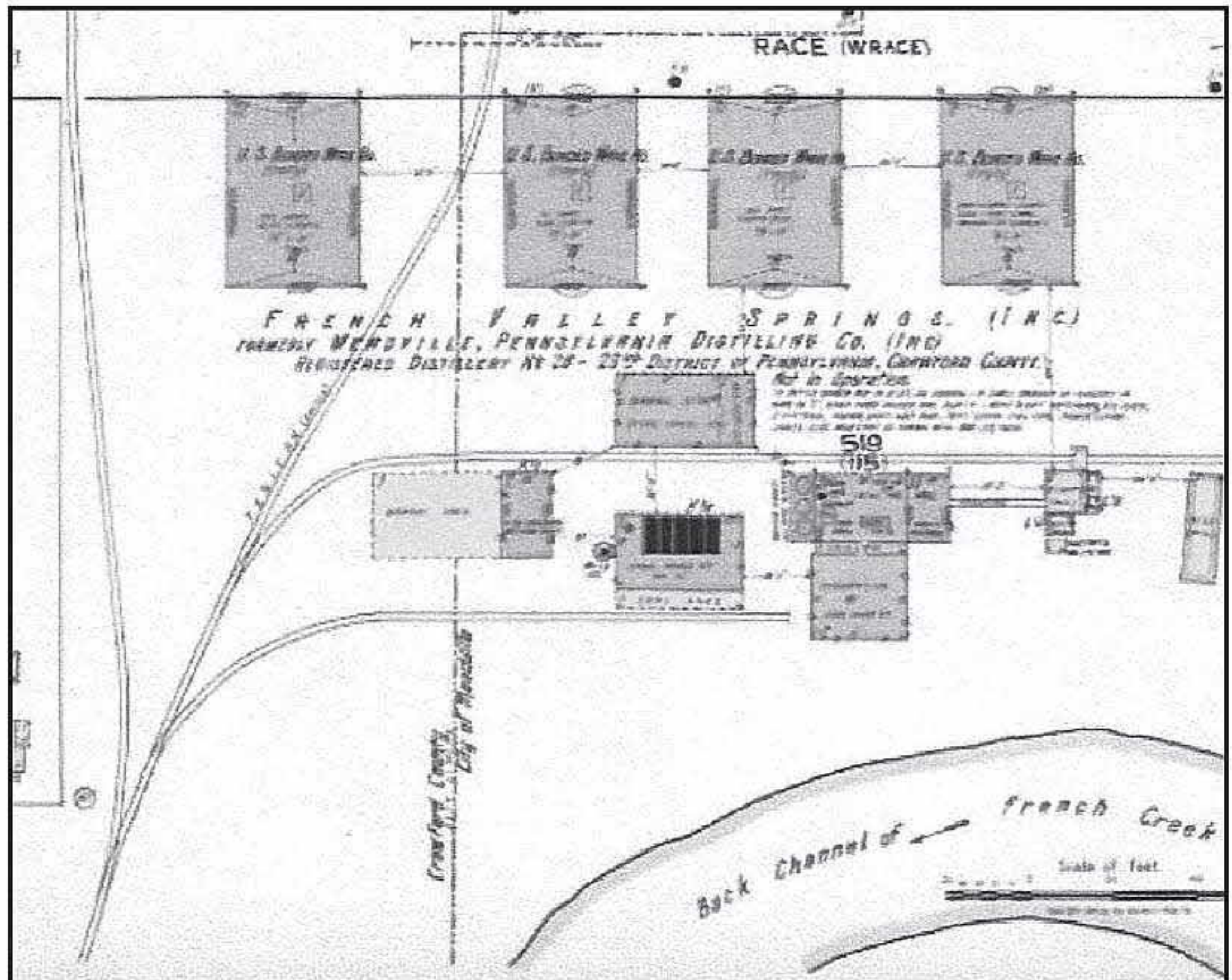
Andover Industries received and delivered products by rail. In time though, the operation was shut down, and the Authority in 2012 chose to tear up the branch.

*Although the Bessemer and Lake Erie presence has disappeared from Meadville, there are still reminders of the railroad around today. The former station on Bessemer Street survives as a farm and garden supply store. And, south of the station a former Bessemer wood boxcar is displayed in Pomona Park. And, old bridge 36, which has two assignments, might find purpose as part of a **Rails to Trails** project someday. We will wait to see.*

The followin maps are copied from 1912 Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of Meadville



The Vallonia Branch near Mead Avenue



Tracks to Meadville's Fifth Ward, which served the Meadville Distillery



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 Railroad Historical Society
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Erie RR diamond logo on the west side of the 518.

French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society
 Calendar of Events
 Fall - Winter 2016

- Oct. 15 Railfanning Day**
 Painesville Railroad Museum
 475 Railroad St., Painesville, OH
 10 am to 5 pm
- Nov. 5 Cleveland 2-Rail O Scale Train Show**
 Lakeland Community College, Kirtland, OH
 Admission \$7
 Hours 9 am to 2 pm
- Nov. 6 Erie Train Show**
 Rainbow Gardens,
 Waldameer Park, Erie, PA
 Admission \$5
 Hours 10 am to 4 pm
- Nov. 27 Rochester, NY Thanksgiving Train Show**
 1200 Buffalo Rd., Rochester, NY
 Hours 9:30 am to 3 pm
- Dec. 10, 11 Tiger Tracks Train Show**
 Rochester Institute of Technology
 Gordon Field House, Rochester, NY
 Hours 10 am to 5 pm , 11 am to 4 pm
- Dec. 18 Christmas Train & Toy Show**
 Lakeland Community College, Kirtland, OH
 Admission \$6
 Hours 10 am to 3;30 pm



Dennis Mead airbrushing the last of the cab numbers.



Stan Niwa welding a plate onto the cab of the 518.

All photos on this page by Carl Timko