

# French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society

411 Chestnut Street Meadville, PA 16335

SPRING 2006

Newsletter of the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society

Volume I Number 1



# VALLEY EXPRESS

**MAY 20, 2006**

764 Bessemer Street  
Meadville, PA

10:00 am ~ 4:00 pm

## Collectible Swap Shop

Keynote Speaker  
11 am  
Nathan Clark

Roundhouse Discussion

## Operating Model Train

Excursion to Corry  
1:00 pm

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### ANNUAL MEETING

**JUNE 15, 2006**  
**MEADVILLE COUNTRY CLUB**  
6:30 SOCIAL HOUR  
8:00 BUSINESS MEETING

### Committee Reports

*These are some of the areas of interest for French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society members. Do you have an interest in 'Rail' that you would like to pursue in our organization? Why not consider joining our group and sharing your expertise with fellow Historians/ Railroaders/ Modelers!*

**Historical/Archives** - An oral histories coop project with Allegheny College is underway. To date eleven former railroaders have shared their experiences. Future plans call for changing displays and/or media at the proposed Heritage Center, as well as through monthly Web-site updates. A compilation of locomotives from CCHS-held Erie records is nearing completion. Manufacturers noted include Baldwin, and ALCO, etc.

**Public Relations/Education** - This newsletter is a first effort of a planned biannual production. Distribution will be by e-mail or postal service to the membership, while additional copies will be made available at the Crawford County H.S. (CCHS), the Crawford County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CCCVB), and local train buff organizations, with which we intend to maintain close alliance- particularly ELHS. Major FCVRRHS events will be advertised in a Kalmbach Publication.

**Property/ Equipment** - A panel of track has been prepared to receive caboose (C356) on permanent loan from ELHS. Insurance has been obtained, and lighting and a fence will be installed to protect the unit. A search for a diesel engine shell is underway for later addition to the future Heritage Center.

**Special Events/Programs** - The 4<sup>th</sup> annual Railroad Roundhouse event is scheduled for 20 May 2006, from 10 AM - 4 PM at the Douglas Center in the Bessemer Building. This year's key speaker will be Nathan Clark. Food and drink will be available, and Railroad photography and memorabilia will be on display. An excursion train from Meadville to Corry, PA is set for 1 PM from the Spring St. Bridge. A model train will be operational and tri-colored T-shirts will be available for \$15. An outstanding matted rendition of a P1 class articulated pusher locomotive in sepia tone is available for \$25 at CCHS.

**Model Railroading** - Previously we displayed our portable diorama, featuring 3 operating trains at Conneaut Lake Park's 'Trees of Christmas' fund raiser. More recently, President Cronin's HO-scale B&LE layout has hosted monthly operating sessions for a Greenville, PA youth group. Our web site offers tips on weathering and modeling scenery as well as coming events. A tour of local home layouts is planned for the future.



# FROM THE STATIONMASTER'S OFFICE

WELCOME to the first edition of the New biannual flyer of the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society. This is another way your board and officers are trying to make the society more beneficial to you, the member...or future member!

On the first day of May I received word that the Erie Lackawanna Historical Society (ELHS) board has signed our agreement for the loan of caboose C356. It should be arriving in Meadville soon! It wasn't so long ago that several of us were building the track panel for the caboose. It was hard work, but what a learning experience! I think I have learned all I need to know about tamping ties, so in the future, when we expand the track to accommodate a locomotive, I will be happy to allow others to hone their skills as a gandy dancer!

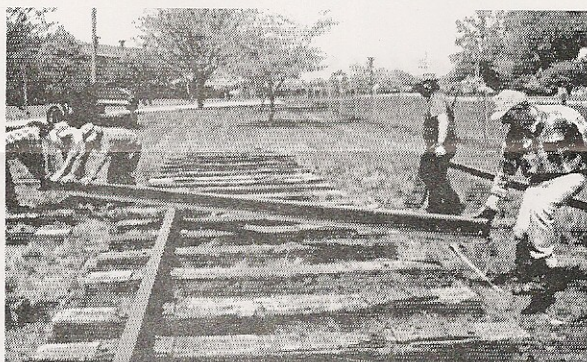


Figure #1

We are finishing event planning for the Railroad Roundhouse on May 20, and are pleased to be able to offer an excursion train ride to FCV members this year. In a gesture of support for FCV, the Western New York and Pennsylvania Railroad will be providing the train to us for less than their cost. Any leftover seats will be offered to the public.



Figure #2

On May 4 your representatives are scheduled to sign the formation documents to create the Northwestern Pennsylvania Railroad and Tooling Heritage Center as a Pennsylvania corporation. When completed, the 22,000 square foot Heritage Center will feature three museums under one roof and offer much, much more to the FCV members as well as to our community.

In addition to the camaraderie we enjoy as FCV members and railroad enthusiasts, we hope to be able to offer additional rail trips, group visits to several model railroad clubs in our area, and an overnight trip to Altoona, Scranton or Strasburg in the not-too-distant future. If you are a member, let us know what we can do to increase your enjoyment of the society. If you are not a member, consider joining us. We are historians, collectors, modelers, and rail fans.

Ed Cronin

# FRENCH CREEK VALLEY EXPRESS

A Publication of the  
French Creek Valley Railroad  
Historical Society

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French Creek VALLEY EXPRESS is published biannually, Spring and Fall. Those wishing to submit material may query the editor. All submissions are subject to editing for length and clarity. Queries must include full name, address and daytime phone number or e-mail address.



If you would be interested in hosting a weekend day tour of your rail layout, please contact FCVRRHS at 411 Chestnut St., Meadville, PA 16335.

**Budget/Finance** - French Creek Valley continues to be financially sound. Sources of income include annual dues, gifts from members and friends of the Society, grants, as well as income from the Roundhouse event, T-shirt sales and limited edition prints Hunt Christie has prepared.

Our members have been very resourceful in finding items required. Case in point is the panel of track needed to display the caboose. Thanks to Hunt, there was no cost to the Society for that project. Because we are sharing expenses with three other groups for the Heritage Center, expenses associated with that project are one quarter of what they might be.

This newsletter is the first example. The excursion train ride on May 20 is another example. Other ideas include group trips to model railroad clubs in the area, an overnight trip to a major railroad museum in PA, group trips to train shows and artifact auctions, and quarterly, if not monthly get-togethers to watch railroad videos and socialize. Please let us know if you have suggestions on how this organization can better support the interests of our members and make membership in FCV a treat!

**Museum/ Heritage Center** - Our French Creek Valley Railroad H. S. has evolved from the Railroad Committee under the Crawford County H. S. (CCHS). In our pursuit of a Heritage Center site, we have joined forces with organizations sharing our mutual

great fit to move the project forward. The second group-CCHS- needed a facility to display photography and to store/ restore valuable historical records. The third group; CCCVB, has pushed our agenda as a means of attracting increasing numbers of visitors to the area - a potential boon to local businesses. They have also advised us of available grant money and assisted with applications. Talks with the City resulted in a site selection along the Meadville Bypass, at the south end of the Seco-Warwick Plant. During the past two years, our plans have been presented to Senator Robbins and other area politicians, who have wholeheartedly endorsed our efforts. Associated Contractors has provided a cost analysis to construct the Heritage Center in 3 phases (Figure 3). Figure 4 is a picture of the Meadville Station, circa 1940. Compare this photo with preliminary

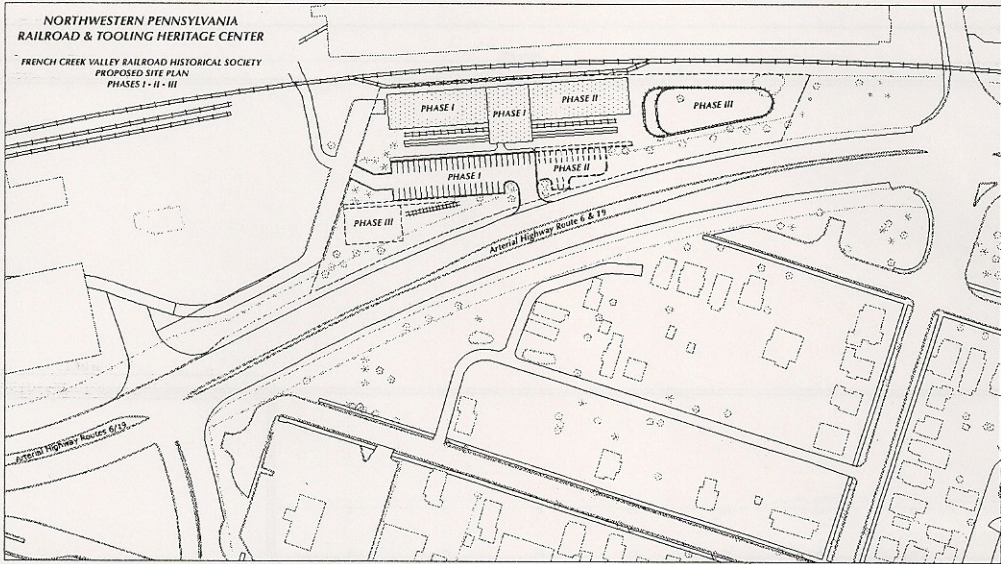


Figure #3

Now might be a good time to remind members that 2006-2007 dues are payable before July 1. They remain unchanged at \$15/ person, \$30/ family, or \$450/ life membership. Members joining in April, May, or June are considered paid up for the subsequent year.

**Membership** - We currently have 34 members. Our newest members are Mr. and Mrs. John Spear of Fullerton, CA. In 1930 Mr. Spear hired out on the Erie. I believe he found our web page and decided to give us his support...which is greatly appreciated. The board of directors has been cogitating about membership. Recently, we have been looking for new ways to offer more to our members.

interest of preserving our local history and displaying artifacts from our heritage, including: (1) The Northwest PA Chapter of the National Tooling and Machining Association; (2) CCHS; and (3) the Crawford County Convention and Visitors Bureau (CCCVB).

The Tooling/ Manufacturing Group currently has the Greater Meadville Area Tooling Museum that is located at the Precision Manufacturing Institute on Rogers Ferry Road in the old Avtex facility, but are faced with finding new quarters once PMI moves to their new facility on Bessemer St. We initially felt that our goals and groups had a

plan and elevation drawings scheduled for Phase 1 (Figure 5). In December of 2005, Museum Management Consultants, Inc. gave us a quote to do a feasibility study for the Center, including assessments of all groups involved, a 3-year business plan and budget, a strategic plan, and a visitor experience plan. Once funding becomes available, an estimated two years would be necessary to complete the facility. But, if this non-profit project is to succeed, we the public need to contact Federal, State and Local elected officials. A form letter is available at [lsmith@mail.csonline.net](mailto:lsmith@mail.csonline.net)



Erie R. R. Station, Meadville, Pa.



Figure #4  
Meadville Station, circa 1940

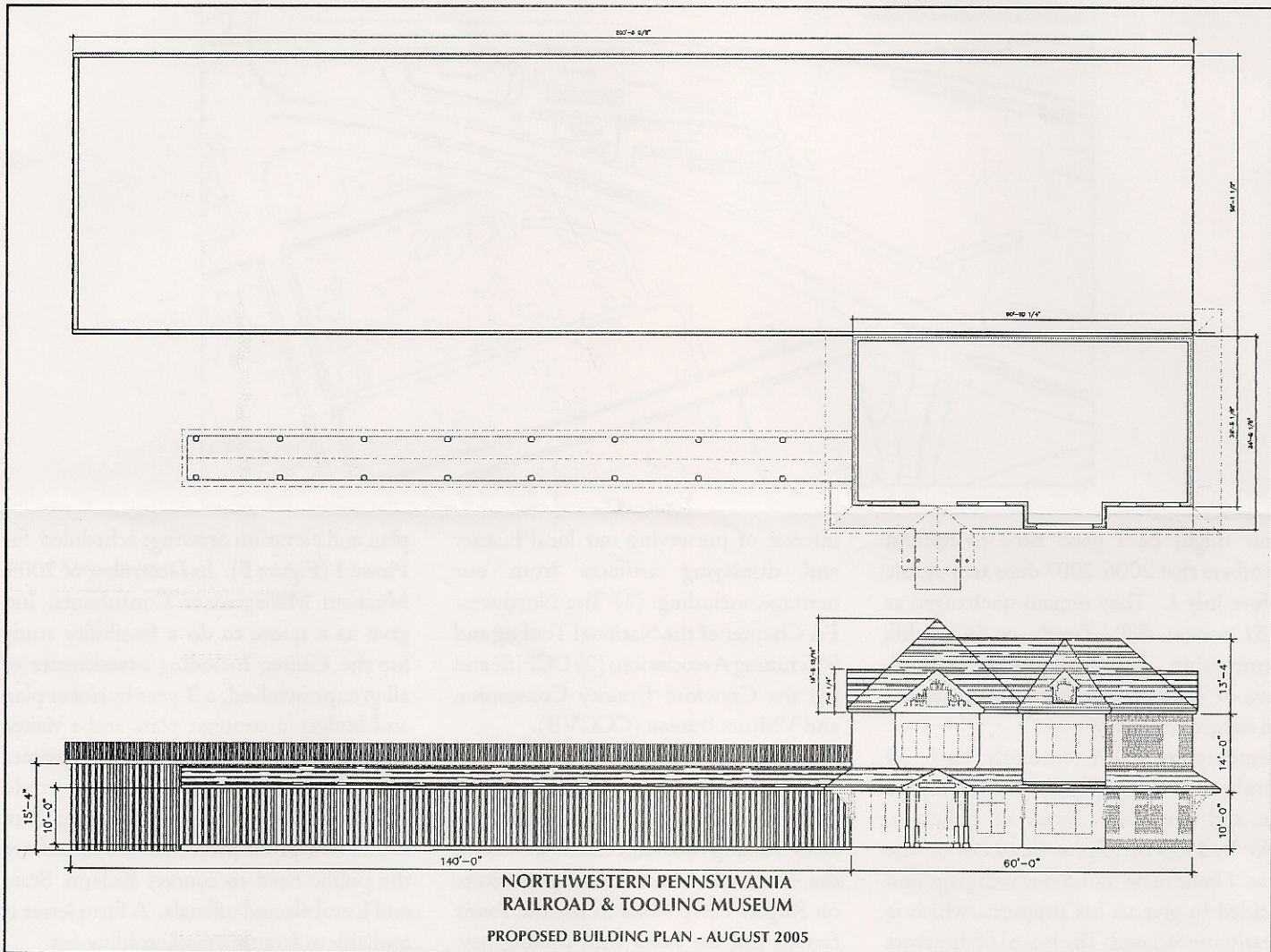


Figure #5  
Phase I Preliminary Drawings



## THE FAMILY HISTORY OF CABOOSE C356

When the merger of the Erie Railroad and the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad occurred in October 1960, the caboose roster was made up of cupola cabooses, both wood and steel from both railroads, and a group of steel bay-window units from the Erie. The Erie's last wood cabooses, numbers 04926 - 04950 and 04951-04975 were built by Magor Car Corporation of New Jersey, starting in 1929. Although the numbers had diminished to a handful by merger time, they were still used in local service. The Lackawanna also had gone to Magor in 1925 for wood cabooses, but only one survived into the merger, number 849.

The Erie, by 1941, had begun building steel cupola cabooses of their own design, with many of the units using wheel sets from former milk cars. What followed were numbers C170-C221 and C 222-C269. These cars were set apart from the first group by use of welded car-body construction, instead of riveted, and they rode on boxcar wheel sets. All these cars were built in the railroad's Dunmore shops, near Scranton, PA.

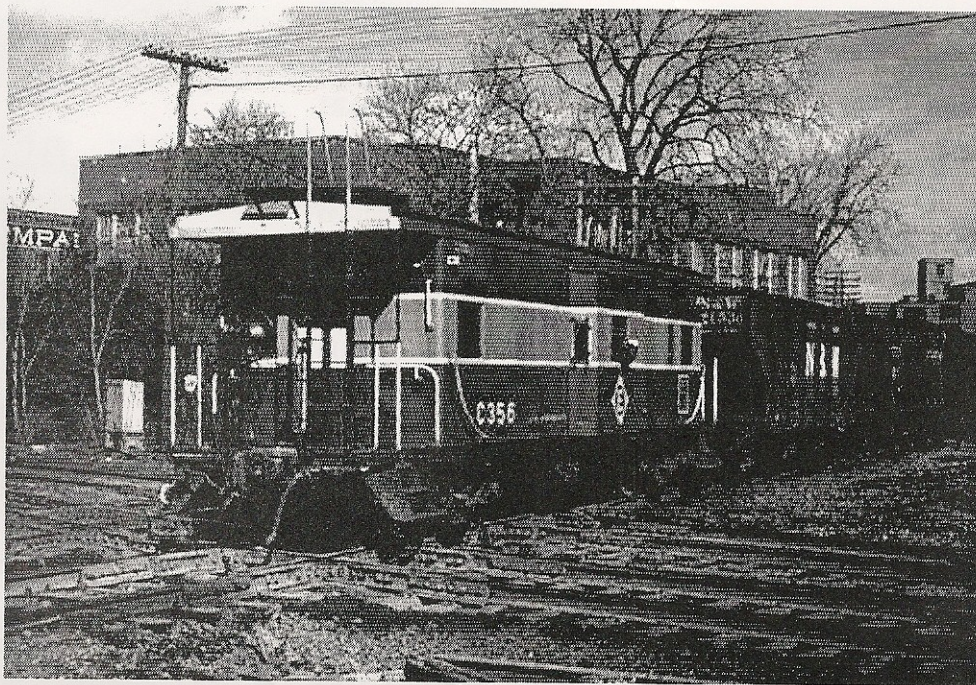


Figure #6

Meanwhile the Lackawanna began in 1948 building a group of steel cupola cabooses, numbers 850-910, at their Keyser Valley shops, using retired steam locomotive tender frames for construction. These cars, at the time of the merger, had number changes by the addition of a C in front of the number, a practice of the Erie cabooses.

June, 1952 marked the last time the Dunmore shops built a caboose for the Erie, number C300. This was no ordinary caboose, but was a test bed for a new bay-window design the Erie had developed. Collecting comments from the crews helped design the best features for this unit. Finally, in 1953, the Erie went with its design to the International Car Company of Kenton, Ohio for an order for fifty units, numbered C301-C350. Built on milkcar wheelsets, these were the newest cabooses on the roster, and thus were assigned most mainline train duties for the Erie and the new Erie-Lackawanna Railroad.

The Erie-Lackawanna began to look at replacements for the wood cabooses by the late 1960s, so the railroad placed an order in

1969 with International Car for twenty new bay-window cabooses, numbers C351-C370. With this order came our caboose, C356. These units were the first cabooses on the roster equipped with roller bearing wheel sets. In 1970 the EL returned to International car for the last group of cabooses they would ever buy, numbers C371-C380. The most striking difference with these cars was the lack of roof walks and end ladders, the result of an AAR safety ruling of eliminating crew members from walking on the tops of cars.

Our caboose, C356, spent its career working the entire mainline of the EL from Jersey City to Chicago. Delivered in the red car-body scheme, with black roof and yellow handrails, she carried the EL logo and number in white. Then, sometime after August 1973 she came back to the Meadville Car Shops and received a new paint job of maroon, gray and yellow, a reversal of the diesel paint scheme.

In April, 1976, C356, and the rest of the EL roster, was about to see change with the takeover of the railroad by Conrail. Re-numbered 21152 in the Conrail fashion, she saw changes during her shopping, including removal of the roof walks and end ladders and replacement of the window glass to bullet-proof type. Once

out of the shop she would venture the mainline of Conrail, riding rails never before traveled by C356. Then in 1988 an action by the Erie-Lackawanna Trustees would change the history of this special caboose. Bought by the trustees from Conrail, she would be donated to the Erie-Lackawanna Historical Society and delivered to the Morristown & Erie Railway in Morristown, NJ. There C356 would be restored to her maroon, grey and yellow paint scheme, and see active duty on the M&E.

When the FCVRRHS reorganized, the new officers received an offer from ELHS for use of C356 for display purposes. After deciding on the site at the lower end of Meadville along the arterial highway, negotiations began.

Like all stories, this one has a happy ending. The negotiations are complete; the paperwork is signed; and caboose C356 is getting ready to ride the rails again, this time back to her home town and the employees who lovingly took care of her during her life on the Erie-Lackawanna railway.

Dennis Mead



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Meadville, PA 16335



## CONTRIBUTIONS

Ed & Suann Cronin  
W. B. Moore  
Annette Lynch  
Ross Prather  
John Petruso  
Robert Wade  
Dan Higham  
Penelec Employees  
Gerry Deane  
Gene Templeton  
Erie Lackawana/ Conrail Vets

Dave Miller  
Rotary District 7280  
Dennis Mead  
Pete Gifford  
J. McFadden  
Huntington Christie  
Scott & Joyce Ladner  
Bill & Yetivemarie McComas  
Crawford County Historical Society  
Crawford Heritage Foundation

## MEMORIALS

Stuart & Mildred Ladner Family  
Frank & Norma Portfilio Family