

The Coal Yard

(at Hanover Junction)

by **Roger E. Shaffer**

The steam locomotive, which provided motive power for many years to the railroads, was indeed a powerful monster. These engines exhibited many characteristics similar to real people. They seemed to be breathing as the air pumps operated, needed much attention, and had great appetites.

In order to satisfy their tremendous appetites, facilities were required at numerous sites along the iron trails to supply them with coal, water, and sand. These facilities also had to accept the ashes shaken from the hearth of the fire box of the locomotive. One such facility on the Pennsylvania Railroad (Northern Central) was located just 0.7 mile south of the Hanover Junction station ("U" block tower).



The Coal Yard at Hanover Junction, 1917 (from collection of R.L. Williams)

Picking a year out of history, 1922 would be representative of an era when this coal yard was a very busy installation. Many of the local people often referred to it as the "Coal Chute," which

was of course a descriptive name for the operation, but its railroad name was the Coal Yard. The nearest points to this coal yard that could also supply coal and water were located at York (to the north), and at Parkton (to the south).

The normal flow of material for coal was to have a locomotive shove loaded hopper cars up on to the high trestle track. The local freight, B 90, was usually assigned this duty. The coal was then dropped into bins located directly below the tracks. From these storage bins, the coal was chuted into small hand-pushed larry cars which ran on a narrow gage track. These loaded cars were then pushed on to a turntable, turned 90 degrees, then manually pushed out over the bridge which crossed the main tracks. The car's contents were dropped into the tender of a locomotive waiting directly below.

A small building to the east of the main bridge housed a pump which was used for pumping water from the nearby Codorus Creek. The water was forced into a reservoir located to the west, near the public road, at an elevation well above the main tracks. The capacity of the reservoir was 537,000 gallons of water. The water flowed by gravity to the water plugs for transfer to the locomotive's water tank, to satisfy a thirsty piece of motive power. It was the duty of the fireman to attend to operation of the water plug for taking on water, and an operation which was reason for many a fireman to experience an unexpected shower. And too, it certainly must have been an icy job during the frigid winter months.



Model of Pump House built by Roger Shaffer



Model of Reservoir built by Roger Shaffer

I can recall tales told of a certain engineer who became quite amused when a fireman met with an accidental splash. It was the responsibility of the day trick track walker to attend to the water pump, to insure an adequate water supply in the reservoir.

For many years, "Jim" Newcomer was the day trick track walker, after serving on the track maintenance crew. He lived very near to the village of Hanover Junction. "Jimmie" McCollough was the night trick track walker. He lived in Seitzland, and would arrive at Hanover Junction on train No. 995 at 8:07P.M. to begin his tour of duty. He returned home on train No. 8020, leaving Hanover Junction at 6:20AM.

Track walkers carried a wrench to tighten any loosened nuts of the splice bars which held the rails together. They also carried a hammer to depress any spikes which may have risen from their position holding the rails to the ties. The night trick walker carried a lantern in addition to the

tools. Track walkers were required to punch a time clock located at several locations in their territory to ensure that they were on their required tours of duty.

It would have been quite impractical for the engine crew to drop hot cinders along the right of way because wood ties could certainly not resist this hot material and they would be consumed. The track repair gang would then have to be assigned the job of replacing the burned out ties. In order to minimize this problem, the coal yard provided pits where the crew could drop the contents of the ash pans, and not drop them along the tracks. After the ashes were cooled, they were shoveled out of the pit into a wheelbarrow and transferred to a waiting hopper car on the depressed level ash track, as it was called.

In order to assure traction for the driver wheels of the locomotive on the rail, under certain adverse conditions it was often necessary to use sand to assist the locomotive in getting the train rolling again. Therefore, sand was another of the materials dispensed at the coal yard. Sand was stored in "domes" located on top of the locomotive boiler, allowing gravity to provide the means by which the sand was delivered to the tracks through a pipe that extended to just above the rail surface.



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