Goings On at Seashore -

Obviously as with every other locale on our planet the primary news is the pandemic of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). As this is being written the museum is closed with all employees having transitioned to work remotely. The health environment is changing rapidly enough that I am not going to attempt comment beyond that and would recommend you watch for bulletins from Seashore and the Seashore website as to what is occurring.

As one of those “would you believe?” passing notes - this edition of The Main Line represents the start of the 12th volume, some 132 editions, counting extras and doubles.

Do You Recognize?

Last Month’s Do You Recognize -

This month's “Electric Railway Company”, the Carbon County Electric Railway Co., received a charter on February 4, 1892, to construct a wide gauge (five feet, two and one-half inches) electric railway from its hometown to a resort located some 2 miles northward. On September 5, 1893, the new electric railway company inaugurated service from a point in the town near where a bridge across local river to anthracite hauling railroad company’s station was located. This first track extended to another railroad station of a switchback railroad serving coal mines nearly 1,000 feet above the river and canal where the coal was shipped. As tourism grew the traffic on the switchback was altered from anthracite all day to anthracite in the morning and tourists seeking the thrill and views of the 9 mile 1,000 descent during the afternoon. This trip became a tourist destination second in popularity to Niagara Falls and persisted until 1932. The street railway company obtained electricity from a water power generating system built along the neighboring river.
Tracks reached the eastern portion of the town when the company opened a one and one-half mile extension to the northeast starting from a junction with the original route in 1898. Effective 1902 the route served the anthracite hauling railroad's new station located in eastern part of the town. The original plan to extend to the resort were abandoned and portions of the original the trackage became dormant after the station was relocated.

The Slatington and Palmerton Street Railway was formed in December 1900, with construction planned of an electric street railway along public highways from the Carbon County’s terminus in Mauch Chunk to a neighboring traction company’s terminus in Lehighton.

The Carbon County and the Slatington and Palmerton merged in March 1901 forming the Mauch Chunk, Lehighton, and Slatington Street Railway.

On May 13, 1901 the new organization awarded a contract for construction of trackage from Mauch Chunk to Lehighton, the early industrial and railroad center located on the Lehigh River after which it is named. Parts of the earlier route were relocated from that planned along the public right-of-way to a somewhat longer private right-of-way. Plans to connect with a neighboring traction company's trackage resulted in reduction of existing track and the new route being built to standard gauge (four feet, eight and one-half inches). New construction increased the railway company’s total mileage to twelve miles. Our railway also built another car-barn with an anthracite coal burning powerhouse.

While the southward projection had been discussed another group planned entrance into the home town from a northerly direction. The Tamaqua and Lansford Street Railway, a standard gauge system, was built by a coal and navigation company. Partial service began in 1897 reaching Mauch Chunk in summer of 1903. This street railway and various other street railways in the Eastern region of the state merged in 1906.
New trackage construction and installation of improved facilities strained the railway company’s financial structure and on April 12, 1904 the Mauch Chunk, Lehighton, and Slattington Street Railway was sold under foreclosure. The new Carbon Street Railway Company, named after the county, received its charter on October 18, 1904, and commenced operation of the system.

This iteration survived four years before it succumbing to foreclosure in May 1908. The new owners commenced operation on July 27, 1908, renaming the company the Carbon Transit Co., again incorporating the county name. While ownership of the electric railway changed, a trolley park was opened along the line on 75 acres of land located atop Flagstaff Mountain. Tourists could complete their visit to the region including the dramatic switchback railroad by viewing the beautiful and quite famous river valley. Amusement, dancing, and picnic facilities also attracted residents and social groups from the surrounding area.

A car barn and five open cars were destroyed by fire in 1917 spoiling an otherwise successful period of operation. The transit company immediately rehabilitated and replaced rolling stock. The car barn site was abandoned.

With the end of World War I the company’s traffic declined and yet another foreclosure in March of 1919 triggered by the company's failure to meet interest payments due on bonds. The new owners renamed the road as the Mauch Chunk & Lehighton Transit Co. bearing the names of its primary communities and dropping the county name.

Fire once again destroyed a car barn and several cars of various types in 1923. However, the company quickly replaced destroyed rolling stock with a variety of second hand closed cars, including Birneys and built a small car barn on the site. Competition from motor vehicles and the line's slow and circuitous route caused further losses in passenger traffic. The aging equipment also contributed to public dissatisfaction with the service.
In January of 1925 the line ceased operations south of the mountaintop the amusement park. Usable rail removed from that section were used to upgrade the track still being operated within the line's home town. The transit company sold its assets to a power securities corporation on June 30, 1925. Yet another reorganization brought about an electric company name. East Penn Electric Co. (National Power & Light Co.), reflecting the area of the state where it operated and dropping the names of the previous endpoints and 1928 saw traction replace electric in East Penn Traction Co. (National Power & Light Co.). The company that had resulted from the 1906 mergers mentioned above was assigned as manager. The new management abandoned the company's power station and arranged to purchase power from a local public utility. Several secondhand single and double truck cars were transferred from the managing company's fleet to our line and most of the other cars on the transit company's roster were scrapped. Secondhand cars and other economy measures could not reverse the decline in passenger traffic with service from the amusement park to a midpoint from the hometown center abandoned in 1929 and the rest abandoned on October 28, 1931. Motor buses immediately assumed the previous trolley routes. At the end the service was being operated by three long-in-the-tooth Birneys and a couple of double truck cars, all having been transferred from the managing company's roster. The color scheme prior to the 1925 sale was primarily green with more variety as the secondhand units were introduced.

Meanwhile, in August 1931, the company managing our many-times-reorganized line abandoned its own trackage into our home town. Electric railway cars, which totaled approximately forty units over the years consisted of an odd and collection of single and double truck closed and open types. Very few cars had been purchased new, the others represented second hand acquisitions from various companies located throughout eastern United States. A single truck snow sweeper and a former funeral car converted into line repair service were the only motorized non-passenger units.
Maintenance work was handled by non-powered dump cars (three side-dump cars and three flats were purchased second hand in 1901) propelled by passenger cars.

In 1920s the football games at a university located on a neighboring system under common control with our system was causing congestion in the university town. The local transit company offered to augment trolley service with buses and accelerated the acceptance of bus replacement of the electrics in 1931 and the establishment of East Penn Transit Co. (National Power & Light Co.).

The following is not directly trolley related but strange - and a good hint - The entire area and our line's hometown of Mauch Chunk suffered greatly from the Depression. Even after the Depression economic changes sweeping the country altered the demand for the natural resources available in the area, as well as a declining supply. In a 1954 attempt to revitalize the town, an agreement was made with the family of a Native American olympic hero Jim Thorpe (two gold medals) from the 1912 Stockholm Olympics. Mauch Chunk agreed to have the Olympic star's body moved from his burial site in California to what had been our line's hometown in the hopes of spurring revitalization of the community. The Jim Thorpe's closest association with the town was his attendance at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania about 90 miles distant. Mauch Chunk further agreed to create a monument to the hero in the town and rename itself Jim Thorpe in his honor. This was done although there was some later controversy as to the completeness of the deal. The revitalization scheme did not particularly work and the desired revitalization came decades later through promotion of the town’s historical and architectural features, and natural beauty.

For those readers who would enjoy more detail Short Trolley Routes in the Lehigh River Valley published by the Lehigh Valley Chapter of the NRHS in 1967 is an excellent source.

This Month’s Do You Recognize -

The route of this month’s electric railroad originated in 1878 when a horse railroad was chartered to build a narrow gauge (three feet) line from the state capital to an adjacent village, a distance of about four miles. Initially five cars were purchased from the Abbott-Downing Company with operations getting underway in 1881. Extensions were added in 1882 and 1884. As a result of heavy snow storms in the winter of 1884-85 the city granted permission to use steam power over part of the line. Cars were horse-powered for the first two miles from the city center and then hauled by steam dummy for the remaining five miles to another neighboring village. The stresses of steam power required the passenger cars’ four wheels be replaced with eight.
In 1889 the seemingly inescapable intrusion of fire destroyed a locomotive shed, stable, and car barn resulting in the loss of one steam dummy and the buildings. This loss reduced the line’s service level. In December of that year the company petitioned the city for permission to electrify the system. After several months of agonizing over permitting a single or double wire system, in March 1890 permission was granted for the single wire system preferred by the company. By late November 1890 regular electric service was underway.

A new superintendent took over in late 1890 and found the line basically unserviceable. The line was effectively shut down in January 1891, both physically inoperable and with no credit. At this point the railroad owned 13 cars, 15 horses, and a steam motor. The road was reorganized under the name “street railway”, capitalization was increased, repairs undertaken and new cars added. Extensions were built in the period of 1891 - 1894 extended the line to 11.6 miles with a 50 acre trolley park being opened in 1893. By 1895 the roster included nine closed cars, 16 open cars comprising 17 powered cars and eight trailers.

In late 1900 a railroad under lease to the primary Class 1 steam road in the region petitioned the state railroad commissioners for authority to build an interurban electric railway from the state capital to the state’s largest city, an industrial center some 15 miles to the southeast. This proposal was somewhat unique in that it was an experiment by the steam road in building an integrated electric division rather than simply owning a trolley line. The line was built to first class steam road practice and standards. Regular service was commenced in August 1902 with a mix of cars built in the Class 1 steam road’s shops in the capital and cars purchased from a major car builder located in...
the state. A large car barn was built on railroad property in the capital and a smaller one midway between the electric line’s endpoints. Operation used modified standard steam road.

Meanwhile in June of 1901 a majority of the stock in the three foot narrow gauge city line in the capital was transferred to officials of the class I steam road. The new management outlined plans for converting to standard gauge and connecting with the new electric branch of the steam road. During 1903 the state legislature granted authority for the electric branch of the railroad to assume control of the street railway. In November of that year the Superior Court dissolved the street railway corporation and transferred its assets and franchises to the steam railroad. In the Fall of 1903 track crews widened to former city lines to standard gauge and the old rolling stock was rebuilt.

Costs involved in building the new electric branch, purchasing the street railway along with its conversion and rebuilding was paid through the sale of railroad stock and bonds.

In 1909 a 1.09 loop extension was added to the city system. Summer-only service was operated to the river park that the city railway had opened in 1903. Route structure remained quite stable over the life of the branch. The state fair grounds in the capital were abandoned in 1909 resulting in the ultimate removal of track and overhead on an adjacent line and the river park branch was eliminated in the early 20s.

During 1902 the railroad shops built eight double truck closed cars equipped for multiple unit operation with eight more added during 1903. Six 13 bench opens
were acquired from a car builder in the state during 1904. The electric branch acquired 12 closed and 11 open cars from the street railway, plus six open trailers, some maintenance equipment and four horses. Most of the acquired equipment was immediately junked. In 1914 a report to the Interstate Commerce Commission reported that the electric branch had 23 closed cars, 14 opens, three service cars, and three plows.

In late 1919 the leased railroad company that the class 1 steam road had used to purchase the city railway and build the electric branch was merged into the parent steam road and the electric lines became a separate division of the parent steam road.

In addition to rising costs and highway competition the division’s financial problems were greatly increased when in 1918, as part of the world War I effort, the parent steam road was temporarily taken over by the U.S. Railroad Administration but the electric division was not and suddenly found itself expected to stand alone financially. USRA control ended in March of 1920.

One-man operation came to the city lines in 1921 and the interurban in 1925.

When the steam railroad’s other electric railway was motorized in 1925 several cars owned by our line were returned from operation on the other system. There had also been two 20 foot closed cars built in 1900 belonging to the other railway that had operated continually on our line.

Two secondhand Birneys were acquired in 1929. After 1925 the opens were mainly cannibalized over time and the lines were run with one-man closed cars.
By then early 30s the electric division’s interurban and city operations were in very poor condition. In 1932 the railroad through its electric division affiliate petitioned the state to end all electric service and the railroad’s motor bus affiliate petitioned to start motor bus operations over those same routes.

My only hint on this one is that I can’t believe I didn’t do a piece before. In fact I’m afraid that I did and have just missed it!

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**Library Committee**

The Library Committee did not meet in February due to power outages from the windstorm and the Library Committee did not meet in March due to public health recommendations for COVID19 and are now postponed indefinitely,

Issues still on the agenda include:

- Elections for 2020/2021: We have one opening on our slate. Please contact Karen Dooks if you are willing to run.

- Electrical work in the Conference Room.

- Concerns regarding the Curatorial Collections Management Policy as they relate to the Library.

Our community partner York County Community College is also closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Library Committee’s meetings followed by a Workshop on Saturdays (10AM - 2 PM) are cancelled.

Saturday - Workshops only (10AM - 2 PM) are cancelled

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The Wednesday Evening Workshops Are Cancelled

By Karen Dooks, Chair
Links:

More than 1000 of the images are accessible online = https://digitalmaine.com/trolley_images/

Facebook page = https://www.facebook.com/groups/44932548777/

Seashore Library On-Line Resources -

A library resources page originally developed by Amber Tatnall dealing with useful and interesting resource material including among other things links to some three decades of the Street Railway Journal and the Electric Railway Journal on line is located at:

http://virtual.yccc.edu/seashoreTrolley

or this handy tinyurl works as well: http://tinyurl.com/zwhndoe

The Library continues to upload material to the various sections of DigitalMaine - The DigitalMaine Repository is a partnership of the Maine State Library, Maine State Archives and community institutions around the state.

The uploads to the new documents area are quite fascinating as they allow you to literally leaf through the documents.

https://digitalmaine.com/trolley_museum/
https://digitalmaine.com/trolley_blueprints/
https://digitalmaine.com/trolley_images/
https://digitalmaine.com/trolley_documents/

Please remember when sending donations for the library to note that it is for Library Development – Fund 951.
A NEW BOOK -


Cincinnati Car Company’s chief engineer Thomas Elliot designed the curved-side car, a lightweight model that used curved steel plates (not conventional flat steel plates) in body construction. Instead of the floor, the side plates and side sills bore the bulk of the weight load making the cars lighter than conventional cars and, as a secondary benefit, considerably more attractive to the eye than the standard rather boxy lightweights of the time. The first cars of this type were sold in 1922 with some 400 ultimately built through 1930 with Wheeling Transit having 21 of these.

This interesting book is a twofer or mayhap a threefer for the general transit fan and especially those with a fondness for the beautiful Curved-side car developed by the Cincinnati Car Company and the history of Wheeling Transit in that era.

The book’s first quarter examines the history of Cincinnati Curved-side streetcars in Wheeling, West Virginia, from the 1920s until the late 1940s, but includes good coverage from horse cars through the end of the electrics with even a bit about Wheeling Transit buses. Included is a roster of passenger cars and renumbering and retirement details. The middle section is comprised of a wealth of photographs of the system and individual cars with well detailed annotation. Most of these photographs were taken between 1945 and 1948 by the late William J. B. Gwinn. Bill Gwinn started as a motorman with Ohio Valley Electric in 1917 converting from motorman for Co-operative Transit Company to bus driver in 1947 and ultimately retiring in 1962 from Co-operative Bus Lines. This section is so complete and thoroughly documented as to really qualify as a standalone section rather than simply an adjunct of the first part describing Wheeling Transit.

The last quarter of the book is the story of Co-operative Transit’s Curved-side No. #639 acquisition in 1957 by the Seashore Trolley Museum through the completion of its restoration and dedication in 2009. Included is detailed tracking of the car’s restoration progress with many color photographs. There are also informative insights as to how this project to some extent paralleled and drove the Seashore restoration shop’s development.

Traction In The Pan Handle is the summation of the dedicated efforts of numerous individuals spanning some 40 – 50 years. That length dictated by the time necessary for the acquisition of materials, infrastructure, labor, and money required for the complex effort of restoring No. #639 and the parallel writing and editing of this book. James D. Schantz, President & CEO (and Chairman Emeritus) of Seashore and No. #639’s sponsor and Frederick J. Maloney, a Senior Trustee of Seashore and long-time member and contributor were both present during this book’s long gestation. They ultimately took on the major task of weaving the sub-stories from 1957 through 2009 into one coherent and informative story. The outcome of their efforts is well worth a read by anyone interested in electric railways, Curved-side cars, Wheeling in particular and perhaps could even provide an eye opener for that as-of-yet undiscovered trolley fan.

Review by Ed Ramsdell
Editor’s note -

I’m quite certain that nearly all of you are aware of the following. On March 21, 2020 we lost John L Middleton Jr. at age 94. Anyone belonging to Seashore knew John as a member, as well as Vice President of Business Affairs, Motorman, Conductor, Track Crew Worker, Yardmaster, Trustee, Marketing Assistant, Interim Management Team, Dispatcher, Docent, Office Clerk, Education Coauthor, Operations Instructor/Inspector, etc etc., and above all as a really nice human being. He was also a host docent on the Downeaster and involved in several other transport related entities. If it had steel wheels and transported people John was interested. John got me into this library undertaking. I had just joined NEERHS and was looking to volunteer. John even met me half-way by droving down to the York Library to meet. After talking through some ideas he said “we have this library that you might find interesting” - That was that! I will truly miss John as I suspect will all who knew him.

ELR

The Main Line - Availability

If you are not on our direct distribution list and would like to be please drop a note to TheMainLine@ramsdell.com.

Ed Ramsdell, Editor

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