

Official Newsletter
of



NATIONAL RAILWAY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 1361
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www.hscnrhs.org

Fall 2021

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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 10 days after the PRR-NYC merger), evolving from the Altoona Railway Museum Club (1965-1968). We meet on the **FOURTH** Tuesday of each month except December, at the Railroaders Memorial Museum, Altoona, PA, at 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 President and 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.

IN THIS ISSUE
by Leonard Alwine, Editor

Back in the day, Glenn Miller played an old song “Pennsylvania 6-5000” which was the phone number for the Hotel Pennsylvania in New York. That hotel is scheduled to come down and is the subject of a feature article submitted by Dave Seidel.

Len Alwine reports on the unveiling of an Altoona PRR artifact saved and preserved at the Bakers Mansion Museum. Dr. Michael Farrow of the Blair County Historical Society submitted an indepth article about this piece.

Len Alwine outlines two new local history books released in July. One is about the Blue & White Bus Lines and the other about the Central Pennsylvania Bible Conference celebrating 100 years anniversary. Len submitted details and photos for the Blue & White book and he himself was the author for the Bible Conference book.

In the “Under the Wire” column, Len writes about the ribbon cutting for the new Amtran Administrative Offices located inside the Trolley Works Complex. This 120 year old building was restored for this new function. It was originally the old Logan Valley Car barn before the one now used by Amtran was built in 1902. Also that day a new service vehicle garage was dedicated as were 7 new CNG powered busses.

Joe Harella continues to keep us updated on local “rail” happenings and also the chapter minutes.

And as usual there is A Look Back column by Len Alwine.

UPDATE ON DAVE SEIDEL

Charter Chapter member and former Coal Bucket editor, Dave Seidel, fell in his house in early July and broke his pelvis. Due to other health issues they were unable to operate and are letting it heal naturally. After a few weeks in the hospital he was transferred to Garvey Manor nursing home. He will most likely be there for many more weeks.

I spoke to him early August on the phone and he is ready to come home although the doctors have a differing opinion.

Virginia is only allowed to visit him a few hours each day so she goes out for lunch and supper to help encourage him to eat.

It would be nice if all the members would send a card or two to them to help cheer them on through this ordeal. Send them to Dave Seidel, 2011 14th Street, Altoona, PA 16601 and Virginia will see that they get to Dave. Also keep them in your prayers.

- Len Alwine, Editor

SO LONG HOTEL PENNSYLVANIA

by Christopher Bonanos

submitted by Dave Seidel

The Hotel Pennsylvania is going to come down, Steven Roth told his Vornado shareholders. That's not a shock. It's an old fashioned hotel with a great many small rooms, on an extremely valuable site directly across from Pennsylvania Station, fronting on Seventh Avenue. Because it's lost some luster over the years, the hotel probably has a tough time drawing business travelers. I stayed there as a young person around 1984, and by that time it was passable but dowdy. Judging by some of the recent reviews on TripAdvisor (e.g., a real life episode of *American Horror Story* and "there were blood stains on the pillows"), it's slipped further since then. Eight years ago, Roth said that he was planning to renovate and turn it into something great, but we live in a different economic climate now, and the empty air above that giant site at 401 Seventh is apparently too tempting to resist. A 1,270 foot tower, bearing the not-at-all-phallic name of PENN15, is it's likely replacement.



There is inevitably, when a building of this age is about to come down, someone who wants to landmark it. Frankly, the Hotel Pennsylvania is a building that could be made handsome and appealing again, but it's just not quite significant enough to fight over. Architecturally, it is like a lot of early-20th-century midsize hotels and office buildings around the city, only larger; it is surely a better quality example from its period, designed by McKim, Mead & White, but it's bulky enough that it already takes up a big bite of land and air, so you can't make much of a case regarding scale. Even if you're a hardcore preservationist, your energies might be better spent elsewhere. The best argument in favor of keeping it is that midtown has relatively few hotel rooms at low prices for college kids and budget travelers, and the Pennsylvania, owing to its frumpiness, couldn't charge too much. In the abstract, it's a pretty good argument, for sure, but "we should preserve this indefinitely as a dump because it fills an economic niche" is a hard one to win, at least when it comes to one of the most well positioned privately owned pieces of land in town.

Which is not to say it doesn't deserve recognition. It was once the biggest hotel on Earth, and it survived a full century, having opened as the last pandemic began to wane in 1919. (Its contemporary next to Grand Central, the old Hotel Commodore - now the Grand Hyatt - is also likely to be replaced by a supertall in the near future.) It claims to have been the first hotel that had "valet doors" - little compartments next to the room door where guests could leave shoes and clothes to be polished or laundered overnight - and it's also one of the last, because those valet doors are still there. It has gone through a whole list of names: the Hotel Pennsylvania became Hotel Statler, then the Statler Hilton, then the Statler again, then the New York Penta, and finally coming full circle, it went back to being the Hotel Pennsylvania. Most famously, it was the hotel where, in the 1930s and 40s, Glenn Miller and his orchestra stayed when in New York, playing the club downstairs - so regularly, in fact, that Jerry Gray and Carl Sigman wrote Miller a playful song around its phone number, Pennsylvania 6-5000. That still the number you call to reach the hotel, and it is said to be New York's longest in continuous use.

And in February 1947, the hotel hosted a scientific conference at which a breakthrough new product was introduced: Edwin Land showed off his invention, Polaroid instant photography. There were dark dramas, too: In 1928, a young man who was polishing silverware in the hotel's storage vault was found stabbed to death with a steak knife. It was adjudged a suicide because none of the silver had been stolen. Another man fell out a window to his death in 2002, in what his family's lawyer claimed was a horrifying treadmill accident. More recently, the hotel was probably best known among discount seekers, especially students who were in town en masse for their Model Congress or Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade marching band trips. We bid it good-bye at the end of its once glamorous run, and we hope that the city's most celebrated phone number ends up in deserving hands.

A SMALL PRR ARTIFACT PRESERVED

On June 13, 2021, Altoona's original 1890 United States Meridian line survey marker was placed into a garden setting at Bakers Mansion Museum in Altoona.

The marker was requested by Theodore Ely, General Superintendent of the PRR Altoona Works. The marker was built and installed and tested and finished June 8, 1890.

It sat for 111 years at its location in Juniata until widening of Chestnut Avenue required it to be removed. It was taken to the Bakers Mansion and for years stored beside the gift shop there.

It was installed in the garden setting at the mansion and on June 13, 2021 it was dedicated with a special service 131 years after it was made. It is just another small piece of Altoona PRR history preserved.



Dedication service with Altoona Mayor Matt Pacifico (center), Diane Alwine (L) and Leonard Alwine (R)

Altoona's Original 1890 United States Longitude and Latitude Meridian Marker now in the Gardens of Baker Mansion

Michael G. Farrow, Ph.D.
Blair County Historical Society

In 1890, Theodore N. Ely, General Superintendent of Motive Power for the Pennsylvania Railroad in Altoona requested the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey to establish a meridian line (latitude and longitude) for Altoona. In May of that year, C.H. Sinclair and E. A. Marr were assigned the work. The Altoona location was selected by Mr. Ely and Mr. Sinclair and construction of piers began. Mr. Marr prepared the survey station at the Naval Observatory. The determination of longitude was to be made by telegraphic signals between Washington, D.C. and Altoona.

above a small reservoir across from the new Juniata PRR Shops about one mile north of the PRR train station in downtown Altoona.



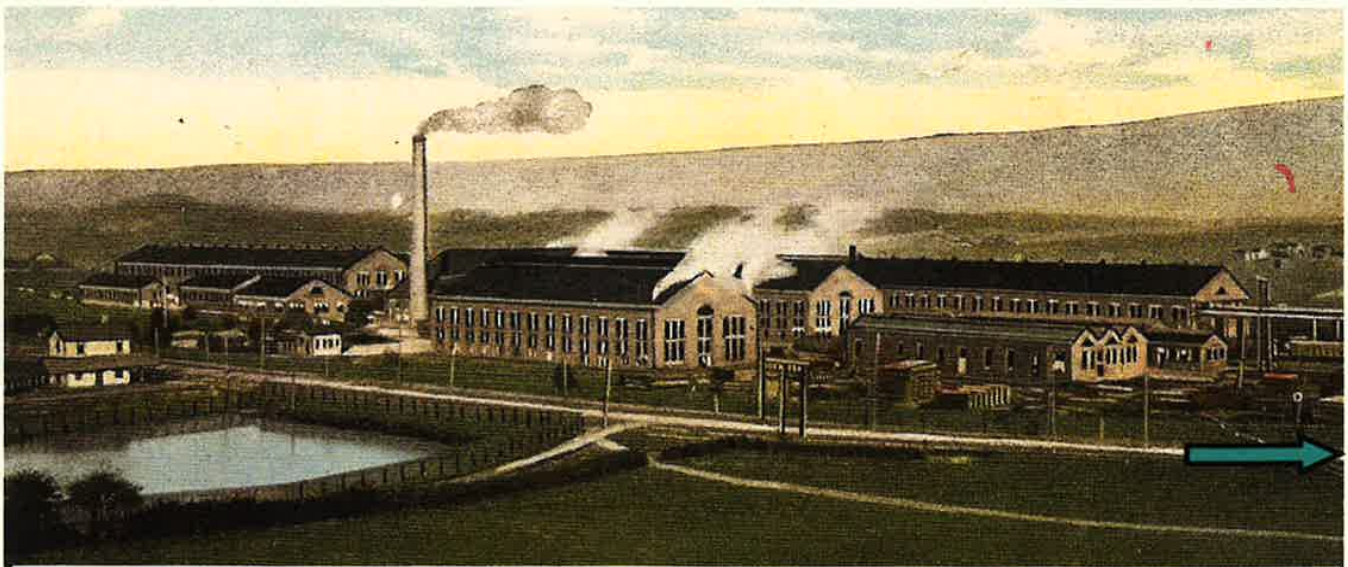
The sandstone transit pier, was 5 feet long, 34 inches wide, and 20 inches thick. It projected above ground for 30 inches. Below ground, the surface of the pier was rough cut; the upper half was pressed smooth and had the top cut away to allow space for the transit-reversing apparatus. A copper bolt, one inch in diameter and three inches deep, with cross-lines cut on it was set in the center of the top and marked the station point, as well as the south point of the meridian line. The cross-lines defined the point of reference for latitude and longitude.

The stones for the transit pier and meridian marker were selected by Mr. Ely. Mr. Sinclair arrived in Altoona May 22 and put the sandstone pier for the transit instrument in place on a concrete foundation .

Carved into the transit pier on the side above
Lat 40° degrees 31' 45" 48"
Long 78° degrees 23' 12" 79"
Altitude 1288.1 FT 1890

The stone marking the north end of the meridian line was set 400 feet away, and had an identical copper bolt.

The station was on property belonging to the railroad,



Approximate location of the Meridian Marker of 1890 in relation to the PRR reservoir, at the top of the hill off the right margin of this colored photograph.

BCHS Archives

After some delay due to cloudy weather and rain, the longitude signals were successfully exchanged on the nights of the 28th, 29th, and the 31st of May. After changing stations, and in their second position, the longitude work was finished on the nights of June 3, 4, and 8. Mr. Sinclair began determining the latitude of the Altoona station and Mr. Marr completed it. Twenty-two pairs of stars were observed on six nights. The PRR paid for the project.

The Altoona Astronomic station remained in place until the widening of Chestnut Avenue from Seventh Street

into Juniata at the Pennsylvania Railroad's Shop entrance gate. After 111 years, it was removed in 2001 to accommodate a four-lane highway. A new, flat-stoned marker replaced it. The original sandstone marker was taken to the grounds of the Blair County Historical Society. It leaned on the outside wall of the present-day Lawruk Visitor's Center and Gift Shop until September 2020 when it was installed in the ground.

The marker now serves as one of the central features in the mansion's gardens. It was dedicated Sunday, June 13, 2021 during a concert featuring the Altoona Community Band.



Carved into the marker's back side: Meridian 1890



The original location of Altoona's meridian marker was approximately where the yellow star is placed on the photo, 300 feet West of Chestnut Avenue and 300 feet east of the highest point of the hill. It was removed when Chestnut Avenue was widened. The complex of buildings adjacent to the star is the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Center (ICE).
Photo www.ice.gov

LOCAL HISTORIES PUBLISHED

by Leonard Alwine

This past July two local histories have been published. Both were a little late due to the Covid shut down last year.

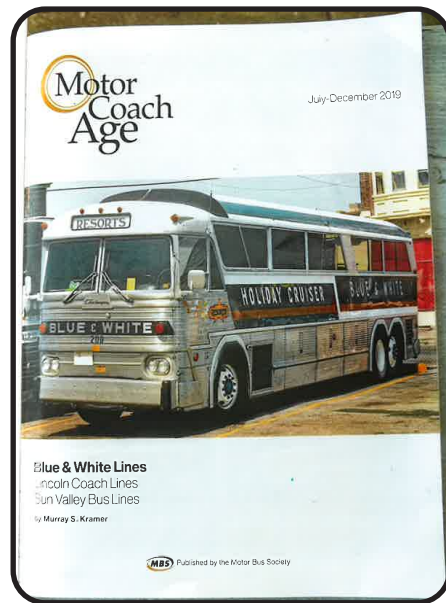


Photo of the Blue & White Bus Lines history book.

The first is a history of the Blue & White Bus Lines of Altoona, PA. It came out in late June 2021. It was published by the Motor Bus Society and was written by their Technical Editor Murray S. Kramer.

Research for this book began in 2016 and I was able to send Murray information that I had about Blue & White and photos I had collected throughout the years. For my help I am listed in the acknowledgements at the end of the article.

The booklet was scheduled for publication as the Motor Coach Age July - December 2019 issue which would have normally been released late Fall 2019. As usual, items like this most times run a little late getting done, so a January 2020 date was rescheduled. Then Covid hit and everything was shut down and put on hold. A year and a half later the booklet was finally printed and released late June 2021.

The booklet covers the history from the May 14, 1914 start of a primitive bus line from Altoona to the Cove area, most likely hauling workers from the Cove to the Altoona PRR shops. In the Spring of 1915 another bus line was started along the same routes and the driver was "Babe" Long. In 1919 that line was sold to L.N. Long and the Blue & White Bus Line was born, so to speak.

The Longs kept Blue & White as a family owned and operated business from that time until November 1999 when a huge accident involving four buses made insurance unaffordable and they closed down.

Over the years Blue & White purchased many small bus lines of the local area and expanded their routes system into Central and Western areas of Pennsylvania and Maryland.

In 1959, they acquired the PUC rights of the Altoona & Logan Valley Electric Railway and the Logan Valley Bus Company and then actively began to pursue the charter bus business.

By the mid 1980's, the line service was almost gone and they had purchased Lincoln Bus Lines of Pittsburgh, making Blue & White a nationwide company with over 100 buses still fully owned and operated by the Long family, one of the last businesses of this type in America. To see all the history, purchase a copy and read it.

The booklet is 55 pages long with over 125 photos (more than half in color showing the different paint schemes used through the years) and is printed on glossy paper.

It can be ordered from Motor Bus Society II Inc., P.O. Box 261, Paramus, NJ 07653-0261. It is Motor Coach Age Vol. 1, Nos. 3-4, July - December 2019 Issue, Blue & White Lines. The cost is \$15 plus \$3 shipping.

It is well worth the price for anyone liking local Altoona business history.



An old photo not used in the book shows Leonard Alwine and Mike Albanese riding Blue & White Bus #140 to Holland, Michigan in 1969 with the AAHS band to mark in the Tulip Festival Parade.

Mike is a former Editor of the Coal Bucket.

The second book is a history of the Central Pennsylvania Bible Conference (CPBC) from 1920-2020. It was published by the Way of Truth Ministries (WOTM) and was written by Leonard Alwine.

The CPBC is just one of the many world wide ministries and missions of WOTM.

The book was planned for a Summer 2020 release date at the CPBC's 100th Anniversary Conference to be held that August. But then covid hit and by April 2020 the conference was postponed and the history book about 75% written by that time canceled. Later in October 2020 a virtual conference was held but with no 100th Anniversary celebration. The virtual conference was actually called "The Prelude to the 100th Anniversary".

In May of 2021, with the restrictions being lifted, a live conference was scheduled for August 2021 and in May the WOTM board decided to try to finish the book for that conference time.

For about the next eight weeks, Leonard Alwine finished writing the book along with updates about the covid delay, and Danielle Jagel, Administrative Assistant at WOTM worked hard typesetting and getting the book printed. It was finished July 28th, just in time for release at the 101st Conference schedule for August 1st-6th at The Casino at Lakemont Park.

The book is 42 pages with about 100 photographs (3/4 in color) and is printed on glossy paper.

The book covers the history of the CPBC from 1920 when A.J. Aukerman, General Secretary of the PRR YMCA and other local christian businessmen met February 20, 1920 at the YMCA building in downtown Altoona to establish the conference. The first conference was held July 31st thought August 8th, 1920.

An estimated 5000 people attended that first conference, most coming by PRR trains to Altoona, Tyrone and Hollidaysburg stations. From there they traveled by trolleys of the Altoona and Logan Valley Electric Railway to the Lakemont Park.

The conference has continued now for 101 years, the CPBC being the longer continuous running event of it's kind in America.

The book would be a welcome addition to the library of anyone interested in local Altoona history. It can be ordered from: The Way of Truth Ministries, Central Pennsylvania Bible Conference, 315 40th Street, Altoona, PA 16602. The cost is \$10 plus \$3 shipping and is a bargain price for a printed book of it's quality.



Photo of the book cover.

UNDER THE WIRE **by Leonard Alwine**

AMTRAN RIBBON CUTTING HELD

On Friday, July 16, 2021, I was invited to a ribbon cutting and open house at Amtran's Trolley Works along 5th Avenue in Altoona. The morning was one of excitement and pleasure as I was given a personal tour of the remodeled buildings. Walking through these 120 year old structures was like having a tour of a Logan Valley and early Amtrak museum. Everywhere I looked (and I know I missed some things), there were photos and artifacts from Logan Valley and early Amtran days.

The Trolley Works building was actually the original Logan Valley car barn before the new one was built in 1902 (site of the current Amtran bus garage). The original 1902 sign from that car barn, which hung for 119 years into the Amtran era has been restored and now is safely displayed inside the conference room of the Trolley Works building.



Sign on the original 1902 car barn.



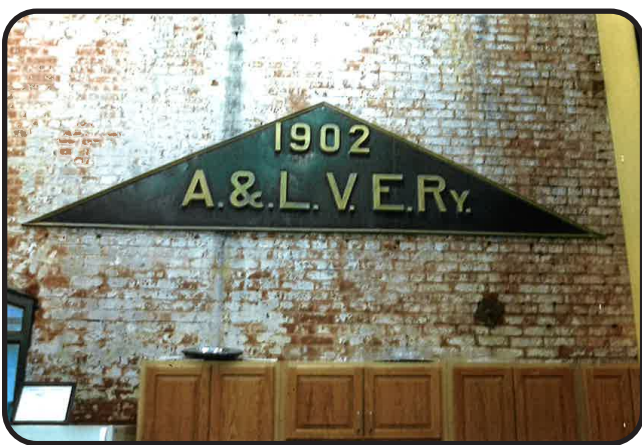
Sign replaced at top of bus garage remodeling in 1990.



Sign being restored after blown down by wind (placed on lower building).



Restored sign on front of bus garage in 1998.



Restored sign on wall inside Trolley Works building conference room 2021.



New sign placed on bus garage in 2021 honoring Logan Valley.

A lot of effort went into the planning of this building remodeling the historic displays. Even original bricks were cleaned and reused in the process.

Back in 2008 when Amtran purchased these original Logan Valley structures I was able to tour them. They were in bad shape and most businesses would have just torn them down and built new. I commend Amtran on their foresight to preserve these historic structures.



Restored sign on wall inside Trolley Works building conference room 2021.



Inside 2021, archway reused as book shelf inside one of the offices after the bricks were sandblasted.



Inside of conference room in 2008 showing old fire door and junk.



Inside of conference room in 2021 with restored fire door and a new mural painted on the wall

Also as part of the ribbon cutting was the dedication of a newly built service vehicle garage on the ground below the original Logan Valley Bus Garage which had to be torn down due to deterioration. But built into the front of this new building were the old letters from that first garage and a wheel set from the last trolley car ran in Altoona is displayed on a brick patio beside it. Amtran has done more than required or even expected in preserving the history of the transit system in Altoona.

Amtran gave out a set of cards showing the changes in buses from 1923 to 2021.



Logan Valley's first bus complete with a Logan Valley token glued to it



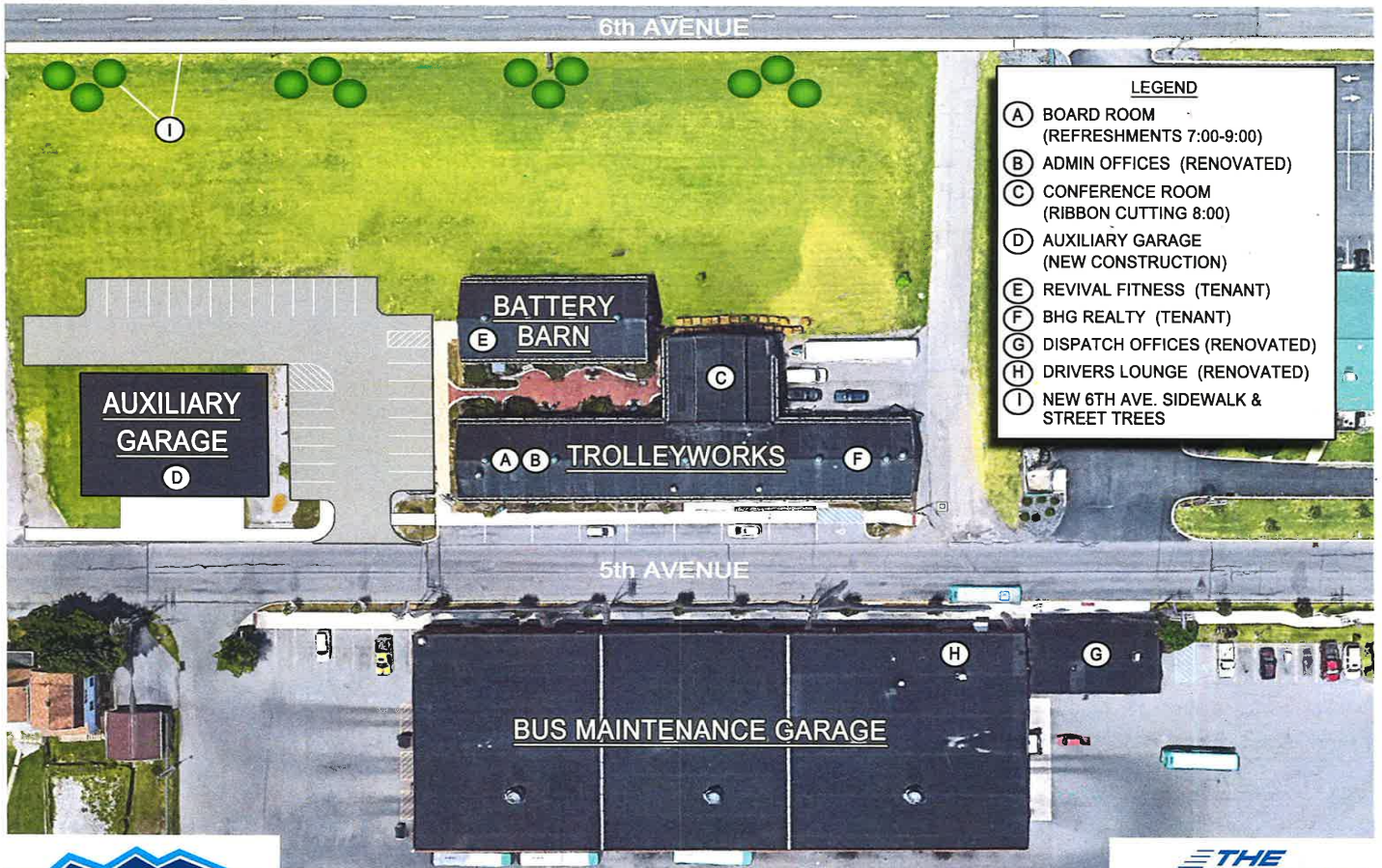
Amtran's latest bus in front of the service vehicle garage showing the old Logan Valley letters.

Also that day 7 new compressed natural gas buses were added to the fleet, replacing the last of the diesel powered buses. Amtran is now all CNG powered. They still have 3 diesel electric hybrid buses in use that are planned to be replaced in 2023.



Amtran officials cut the ribbon for the seven new buses placed in service that day.

It was a great day for me as I traveled down memory lane looking at all the historic photos and items on display. Amtran has done a great job of preserving these memories. My hat is off to all involved in this project who had the foresight to preserve rather than destroy Altoona's past transit heritage.



Map of the Trolley Works Complex given out that day.

LOCAL YARD NEWS

by Joe Harella

The Norfolk Southern Railroad furloughed 86 more employees in July from the Juniata Shops. 14 other jobs will also be eliminated meaning 100 less employees in Juniata. Also the Cresson Shops closed August 1, 2021 resulting in 9 more employees laid off.

Also in July NS reported that their second quarter profits had doubled to \$819 million or \$3.28 per share. Perhaps it is better to invest in Norfolk Southern stock rather than work for them.

Also in late July, the Altoona Railroader Memorial Museum announced that Wick Moorman, former head of NS, will head up a committee to raise an additional \$2.6 million to be used to get the 30 year old restoration of the K-4 1361 finished.

HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS

REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

JUNE 22, 2021

The regular monthly meeting of the Horseshoe Curve Chapter NRHS which was scheduled to be held on June 22, 2021, had to be canceled due to the absence of the president.

JOSEPH HARELLA

RECORDING SECRETARY

HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS

HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS

REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING

JULY 27, 2021

The regular monthly meeting of the Horseshoe Curve Chapter NRHS was held on July 27TH, 2021. The meeting was called to order by Pres. Frank Givler at 7:22 P.M.. The meeting was held here at Kings Family Restaurant.

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and approved by Ron Givler, second by Gary Price. The motion passed.

The financial statements were read by Treasurer Denny Walls. Paul Campbell made a motion to accept the financial report, Dick Charlesworth second, the motion passed.

Denny also informed everyone that he met up with John Hafer who is a trackman for the Everett Railroad. The two were discussing the four companies that may reopen the Roaring Spring Paper Mill. The companies are proposing to make paper board, and they may not need as many railroad cars as they did before. Also, the NS unit #561 has been sold, but it is still here.

OLD BUSINESS

1. Chapter Picnic- Pres. Givler informed everyone that we will NOT hold a meeting in August as it is time once again to plan our chapter picnic. The picnic will probably be held at Joe DeFrancesco's grandparents place [Rachel and Dink Gensimore] and we are looking at the date of Saturday August 21ST.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Dick Charlesworth may organize a bus trip this fall to Cumberland to ride behind engine #1309. The trip will benefit the Alto Model Train Association and will take place only if the 1309 is up and running. More info later.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

1. Denny Walls informed everyone that recently he attended an auction out at Kernel Millers. While he did not hold the winning bid, he was given by the winner a Sanitation Supply Container which held a kit that would support 50 people. The items included those that would be used for personal hygiene.
2. Dick Charlesworth reported that the Alto Model Train Association will be open every weekend thru the end of summer. They are trying to attract more visitors. The next model train show will be the first Sunday in November at the convention center.
3. Dave Seidel Update- Dave will be moved to Garvey Manor nursing home soon. He is improving each day. Since they could not operate on him, he will have to heal up on his own. We all wish him a speedy recovery.

Paul Campbell then made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Ron Givler second, the meeting was adjourned at 7:49 P.M. -15 Members Present

Attendance- Ron Givler, Gary Price, Dennis Haire, Denny Walls, Paul Campbell, Mike Walls, Dan Summers, Dick Charlesworth, Karen Givler, Frank Givler, John Fisher, Larry Lear, Dee, Don Goebel, Joe Harella

JOSEPH HARELLA

RECORDING SECRETARY

HORSESHOE CURVE CHAPTER NRHS

A LOOK BACK by Leonard Alwine

90 YEARS AGO The Empire State Building was opened May 1, 1931. It was the tallest building in New York until the twin World Trade Towers were built in 1971.

50 YEARS AGO The walls of the PRR passenger car shops at 2nd Street collapsed. PRR officials said the building would have to be razed.

Lester Whetstone of Woodbury was the last known ice delivery man in Blair County and was downsizing due to his age. A 50lb. block of ice cost \$0.85 cents and \$0.90 cents if crushed.

25 YEARS AGO Oscar Meyer Weinermobile was at the BiLo Store in Orchard Plaza to audition children singing the Oscar Meyer song for upcoming commercials.

Students from Altoona High School completed a video project about the PRR in the 1940's. They interviewed retired employees and made the video which was then given to the Altoona Railroaders Memorial Museum to be shown there.

More than 500 people gathered at the Horseshoe Curve to watch the 52 car Barnum & Bailey circus train pass by.

10 YEARS AGO Ground was broken at the Altoona Railroaders Memorial Museum for construction of a quarter roundhouse to house the K-4 1361 locomotive.

Benzels Bretzels was celebrating it's 100th anniversary. The firm was found in 1911 by Adolf Benzel.

The Blair County Historical Society was donating a Conestoga wagon to Fort Roberdeau. It was last used in the Altoona 1949 centennial parade.

THIS SPRING 2021



A cartoon in the Altoona Mirror seemed funny as aliens were arriving by bus to this planet. That was until one was spotted under a tree across the street from the Amtran bus garage. WHO KNOWS???