

Motor Car Adventure on the Northern Central Railroad I

by Roger E. Shaffer

Thursday June 15, 2000 was the day that brought together several people interested in gathering historical data relating to a portion of the former Northern Central Railroad I. Starting point, the site of the rebuilt New Freedom Passenger and Freight Station.



Dianne Steis (photography), Steve Makofsky (audio), and Roger Shaffer

Persons involved were Don Patton, Roger Shaffer, Dianne Steis (photography), and Steve Makofsky (audio recording). Bernie Houck was operator of the Motor Car, provided by the Northern Central R.R. II, for transportation from New Freedom to a point just south of the former Brillhart Station, and return.

After clearing the Interlocking area at New Freedom, we headed northbound down grade of the New Freedom Hill. First item of note was the "Wye" trackage interchange with the Stewartstown R.R. Leaving the New Freedom area, there were several concrete poles lying at track-side. At the time of conversion from the Block Signal System to the electrically operated 3-position light (a Pennsylvania R.R. Standard Signal) in the area north of New Freedom



Off we go!

Station, the wooden telegraph poles were replaced with concrete cast poles. This fact always attracted my attention when in this area, for these poles were indeed unusual.



Bernie Houck, Engineer, Northern Central Railway

Baltimore and Susquehanna Railroad, the time table indicates the station as Strausburg. The station building no longer stands, but the location was noted. The station itself was located in the confines of the Borough of Railroad, with the station known as Shrewsbury.

On our left there soon appeared the remains of the Railroad Furniture Factory, which had been destroyed by fire many years before. Nearby, still standing, is a large sign noting the factory location. The sign faces the railroad tracks and not the adjacent roadway, making for a sign of rather distinct location.

Next station, Shrewsbury. According to the May 1854 issue of the "American Railway Guide" of the

Continuing on down grade on the 1.54% grade, noted was the increasing size of the Codorus Creek, which has its beginning in the New Freedom area. Locations of signal sites were noted, as well as location of present and discontinued switches and sidings. Passing the well-maintained cast iron mile posts and whistle posts was of interest to the group. The large number of curves on the "Hill" were made so much more evident by the mode of our travel facility, the motor car. Certainly must have caused engineers and firemen on the old steam engines much concern in the days when many of those monsters were going up and down this trackage.



Roger providing historical perspective.

Next station stop, Seitzland. A question was asked, "Was this a station stop?"

Yes, indeed it was. There was a General Merchandise Store here, a coal handling facility, and a few residences.



Glen Rock - stop for gas [note excellent condition of brick sidewalk for westbound trains]

Approaching Glen Rock, attention was called to the group noting the location of the former Glen Rock Electric Light and Power Company building. In the same area, there was at one time an old rope mill, dating back to the founding days of Glen Rock. The operation was owned by William Heathcoat, one of the founders of Glen Rock. The Glen Rock station was formerly "Heathcoat Station." The old brick building in Glen Rock which served as the railroad station also provided facilities for freight handling, and at one time housed the

Borough Offices, a store, community activities for miscellaneous borough activities. The building is no longer in existence. Incidentally, the brick station platform along the west bound track still exists in its original excellent condition. Just across the tracks from the station building was a small shelter building with a glass-paned front for usage of passengers for east bound travel. A pot-bellied coal stove provided comfort during the cold winter months.

A siding on the west side of the main tracks provided access to the plant of "The Read Machinery Company" whose main plant was located in the Grantley section of York. Their prime output was mixing machinery for manufacturing companies such as bakeries. The Glen Rock installation was destroyed by fire.

Passing the station and crossing Water St, here on our left stood the telegraph tower identified as Block Tower "GR". It was occupied solely by telegraph operators on a 3-trick seven-day basis. In addition to their telegraph duties, they operated, by manual lever control, the semaphore train signals and the street crossing gates. Adjacent to the tower is the building formerly used by the Enterprise Furniture Co. On the east side of the tracks there was a large wooden tank for storage of water for the steam locomotives. A stand pipe was located, as well, on the west side of the tracks for use by east-bound trains. Just a bit further on, crossing the Codorus Creek bridge, on our left was at one time a siding leading into the adjacent lumber yard.

We soon pass Centerville, never a station stop, the location of the Glen Rock Baseball Field adjacent to the tracks on the east side. The village, at one time, had a rope mill. Portions of the original buildings are still in existence.

A few yards north of the village was the site of a passenger train wreck, one that I have specific memories of its happening. It became known as the Centerville wreck. On Good Friday, 1920, train No. 544 to Baltimore was scheduled to make a station stop at Glen Rock at 5:01 P.M. However, approaching Centerville, the double headed through train left the rails and plowed into the embankment along the tracks. The lead engine lay on its side, its engineer Walter DeHuff,

killed. His fireman escaped serious injury by jumping from the locomotive. There were no other serious injuries.

It had become a practice for my parents on each Friday evening to take train #994 at 5:38 P.M. to Glen Rock to do some grocery shopping, returning home on #995 at 8:07 P.M. This 1920's Friday evening noted in the above paragraph proved to be somewhat different. Because of the derailment at Centerville, #994 probably never left York that evening.

Larue was a small village with 2 stores, one owned and operated by Charles Warner, who was also postmaster. The other store, somewhat smaller, was run by a Mr. Bailey. Only about 6 or 8 houses were in the hamlet. The railroad facilities consisted of an enclosed window paned shelter building with a potbellied stove for protection of passengers during the cold weather. There was also a milk stand for milk shipments to Baltimore. A rather large freight warehouse located on the west side of the tracks north of the station area was serviced by a siding that was used when car load items were shipped to or from the station.

Going just a bit further on, the location of a specific farm called for a stop of our vehicle. The buildings are located near the tracks, and the specific reason for stopping was to make note of the fact that this was the birth place and location of my suitor activities of the girl who later became my wife.

Then though Seitzville village, never a train stop. Seitzville consisted of a Grist Mill and 4 or 5 houses. At this point was located the terminus of the east bound siding that began at Hanover Jct. This trackage, when extended at the Junction, became trackage of the Western Maryland to Valley Junction, where it made connection with the Western Maryland main line to Baltimore. The west bound siding, which began at Hanover Junction, also ended here at Seitzville. It provided service to the local grist mill as well as a nearby fruit orchard.

Then past the Hanover Jct. Coal Yard, situated 0.7 mi. south of the station. This was a busy location during the steam engine era, providing services which were necessary for steam engine operation.

HANOVER JUNCTION was a major point on the old Baltimore Division of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and one of historic interest in the days of the Northern Central R.R. and the Hanover Branch R.R. of Civil War days. Since Station Agent W. J. Shaffer was my Dad, and we lived in the Station House, this area is of paramount interest to me. In addition to activities around the station, his duties also included the Coal Yard and Larue.



Hanover Junction

Continuing on for one mile, we are at the railroad station of Smyser, which is in the Borough of Seven Valleys. (Is this what is meant by being in two places at the same time?) The ticket office and waiting room were situated in a nearby store building, which was convenient for westbound train passengers, but a distinct disadvantage for eastbound travelers. For them, a small shelter was provided on the west side of the tracks, but it was not enclosed.

Leaving Smyser, we noted the location of a freight train wreck of many years past. A car containing watermelons was involved, pouring watermelons from it. News spread rather quickly to the neighborhood and the watermelons disappeared before the wreckage was cleared up. To my knowledge, there were no injuries suffered by the train crew.

Glatfelters Station next. A telegraph block tower was once located here with the next set of semaphore signals north of Hanover Jct.

Continuing our trip, we soon rounded DIFPERS CURVE. (This is the spelling as listed in the Employees Timetable dated April 30, 1922). The timetable lists speeds of 40 mph for passenger trains and 30 mph for freights on the curve.

Now we approach from mile post 50 on the curve to HOWARD TUNNEL. This is the oldest tunnel in the United States providing continuous railroad train usage. A tunnel on the old Portage Railroad near Johnstown PA predates Howard.

After visiting the tunnel area for a while, we began our return trip. A bit of rain appeared, but was on no consequence and did not mar this special trip. We were able to record some of the railroad history relating to the area.



End of Run - June 15, 2000

Roger E. Shaffer
June 2000