The Hanover Branch Railroad
(The Old Branch)

by Roger E. Shaffer

The Hanover Branch Railroad was commonly referred to as the "Old Branch," and is the name that was always used by the local populace. The name was in used during a period which is of much interest to me, the early 1920s. It was in the 1920s that we lived in the Old Station House at Hanover Junction. Before the turn of the twentieth century, the Old Branch served as a most valuable asset to the community. Large quantities of iron ore from local mines were shipped by rail on the Old Branch. It also served a role as an important link in historic activities associated with the area.

At this period in time, the Hanover Branch Railroad became the Western Maryland Railway, but the name Old Branch remained.

The Hanover Branch Railroad Company was incorporated in Pennsylvania on March 16, 1847. It extended from the connection with the Baltimore & Susquehanna Railroad (later to become the Northern Central, and then in 1911, the Pennsylvania) at Hanover Junction to Hanover, Pa. It represents the oldest portion of the Western Maryland System. Letters of Patent for this first thirteen miles of the Western Maryland Railway were issued in Pennsylvania on October 18, 1849.
The railroad was extended from Hanover to Gettysburg in 1858, just prior to the Civil War, and to Ortanna, Pa. in 1885, with the name "Hanover Junction, Hanover, & Gettysburg Railroad."

This original trackage of the Hanover Branch Railroad became one of real historical interest. It carried the parties of President Abraham Lincoln and Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Curtin from Hanover Junction to Gettysburg on November 18, 1869, where on November 19, President Lincoln delivered his now famous "Gettysburg Address" at the dedication of the National Cemetery. The Northern Central trains carried President Lincoln from Baltimore and Governor Curtin from Harrisburg, the two groups meeting at Hanover Junction and proceeding together on the Hanover Branch to Gettysburg. On a more somber note, on April 21, 1865, the funeral train of President Lincoln left the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Station in Washington at 8:00 A.M. The train spent some time in Baltimore at the Howard Street Station of the Northern Central Railroad, and departed at 3:00 P.M. for Harrisburg. The train passed Hanover Junction at 5:55 P.M. The next morning, the train left Harrisburg for Philadelphia at 11:00 A.M. It continued on its trip to Springfield, Ill. for the burial, via the cities of New York, Albany, Buffalo, Cleveland, Columbus, and Indianapolis.

After the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, the Hanover Branch provided a route for transportation of wounded soldiers to distant hospitals and cities via Hanover Junction, since this was the only rail outlet available from Gettysburg to the outside world during the Civil War area.

These Old Branch tracks provided good travel conditions for us "Junction Kids", as we were called, on our travels to and from Diehl's school. The tracks were used for nearly half of our way to school, and they kept us from walking the dirt road which paralleled the tracks.

I can recall very vividly the Western Maryland "Mixed" train coming into Hanover Junction from Hanover. Trains operated on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at about noon time. On arrival, the engine would be at the head of the train with the engine backing. Then for the return trip to Hanover, the engine would again be at the front of the train headed for its destination. This train could carry passengers to the Junction to make connections for train No. 8021 to York at 12:32 PM., or Train No. 500 to Baltimore at 1:28 PM.

After the train left Hanover Jct., it was only a short distance before it crossed the Codorus Creek on a wooden trestle bridge on the farm of Peter Klinedinst. Two miles later it would come to Strickhousers Station. During the early days of the Hanover Branch, this was an important location as it was a shipping point for iron ore taken from the mines in the local area. Another 1.1 miles the village of Cold Spring, and then 1.0 mile to Codorus. The railroad station and the post office here carry the name of Codorus, but the borough is called Jefferson. Then on 1.9 miles to Valley Junction. This was the connection point the Bachman Valley Railroad made with the Hanover Branch. The main purpose of the Bachman Valley was to carry iron ore from the local mines in the Maryland/Pennsylvania border area. *"The 21st Annual Report (1873) of the Hanover Branch Railroad states that about 12,000 tons of iron ore were received from the Bachman Valley during 4 months."[1]* This Bachman Valley route became a part of the main line of the Western Maryland route from Emery Grove, Md. to Hanover and Gettysburg.

Valley Junction was also the location of a coaling station to supply necessary coal, water, and sand to the steam locomotives. Next station stop, 1.4 miles later, Porters. In 1893, this became the point from which the York Branch began its route through Spring Grove and on to York. With the completion of this trackage, a wye was installed at Porters which proved so useful that it is still actively used to this day.

Then on for 2 miles to Smith's Station and for 3.3 rail miles to Hanover.

The Hanover Branch Railroad facilities at Hanover Junction before the Civil War era were rather extensive. A hotel built by the railroad housed railroad office facilities. There was also a turntable, an ash pit, and various smaller buildings used for railroad activities. However, the Gettysburg Campaign of the Civil War brought Rebel soldiers to the area who were responsible for destruction by fire of the wooden bridge and all railroad facilities except the hotel building. The Hanover Junction Valley Junction rails were removed during the period 1928 34, bringing the end of service to an area that was highly dependent on the railroad. And this was the "Hanover Branch Railroad."

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1 Killough, Edward M. *History of the Western Maryland Railway*. Baltimore: Voluntary Relief Department Press of Western Maryland Railroad, 1940.