



Official Newsletter
of



NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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AUTUMN 2016

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Note: Horseshoe Curve Chapter, National Railway Historical Society was granted a charter by the NRHS on May 11, 1968 (3 months and ten days after the PRR-NYC merger), evolving from the Altoona Railway Museum Club (1965-1968). We meet on FOURTH Tuesday of each month except December, at Railroader's Memorial Museum, Altoona, PA, 7:30 PM. Occasional exceptions are announced to the membership.

90 (+) % of all communications and notices are handled by e-mail. Please keep your e-mail address current with the officers, especially the Chapter Historian/Editor.

Meetings are open to those interested in railroad history and membership inquiries are invited. Chapter-only membership is available but national membership dues are separate. For more information visit www.nrhs.com.

UNDER THE WIRE

By
Leonard E. A.Iwine

THE LAST STOP
Part 3

In this edition of “The Last Stop”, we will take a look at buses, the vehicle(s) that replaced the trolleys. While many historians would use the words de-railed or killed instead of replaced, buses do have a place in the transit history, a place that similar to the trolleys in many areas has been lost forever. The buses making their “Last Stop” also in scrap yards, rather than museums.

Buses were a natural replacement for trolleys. Many traction companies began using buses in the 1920's as feeder lines to the trolley system. Cities expanded and the out-lying areas began to get populated, and they were better served by buses which didn't require the expense of track construction and over-head power lines to start new routes. In fact, in many new developments, those items of infrastructure were prohibited, so buses had to be used to feed the end point of trolley lines.

Soon trolley companies found that buses were cheaper to purchase and maintain than the trolley cars and could be quickly updated to route changes. Then, too many cities began to pave streets to cater to the ever increasing use of automobiles and to change direction of travel as those automobiles clogged the city streets. This left the buses as the only solution to change the route quickly and at little expense to the trolley lines which were losing money each day to the automobiles taking away passengers. So, in the end, it was really government and the auto industry that killed the trolley systems, not the buses. With the automobiles becoming more a part of American transportation, even the buses were coming to the same fate as the trolleys...hard use and retired, being sent to scrap yards, their own history lost forever.

Fortunately there are a few historians who have tried and are trying to record that history. There are some museums across the country that have restored buses as part of their collections. Here in Pennsylvania we are fortunate to have one in Hershey as an adjunct to the Antique Automobile Club of America, with a whole floor devoted to buses and their history. There are rare examples from bus lines across the state displayed there as well as some from other regions. However, there is movement among larger transit authorities employees to preserve examples of different bus styles/models used in their fleets as they are retired, creating “retired fleets” which can be used for special occasions.

But, what about here in Altoona ? Currently there are two Altoona buses , numbered # 153 & # 402, at the museum in Hershey. These are later examples and not unique in any way except # 402 may be the only Orion brand preserved anywhere to date. As with the trolleys, Altoona has missed the opportunity to preserve early, or as I like to call them, special historic buses.

The first example of “missed opportunities” would be the Beaver buses. Beaver is not a common name in a bus-brand, but it was one that was built right here in Pennsylvania. They were hand-built in the shops of the Beaver Motor Coach Company, a division of Beaver Valley Traction Company of Beaver Falls, PA.

In the early 1930's , Beaver Valley management thought the small buses could be built cheaper than those on the market, so they devised a plan and hand-built one on a Ford chassis in the shops, using aluminum circa 1933. After building six buses for themselves, Logan Valley management looked at them and liked the idea, and ordered two for Altoona. That order prompted Beaver to begin building buses for other bus lines also.

From 1935-1956, 980 Beaver buses were built before a flood in May of 1956 destroyed the factory. Sadly, of those 980 manufactured buses, only ONE is known to exist today in New Jersey.

Of those 980 Beaver buses, 25 came to Altoona, 5 were delivered to Johnstown Traction Co, and 2 went to Gildea Bus Lines in Hollidaysburg, PA. Gildea was subsequently bought by Blue & White Lines in 1951 and those 2 Beaver buses came to Altoona [city] also.

Unfortunately, two of these local Beaver buses still existed in the Altoona area into the late 1980's. Logan Valley # 242 (Photo # 1) went to a car lot in Duncansville when retired, and sat there for many years. It then went to a junk yard in Vicksburg was lost. One of the Gildea Beaver buses ended up in a quarry in Eoldorado (section of Altoona) (Photo # 2) and sat there for years until I-99 went through the area and then it too disappeared. Two local examples of a Pennsylvania built bus lost forever.



Another Logan Valley bus that should have been preserved was # 106. Known as a GM “old look” bus, there are many examples of this type of bus preserved around the country, but bus # 106 had a lot of local history tied to it. Bus # 106 was among the last group of 10 buses purchased by Logan Valley to replace the trolley cars. The bus authority purchased this bus and others from Logan Valley and re-lettered them “Altoona & Logan Township Bus Authority” in 1959. Still in its Logan Valley orange and cream color, # 106 received an Amtran decal over the authority letters in 1977 when the name of the operating authority changed. Then, in 1980 it was re-painted Amtran green and white, the only former Logan Valley bus to have this make-over. It was retired in September 1997 & was purchased by Horseshoe Curve Chapter – National Railway Historical Society to preserve as one of the Authorities first buses; however it was later sold to raise funds to restore service truck No. 18 from the original Altoona & Logan Valley Electric Railway. [This truck was indeed restored and is technically operational, but in temporary storage pending some additional \ mechanical issues].





Additionally, , another bus that was special due to it's construction date was # 209. In 1978 AMG was the truck and bus-building division of American Motors. In 1978 they decided to discontinue bus manufacturing and # 209 was the last regular bus built by them, although they did finish an order for articulated buses in early 1979. When # 209 was retired in September 1990, it could have been preserved as a last built but instead was sold to a scrap yard in Hollidaysburg (Photo 5).



From “last built” to “first built”, Altoona missed it’s chance. In 1951 Flxible Bus Manufacturing Co. began design work on a two-level bus for Trailways, which would compete with Greyhound Scenic Cruisers. Flxible hand-built a prototype completed in late 1954 and tested it before it was put into production (Photo 6). The very first production VL-100 as it was called, was delivered to Blue and White Lines of Altoona on April 20, 1955. On October 14, 1955 Blue and White also purchased the prototype unit, meaning that the very first VL-100 buses came to Altoona. With the demise of Blue and White Lines one can only wonder what may have happened to these special buses. Most likely their last stop was a scrap yard due to the aluminum construction. {Note: Blue & White Lines was in bankruptcy at the time}.

In conclusion, much like the trolleys of the Altoona & Logan Valley Electric Railway, Altoona’s successor buses too, made a very sad “last stop”, but at least some of their histories are now recorded.

MR. FRED CONNACHER

By

David Seidel

The name of Mr. Fred Connacher “should be” very familiar to most local railfans in and around the greater Altoona Area, but in case it has slipped by you, I would like to bring you up to speed.

We all know that the Allegheny Portage Railroad, as an important link in the Pennsylvania Mainline of Public Works (Canal) system providing the first public east-west connection between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. The Allegheny Portage Railroad was an extraordinary achievement for its day and seems primitive by today’s standards. All of this was short-lived however, spanning the 20-some years between the 1830’s and the 1850’s when the Pennsylvania Railroad opened its competing route via Horseshoe Curve thereby rendering the Allegheny Portage Railroad and the canal system as obsolete.

Today, in the 21st Century the Allegheny Portage Railroad story is well represented in interpretations at the National Park Service National Historic Site in nearby Gallitzin/Tunnel Hill area near the Blair/Cambria county line. Most of us have visited the site on occasion, but did you know that most all of the interpretive exhibits in the visitors center, as well as the re-constructed Engine House, were designed and built by Mr. Fred Connacher of Cresson, PA ?

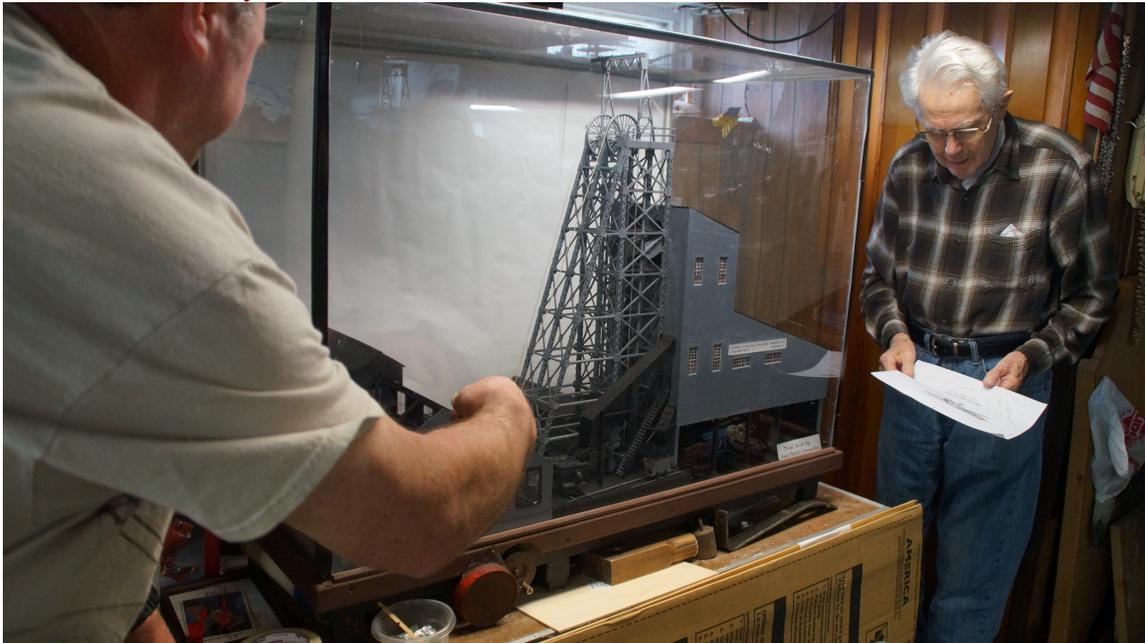
Mr. Connacher, in this writer’s humble opinion, is Cresson’s most distinguished citizen. At age 93, still living in his own home since 1938, with his wife (Camilla Lantzy) of 74 years, is a remarkable nonagenarian whose wealth of knowledge on local history and all things mechanical, might astound most anyone. Among his accomplishments:

- Researching and constructing, without the aid of much historical documentation or drawings, the interpretive exhibits at the Allegheny Portage RR National Historic Site. This included a full-size model of the earliest steam locomotive reflective of the 1830’s design, which was effective only on the “levels” of the route. In the pit of the excavated engine house, the design and fabrication of the massive engine house pulley system, a replica of the 35 h.p. stationary steam engine complete with massive wheels, gears, and rope system utilizing three-inch Russian hemp rope. Since there were little historical documents and plans, Mr. Connacher had to interpret this plan and develop his own drawings to comply with known material fact and the unearthed engine house at Summit (Lemon House).

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Designed and constructed a scale size model of the Pennsylvania Railroad’s “Mountain House” Hotel, which is on display in the library of Mt. Aloysius College Library, Cresson, PA.

- Designed and constructed historic model to scale of the Cresson Tuberculosis Sanitarium (Mountaintop), also on display at Mt. Aloysius College, Cresson, PA.

- **Designed and constructed model of the Pennsylvania Coal & Coke Colliery (Cresson Shaft, on display at his home. Mr. Connacher's father was foreman at the facilities machine shop in Gallitzin, from whom he learned his trade and craft, followed by military service in WWII as an artillery mechanic.**



- **Living in Cresson following WWII, Mr. Connacher, already an accomplished sketch-artist, began photographing steam locomotives of the Pennsylvania Railroad along the mainline, and then painting these scenes at strategic locations with dramatic impact. However, His early art instruction, came at age 14, when his parents arranged for art lessons from Sr. Margaret Mary RSM at Mt. Aloysius College.**

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- Using actual Pennsylvania Railroad blueprints, Mr. Connacher, with scale reduced to 1.5 inch scale, constructed a PRR Class E-6 working steam locomotive, fired by coal and operated by steam in the traditional style, seen here in his home basement workshop.
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- Mr. Connacher cited as one of his most challenging projects, the task of building an operating model of the Bentley BR-2 airplane engine, , which is a rotary-reciprocating engine of the type used by the British Royal Air Force in WW I (very unusual design).
- Constructed a visual motion topography map for the 1889 Johnstown Flood Memorial.
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- His model building talent probably began in the 1960's while employed by L. Robert Kimball & Associates in Ebensburg, while working as a bridge design draftsman.

This author is indebted to Mr. Dale Konkosi of Cresson, for facilitating this meet wit Mr. Fred Connacher. I hope the readers of this issue will have a newed interest in all the interpretative exhibits at Allegheny Portage Railroad and the National Park Service South Fork Dam historiacal site on your next visit.

If perchance, your travels would happen to include St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Cresson pay attention to all the restored spiritual art of the church's interior which Mr. Connacher participated in designing for his parish church.



Kevin Connacher (son), Fred Connacher, Jim Broad, September 8, 2016.

NORFOLK SOUTHERN RAILROAD
OPEN HOUSE

On Labor Day, Norfolk Southern Railroad hosted an open house at their Juniata Locomotive Shops facility for their employees, families, and friends by ticket admission. We were privileged to be the guests of Bill Holtz of Altoona. It was a remarkable event, in perfect weather conditions, and, most fittingly, on Labor Day. **THANK YOU BILL.**

Following are some photos of the occasion, and we sincerely thank Norfolk Southern for the opportunity and the hospitality.





Claytor Lake NS 3



Bill Holtz in his shop area



Fresh for the Heritage Locomotive Fleet



CARD OF THANKS

At the risk of missing someone, permit me to convey a sincere THANK YOU for all your best wishes and prayers during my recent illness. Thus far, things are very encouraging and we will proceed on That basis. As Horseshoe Curve Chapter winds down it's 48th year of service to the greater Altoona area, it is most rewarding to have participated in the process and to have known the many members who are no longer with us also.

Dave Seidel

COMMENTARY

By

Joe DeFrancesco

Dear fellow members and friends,

In recent months, I have grown increasingly nostalgic in regards to my early days as a teen age volunteer at the Railroaders Memorial Museum. Through observing, listening, and being surrounded by a net work of established volunteers who took an interest in preserving our rail heritage, my eyes were amazed as to what dedication and team spirit can accomplish. At the root of all of this, is the passion many of the founding members of the Railroaders Memorial Museum sought to accomplish who were and are chapter members. At the heart of all of the passion and drive are the loyal museum volunteers and chapter members who generously give their time, year after year to ensure museum yard projects are complete. In all of my time involved with the museum and now with the Blair County Historical Society; there is one common denominator, this group of volunteers ask for nothing and none of them seek personal gain through their efforts. Simply put, working together to get the jobs done. The museum and chapter volunteers are the embodiment of community service. Saturdays and Monday evenings are not times for being idle, yes good and colorful conversations and even words may be exchanged between members during work sessions, but their proof is the product their labor creates. Painting, scraping, wire-brushing, sorting, and cleaning are critical tasks of any restoration project and long term maintenance on historic museum/chapter rolling stock. It's important to never forget humble beginnings and to travel the course that lies ahead with eyes open seeking advice along the way. Since becoming the Executive Director of the Blair County Historical Society, I have learned to have a higher regard and appreciation to loyal and selfless volunteers who simply want to give back and help out. With out volunteers our historical sites are nothing. We are not effective. Our volunteers keep us rooted in our community. If you have thought about volunteering I encourage you to reach out, your help is wanted. Volunteerism is a great way to meet new friends and accomplish goals at the same time. I wish to thank our chapter president Frank Givler for being the facilitator for volunteerism with the chapter and museum. I wish to thank all of those who give their time and resources to making a difference with museum and chapter projects. I wish to thank the many volunteers at the Baker Mansion History Museum (owned by Blair County Historical Society) who in the same spirit contribute their time and talent. I would like to invite anyone interested in volunteering at the Baker Mansion History Museum to please contact me. There's no reason not to work together. It's about preserving our common heritage.

Kindest Regards,

Joe DeFrancesco

SAVE THE DATE !

Yes, we know the leaves haven't fallen off the trees yet, but DECEMBER 3rd will be the Chapter Christmas dinner at the Geeseytown Fire Hall. Dinner at 6 PM: two meats, buffet style as usual. RSVP to Frank's Auto Service, 814.943.4942 daily 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. as we need to know how many to prepare for. Program to be announced, but we're working on it. See you there! RSVP to Frank at the garage..943-4942 8 AM – 4 PM except Lunch period of 11:30 to 1 PM. We need accurate count for preparations. Deadline NOV 29TH.

CONGRATULATIONS !

To chapter member David G. Behe for many years of dedicated volunteer service on the Fire Civil Service Commission for the City of Altoona. David Behe served 18 years on the commission, which was responsible for assisting the City of Altoona in the recruitment and administration of civil service testing of candidates for the position of firefighter.

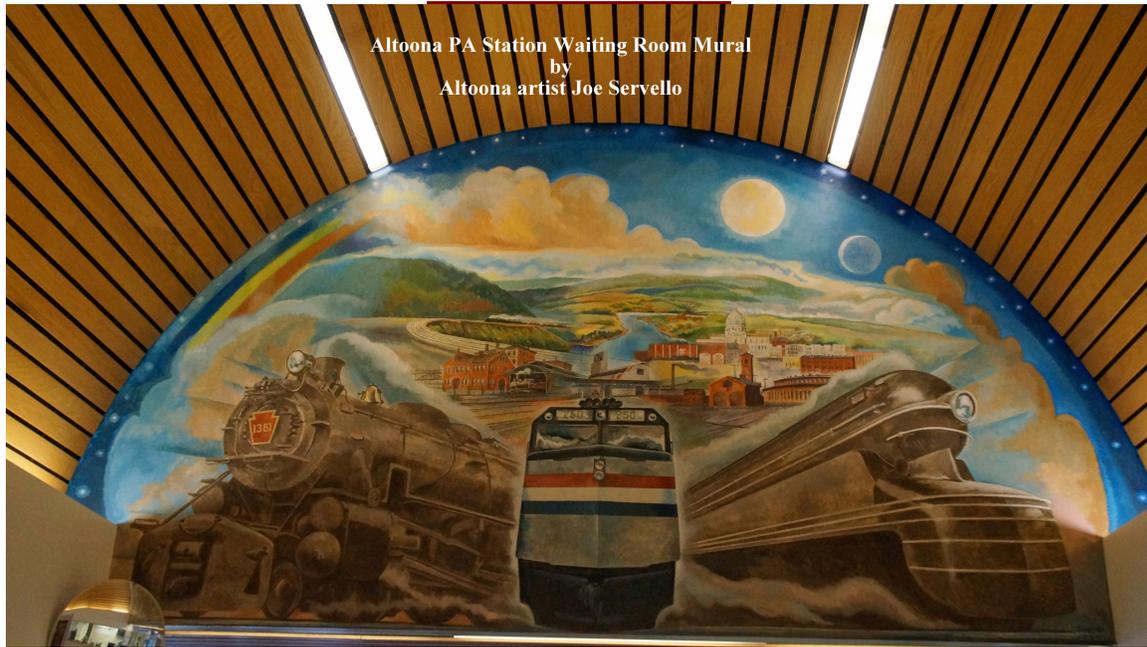
David was honored for his years of dedicated service at a meeting of city council recently at a City Council Meeting.



Courtesy photo

Taking part in the recognition of David Behe for his service to the Fire Civil Service Board are (from left): board members John Garritano, Ted Beam and Dick Wagner; Councilman David Butterbaugh; Mayor Matthew A. Pacifico; Dave Behe, honoree; and council members William Neugebauer, Erik Cagle, Michael Haire and Christie Jordan.

AMTRAK IN THE NEWS



Altoona PA Station Waiting Room Mural
by
Altoona artist Joe Servello

Mural in Altoona Station by Altoona Artist Joe Servello

As most local readers are aware from the Altoona Mirror report of September 18th 2016 , Amtrak announced plans to de-staff the Altoona station, a location in western Pennsylvania with approximately 26,000 boarded trips per year. However, closer examination indicates Amtrak's plan to de-staff ALL Amtrak Stations nationwide (except major hub cities). Amtrak suggestions to have caretaker service at these locations is only for opening and closing the station at train times, but providing no passenger services such as ticketing, & boarding, especially in assisting handicapped

clients needing the wheel chair lifts. In this latter category, that service could be the responsibility of the train Conductor/and Train Attendant who would have to extract this equipment from the station shelter and replace it when finished. Logically, these services by the train crew would probably add several minutes per station stop, more in winter weather, delaying Amtrak at each station stop and tying up the host railroad's main line for this added time and resulting in the non-reliability of the timetable and the inability of passengers to make reliable connections with other trains

Much needs to be resolved, but if Amtrak is that hard pressed financially to remove staffed positions at smaller communities, might we suggest salary cuts in the front office where this decision was initially formulated.

This announced action by Amtrak is still in the early stages, but represents a warning shot of intention across the bow (or nose) of Amtrak service. It is also demonstrative of passenger services near the end of the Pennsylvania Railroad and beginning of Penn Central Transportation era (late 60's + early 70's) when concerted effort was made to actually *discourage* passenger services so trains could be discontinued. You cannot promote a nationwide passenger service by discouraging passenger experiences and is extremely detrimental to the concept of *mass transit* on an intra-state and interstate level, all of which impedes the development of commerce in a civilized society, especially at a time when Pennsylvania is hopeful of expanding passenger rail services in Western PA ! From personal experience, your editor and family can attest to the great customer service from Amtrak staff at Altoona. Some chapter members have also worked as escorts for groups arriving in Altoona by train and we know first-hand about the extra effort in "service" and commend not only station staff but on-board personnel also !

How do YOU feel about Amtrak's announced intention? Please communicate with your local federal elected representative to make your concerns known. As the "old timers" will remember, Altoona Station handled 54 passenger trains daily during WWII and the PRR at that time maintained all the normal freight traffic and defense traffic "on time", without one computer on the premises. Norfolk Southern today will plead "no capacity" but removal of that "capacity" began with Conrail and into the Norfolk Southern era.

HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS SPONSORS SCHOLARSHIPS

As most of us in Altoona already know, Penn State Altoona now has a four-year degree program in Rail Technology Engineering and has graduated two classes thus far. In this regard, three engineering bays are reserved in the new Harry Bennett Learning Center annex to Railroader's Memorial Museum in Altoona, now pending development. Horseshoe Curve Chapter, National Railway Historical Society has entered into an agreement with Penn State Altoona to award an annual scholarship to a deserving student entering class in a new academic year.

CHAPTER PICNIC

Was once again hosted by Joe DeFrancesco's grandparents Rachel and Dink Gensimore at their Deer Hollow Bed & Breakfast near Spruce Creek/Pennsylvania Furnace. We thank them for their gracious hospitality.

