

# James Buchanan, "Big Wheel" of the Railroads

BY OLIVER S. SPROUT

While much has been written concerning the early development of our railroads; two local men appear as having been slighted in the roles they filled as railroad builders. Their advancement of land transport techniques would have made them famous had not their political errors served to overshadow their other successes.

The men referred to are the Fifteenth President of our Nation, the Honorable James Buchanan; and a Secretary of War under Mr. Buchanan's successor, the Honorable Simon Cameron. A unique pair indeed.

Mr. Buchanan, all that one would expect to find in a gracious, college-bred man, supplied the legal talent and culture, necessary for their activities; while Mr. Cameron, orphaned early in life, his education acquired through the medium of his trade—printing, and the rougher tutoring of experience, provided the practical "know how" needed. (5) [Figures, such as (5), refer to the bibliography at end of article.]

Once joined, this pair proved to be the antidote for a supine attitude existing, locally, in regards to our transportation situation, during the second quarter of the last century. Much of this lethargy was a result of conservative ideals held by earlier generations of English Quakers, and those non-resistant groups of Amish, Mennonites and related faiths.

A review of how our transport systems had developed, or failed to do so, is necessary for our appreciation of what these two men got done.

Almost a full century had passed from the time when William Penn, on the occasion of his second visit to the Province, in 1701, thought that much of the natural wealth of his possessions would be floated down river, to the benefit of Baltimore merchants; and the time when, in 1791, an appreciable effort was made to route such traffic into the "City of Brotherly Love," by inland water-ways and turnpikes.

During those nine decades southern interests fought to retain their grasp on what they held; while a minor controversy arose over where river traffic was to be diverted; at Portsmouth (Middletown), or Wright's Ferry (Columbia), and funneled into Philadelphia.

Penn had rough-charted plans for syphoning river traffic up the Conestoga and down the Schuylkill rivers, after having made a canoe trip, and short portage, over the suggested route, with recommendations for improving

the channels in the Susquehanna and Juniata Rivers. Little had been done to further those plans except that in 1762, David Rittenhouse and a Dr. Smith had made preliminary surveys, aimed at connecting the Schuylkill, Quittapahilla and Swatara Creeks, with Robert Morris and Robert Fulton extending such work later; from which efforts nothing immediately developed. Then, in 1791, Legislative Action gave us the Enabling Act which made possible the construction of fifteen canals, and some turnpikes, between 1791 and 1821. (9)

Confused law-makers then naively authorized "the construction of a canal to connect the Schuylkill and Susquehanna Rivers," without mentioning the Conestoga, Swatara, or any other particular route. They, if you please, were planning a state-wide arch for traffic; but, omitting the keystone.

While bewildered solons debated, James Buchanan was born at Stony Batter, near Mercersburg, Pa. He finished at Mercersburg Academy by 1805; and Dickinson Law School in 1809. He, at once, came to Lancaster to read law under James B. Hopkins, Esq., and was admitted to practise law before the local bar in 1812. (5)

The next year, 1813, he was appointed prosecuting attorney for Lebanon County; then being formed from portions of this and Dauphin counties.

While filling that position he learned of the activities of a group of men, then organizing a company to build the Union Canal. This artificial waterway was intended to connect the waters of the Schuylkill Canal and the Susquehanna River, by following the course of the Swatara and Tulpehocken creeks from near Reading to Portsmouth, a distance of seventy-two miles. (9)

The company received a charter in 1814, a few months before Mr. Buchanan went to Harrisburg as Representative from this District, as he did likewise in 1815.

In 1814, a decided betterment for traffic had been completed at Columbia in the form of a cross-river covered bridge. It is well to remember that in southeastern Pennsylvania, mountains and rivers ran at right angles to the main trend of migration, with an east-west trend. With an estimated eight thousand wagons using the road between Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, in 1810, public opinion had demanded—and obtained—this improvement at the river borough. The Legislature had, in 1811, authorized the construction of this bridge; which was built about a quarter mile above where the present iron spans are located. (12) Wright's Ferry, licensed in 1728, had strangled movements at Columbia, and was definitely outmoded, since it was only available for eight months of the year; being immobilized by ice and spring freshets, "from when the oak leaves fell, until skunk cabbages came out."

Here, then was the more nearly perfect manner for removing bottlenecks in traffic that existed at every ferry along the entire length of the river, since it supplied an all-weather, year-round accommodation for cross-state traffic. Such improvement added immensely to the popularity and usefulness of Columbia as an intermediate transfer point for traffic moving in all directions.

Mr. Buchanan, from his post in legislative halls, was fortunately placed to learn considerable about our transportation problems, and their suggested remedies; many of which were outmoded almost before being recommended.

During the time in which this bridge was being built, and possibly enlightened by information gleaned from Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Hopkins, under whom Mr. Buchanan had read law, made a very bold decision. (5)

Fourteen miles above Columbia, Conewago Falls presented the worst hazard to river traffic in the entire length of the river. There the river dropped twenty-two feet in less than a mile, over a mass of rocky shelvings. So dangerous was this stretch of water that, in 1797, a state-financed canal, with lock chambers, had been placed in operation, on the *western* bank of the stream at York Haven, by Governor Thomas Mifflin.

Mr. Hopkins decided that if the Union Canal was built, as it promised to be, boats coming out at Portsmouth would have a most difficult time crossing the island-studded river, to use that canal, besides having to make another hard crossing below the canal to dock at Columbia.

Even under existing circumstances many rivermen were frightened at this latter move, and were unloading cargoes at Falmouth, with such freight being forwarded, by way of "the pumpkin vine road," to Elizabethtown and points east. Consequently, we find Mr. Hopkins requesting and receiving a charter to construct a short canal and lock chamber along the *eastern* bank of the river, at a cost of approximately \$200,000, in the face of political opposition, because of the competition his works offered to the State canal opposite.

While Mr. Hopkin's canal was getting under way, Mr. Buchanan left his desk to serve as a private in the militia, hastily enlisted to face the British who, in August 1814, burned the National Capitol. His enlistment was of short duration, as peace was declared in March of 1815. Another company beside his, but of the same regiment, was commanded by a man who Mr. Buchanan was to meet later under very different conditions—Captain Adam Diller. (Pa. Arch., 2nd Series, Vol. 17, p. 92.)

Members of the Canal Commission at the time were satisfied to await the completion of the Union Canal, hoping thereby to avoid the expense of such construction, and concentrated their efforts on getting something built to the west of Portsmouth.

During this period Mr. Buchanan experienced the great hurt of his life when his romance with Miss Ann Caroline Coleman faded, possibly as the result of tea table conversations, conversations during which tongues were not always kind in what they spoke.

For a while Mr. Buchanan considered retiring, as he might have done with an annuity of \$11,000, but he compromised by dropping out of politics, while remaining active in his profession. (9)

The second decade of the last century found most citizens satisfied with the progress being made by the Canal Commission, but not everyone was so minded.

In 1818, Colonel John Stevens had addressed a memorial to the State Legislature on "The Expediency of a Railroad between Philadelphia and Pittsburgh," in an effort to meet threats poised to our cross-state traffic by the Erie Canal on the north, and the National Highway and Chesapeake Canal to the south. (14)

After one of the members of the Legislature had stated from the floor that, "for all intended purposes canals are twice as well suited to our needs as are railroads," Mr. Stevens kept the matter alive by addressing letters to influential citizens and law makers. Such, however, could only conceive of a "railed road" of the type used overseas, where draft animals were used to drag "burthen" cars; sometimes four-legged beasts, and sometimes two-legged ones, being used.

While Mr. Stevens was conducting his campaign for a railroad, Mr. Buchanan re-entered politics, and was elected to the National House of Representatives in 1819, where he served, by repeated elections until 1831, with distinction.

Doubtlessly spurred by the completion of the bridge at Columbia, (5) and common knowledge of Mr. Hopkin's plans, a group of men received a charter, in 1814, to construct a turnpike from Columbia to Marietta, up along the river bank, which was to effect Mr. Buchanan's plans, as a railroad builder, long after that charter was granted, although no effort to construct such road occurred until 1826, after canal construction began.

Meanwhile the Canal Commissioners became impatient with the slow progress made by the builders of the Union Canal, and ordered a survey made of the land between Portsmouth and Philadelphia. This task was performed by members of the Army Engineering Corps, under Colonel S. H. Long and Major John Wilson, and a civilian, Mr. M. Robinson. (14)

This group reported that a canal between the points designated was not practical, and suggested that a railroad be constructed to transport passengers and goods over that distance.

It was then that Colonel John Stevens' theory received tardy recognition. Stevens and Charles Loss had traveled in a buggy over the suggested route, inspecting possible locations, and trying to sell stock in their enterprise, for which they received a charter in 1823, but they met with small success.

Many had listened to Stevens' proposals until they learned that he intended using his lately developed steam engine on the road, then "got themselves propped" against it. Consequently, Mr. Stevens was compelled to leave his charter lapse, for want of sufficient capital.

There were, however, some who were convinced that Mr. Stevens really had something worthy of a trial; and these men decided to take action in advancing the proposition. In April of 1826, this latter group had the satisfaction of receiving a charter to construct the Columbia, Lancaster and Philadelphia Railroad, capitalized for \$650,000, with permission to increase that figure to one million dollars.

(5) Included in that group were James Buchanan, General George Porter, member of the Legislature, and Amos Ellmaker, all of Lancaster;

James Given and John Barber, of Columbia, with others from Chester County and Philadelphia. Regardless of the wealth and prestige represented by this group, their building program had not advanced very far before the enormity of the task confronting them became evident; and they turned the project over to the Canal Commissioners for completion.

And, small wonder, when one learns that their surveyors had to run their lines by using ordinary spirit levels fastened to long planks because, in all of Philadelphia, they had only been able to obtain a single standard transit.



The Canal Basin and Bridge at Columbia, Pa.

Meanwhile Governor Andrew Schulze, who had been practicing law in Lebanon County, while Mr. Buchanan was prosecuting attorney there, exerted pressure on the Canal Commissioners to get something accomplished along the artificial waterways; as the Union Canal had been placed in service in April of 1825; and was, in December of 1827, connected with the State Works, after the latter work was ready for such connection.

The Main Line of the State Works was scarcely opened before the limestone bottom fell out of the Union Canal, about two miles from Reading, which called for a relocation of a short stretch of that canal, and the salvaging of eighty-two boats that had been marooned by the accident.

That incident, along with the generally poor performance of the Union Canal, caused the Canal Commissioners to decide upon extending their canal down river from Portsmouth to Columbia. (12)

As a result of Governor Schulze's initiative, bids had been asked from contractors to dig several sections of the State Canal, from Portsmouth to Hollidaysburg, at the foot of the Allegheny mountains, a distance of one hundred and seventy-one miles. The corner stone of those works was laid on July 4, 1826, at Harrisburg, with Masonic ceremonies.

At that time Mr. Buchanan was embarking, as an investor, in the newer type of transportation technique. (2)

Among those submitting bids to get the dirt shoveled out of a part of those one hundred and seventy odd miles of ditch; forty feet wide at the top and twenty-five feet wide at the bottom and eight feet deep; to say nothing about the extra work necessary at the hundred and thirty-seven lock chambers incorporated in the plans, was Simon Cameron, who contracted to complete that section between Harrisburg and Clark's Ferry, opposite the mouth of the Juniata River. (5)

He, too, at a later date, contracted to dig two other sections west of the mountains. In completing these several contracts, Mr. Cameron displayed his abilities as a co-ordinator so well that Governor Schulze appointed him Adjutant General of the State Militia, in 1829.

While Mr. Cameron was seeing to it that the men with calloused hands kept their backs bent, others had been busy elsewhere, and several days before Christmas of 1830, the huge twelve-hundred-foot long and sixty-foot wide canal basin at Columbia was filled and tested. At that time two boats laden with flour from mills at Chickies were brought down to the basin. After the cargoes had been removed, groups of local men with their ladies, and a brass band, boarded the boats and made a round trip to Chickies, and returned before the works were drained for the winter. (5)

During the construction of ten miles of canal from Portsmouth to Columbia, known as Section 18, Mr. Hopkins had an opportunity to sell his own short canal and locks to the State; but his asking price was too high, and the entire investment was lost.

Portsmouth eventually was absorbed by Middletown, which had been so named by reason of its being the "middletown" between Lancaster and Carlisle for the teamsters using that route. That location came to feel a loss of business when Columbia was selected as the eastern terminal of the canal, rather than Portsmouth. However, the place continued to grow in a gradual manner because of traffic using the pike, the State Canal, and the Union Canal, which functioned in a forlorn sort of way. (4)

As a result of such development, a bank was opened there in 1832, with General Simon Cameron being the cashier. The duties of this position were not so arduous, and allowed the General to become acquainted with leading citizens of the area, their needs and ambitions, which were soon to find expression in an unexpected manner.

During this busy period to the west of Columbia, the railroad section to the east was not getting built rapidly. Detention there arose mainly from a desire on the part of the citizens of Lancaster to have the rails brought into the heart of their town rather than to have them laid down a mile to

the north (or right where they are today), with a spur line serving the town's needs. Rocky formations encountered in this new detour caused delay and unexpected costs; and, after expending \$60,000 of their own money, the local citizens turned their self-assumed task over to the State for completion. (5)

Here, evidently, the citizens of Lancaster missed the close contact of someone, such as Mr. Buchanan, with the State Legislature; as he had been appointed Minister to Russia by President Polk, and no substitute appeared. This opportunity was embraced by Mr. Buchanan with success in that he consummated our first trade treaty with the Czar, gaining for us valuable concessions when ports on the Black and Baltic seas were opened to our ships, and for himself an education in international traffic matters.

In that period, February, 1832, a sudden warm spell caused the ice on the river at Columbia to move, jam, and back the water up; and float the bridge off its piers. Magnificent as the designing of that structure had been, some one erred in only allowing sixteen feet clearance between low water mark and the floor of those spans.

Traffic then became so badly snarled that citizens of Middletown thought their fondest dreams might come true. With the bridge at Columbia gone, and the railroad to the east incomplected, some thought they might be able to convince members of the Legislature, and the Canal Commissioners, that all improvements at Columbia should be written off as a dead loss.

Civic hearings were held at which Mr. Cameron was a prominent figure, and some rapidly laid plans were aired. From those plans came a request to the Legislature for permission to build a railroad from Lancaster to Portsmouth, by way of Mount Joy. Some, too, talked of building another bridge over the river, at Portsmouth, to accomodate traffic off the pike, and, perhaps, the rails of the projected railroad to Carlisle, twenty miles beyond the river. (14)

During the eighteen years that the demolished bridge had seen service (5) it had fully demonstrated its value; and the owners were not long in providing a replacement. The new bridge was placed where the present iron bridge stands, a quarter mile below where the older one had stood. This new location was at the eastern end of the canal basin, the western terminal of the railroad tracks, and also of the macadamized pike from Philadelphia. By using the debris of the old bridge, consisting mainly of the dressed stone in the piers, the builders kept their costs down to \$153,000. It was opened to traffic in October of 1834; six months after the first exhaust of a steam locomotive was heard along the Susquehanna. On the floor of this new bridge were two railroad tracks, as a prophecy.

The folks around Middletown had figured without their host. Too much capital had been invested at Columbia by the Commonwealth, the Bridge Company, and individual concerns, like the forwarding companies whose warehouses lined the northeastern side of the twelve-hundred-foot-long canal basin, for such to be written off as being expendable.

The petitioners did, however, receive a charter to build a railroad twenty-five miles long from Dillerville to Portsmouth, on June 30, 1832; and then only after they had been particular in wording their request.

The new railroad was shown to be a necessity for the rich agricultural region it would serve; one that would bring much business to the Main Line by delivering goods to, and from, its terminals at or near Lancaster and Portsmouth. To have even suggested that any competition might be created with the State Works would have been considered as little short of treason, in the minds of many. (9)

Governor Schulze had done everything possible to get the State Works activated during the slack times of his first term; and so popular had the effort been that when he ran for office in 1829, he received all but about one thousand of the popular vote of the state. (6)

After receiving a charter to construct the "Mt. Joy" road, as the Portsmouth and Lancaster Railroad came to be known, in June of 1832, the Board of Directors solicited subscriptions with small success, to stock in the company. Citizens of the area remembered how they had been misled when stock had been sold in the Union Canal Company. Many thought business was sure to be taken away from the State Works; and that value of investments at Columbia would be destroyed, where arrangements were already underway to build a new bridge. Others realized that first plans to have railroads carry only passengers, and the lighter, more valuable goods, while the canal bore the bulky cargoes of natural products, was not practical, when the anticipated traffic volume was considered. There also existed opinions that some of the promoters were "shrewd business men," legally honest; but not morally so; men quick to take advantage of another's momentary distress; and as stock did not sell very rapidly, the project lagged.

At the opposite end of the proposed route another individual stood in need of guidance. (6) Adam Diller, who had captained a company of militia, marching in the same regiment as had James Buchanan, to the defense of Baltimore, in 1814, lived in Lancaster, and had served as sheriff of the county from 1828 through 1830.

It is unlikely that the one-hundred-and-twenty-foot square, and Court house of 48 by 58 feet, that stood in Center Square, until 1852, was large enough to have much happen there that was hidden from the sheriff; so Mr. Diller evidently was acquainted with what the several groups of railroad builders were planning to do. He, too, must have known that the Portsmouth and Lancaster Railroad Company would not be allowed to lay their tracks into the heart of the town, parallel to those of the State Works Main Line.

During the early part of 1833, Mr. Buchanan returned home, and shortly thereafter, Mr. Diller bought fifty-two acres of land along the northwestern edge of the town, along the road to Reading, where that pike crossed the tracks of the Main Line at grade. Mr. Diller retained a patch of ground for his own use, on which he erected a warehouse, in which goods were stored while awaiting transfer to and from cars and wagons. He, then,



stood to benefit from his warehouse business if the Mount Joy Road was never built, and more so if it was. The remainder he sold off as building lots.

Within a few months after Mr. Buchanan's return, a meeting of the stockholders of the Mount Joy road was held at Elizabethtown, in December of 1833, with two dozen men present, some of whom were officers in the State Militia. After that meeting action occurred. On June of 1834, Mr. Buchanan was elected president of the company. (5)

In April of 1834, the Black Hawk, which had been towed up the pike from Philadelphia to Columbia, with several converted stage coaches that had been hauled up the railroad, by horses, were readied for service and several trial trips were made from Columbia eastward. Directly, Governor Wolfe and a selected group came to Columbia from the state capital, by packet boats over the canal. From the canal basin they were taken in coaches to the top of the inclined plane where everything was in readiness, and they boarded the cars and were whisked away to the county seat, covering those dozen miles in the remarkable time of one hour. After spending the night in Lancaster, they went to Philadelphia the next morning—a seven-hour ride, without mishap.

Pennsylvania was at long last, ready to claim what rightfully belonged to her.

Apparently, the Mount Joy project only needed the presence of someone of proven character, as Mr. Buchanan, to gain the confidence of the public, for construction of the new line began soon after he was elected president of the company; and Adam Diller sold an acre and a half of his land to the new road for a station site. Before the year was out, fourteen miles of track had been graded and laid between Dillerville and Elizabethtown; and order began to appear from the chaos that had existed in traffic.

In October of 1834, the new bridge at Columbia was opened for traffic, as previously mentioned; with Mr. Buchanan being elected the next month to the United States Senate, where he was destined to serve until 1845.

With a pair of men like Messrs. Buchanan and Cameron at the throttle of the Mount Joy Road, the project developed rapidly, and on March 11, 1835, the company received a new charter; this one being granted to the Harrisburg, Portsmouth, Mt. Joy and Lancaster Railroad Company. Under the new charter the company was granted the privilege of laying ten additional miles of track, farther to the west; and right into the heart of the state's capital city. Those last ten miles of track paralleled the route of the State Canal, and were in direct competition with that waterway.

The accomplishment of securing the new charter can be accepted as an indication of the influence wielded by the management of the company. Apparently, the matter of a cross-river bridge was then brought into the open, with some "log-rolling" being done, which resulted in the proponents securing permission to build those additional ten miles of track; provided they forgot about the building of a new bridge. (See p. 22, P.R.R., 1846-1946.)

In September of 1836, the John Bull, which had been doing duty on the Camden and Amboy Railroad, in New Jersey, was unloaded, in Trojan horse

manner, with several cars, from canal boats, at Portsmouth, and were soon rattling along over the newly laid rails, into Harrisburg; just as similar mechanisms, built by Matthias Baldwin, or the Norris Brothers, were chugging between Columbia and Philadelphia. (2)

By the end of 1836, the entire thirty-six miles of track between Dillerville and Harrisburg were completed, and in operation, except a short stretch at Funk's Tavern, Elizabethtown, where some tunneling was unfinished, and around which passengers and goods were transferred in stage coaches. During the tunneling, the roof of the tunnel caved in, killing two men, and the project was completed as a deep cut. (5)

In December of 1836, Mr. Diller sold thirty-eight acres of land to James Cameron, brother of Simon, who had studied law under Mr. Buchanan. This land lay to the southeast of Mr. Diller's town site, and the reason for such purchase is not definitely known; although James Cameron did act as agent for his brother and Mr. Buchanan, on several occasions demanding someone in whom the principals had absolute confidence.

February of 1837, brought Simon Cameron to Lancaster, when he purchased a lot of ground about four hundred feet east of the Reading Pike, on which a three-story building was subsequently erected and used for a time as a combination hotel and waiting room; which had but recently been demolished.

Mr. Diller about that time sold some half-dozen lots to forwarding companies upon which warehouses were erected, and Dillerville now showed more promise of becoming a growing community than it ever did.

In another year the tracks of the Mount Joy Road were connected with those of the Main Line at Dillerville, and it became possible for passengers, and the lighter type of goods, to be loaded on cars at Philadelphia and taken directly into Harrisburg, without any transfer being necessary at Dillerville. This trip was over a route five miles shorter than one routed by way of Columbia, where a transfer from cars to boats was necessary; to say nothing of the long, slow drag up the canal, if and when that convenience was operating. Too, the new service was available the year round and in all but the very worst of weather conditions.

It was over this newer route (9) that Charles Dickens traveled, when he toured our country, in 1841; which trip he writes of pleasantly in his memoirs of the same.

The response to the demands of the public for speed was reflected in the earnings of the company which prospered from the very start.

In all fairness to the State Railroad, it may be said that it was the only link in the entire State Works Program to operate at a profit. For the fiscal year of 1838 those profits were \$219,787.13; notwithstanding the number of free passes issued to state employees, which at times included the sheriffs and their families, of the counties through which the road ran. (10)

Business increased over the Mount Joy Road, requiring the entire line to be double tracked by 1842. The enterprise of the management is shown

by their adoption, in 1846, of the telegraph, as an auxiliary to train dispatching. This, probably, came as a result of the nearness of the road's president to experiments carried out, with government aid, along the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and Mr. Buchanan's appreciation of its value.

It is not to be thought that the State Canal was a failure in moving bulk cargoes, since one boat carried twenty-five or thirty times what was then carried by a single freight car. Consequently facilities at Columbia, around the basin, became taxed to the limit, since those cargoes had to be transferred to wagons or cars. To expedite such cargoes, intact, to southern points, the Tidewater Canal was dug along the west bank of the river from Wrightsville to Havre-de-Grace, Maryland, by southern capital, in 1838; which effort is, of course, foreign to our subject. (12)

While Mr. Buchanan was in the Senate, Mr. Cameron served as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, during the settlement of claims made by the Winnebago Tribe in 1838; and James Cameron served as executive head of the Mount Joy Line; and was made superintendent of motive power of the State Road, at Columbia, in 1839. During the early 1840's international trouble developed in the southwestern section of the continent, followed by the Mexican War; in which the Cameron name figures prominently; and of which, no doubt, Dr. Beck will deal with in detail in his paper for April. (9)

Such events showed the need for better methods of transportation than existed in 1831, when Simon Cameron took a contract to build a canal from New Orleans to Lake Pontchartrain. At that time Mr. Cameron hired twelve hundred men, locally, and sent them to the job on ocean-going vessels, while he and his engineers, and their gear, floated down the Mississippi River on barges.

By 1845 public opinion was ready to admit the inadequacy of the slothful canal, which was only available for eight months of the year; and demands were made that accommodations, offered by the railroads, be extended to the west.

From that clamor came the request from aroused interests for a charter to build the Pennsylvania Railroad, from Pittsburgh to Harrisburg. This request for a charter was granted, and the same was issued September 19, 1846; in spite of similar requests made by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, but in which the southern road could not meet requirements. (14)

After actual construction of the longer trackage started, it became evident that the Pennsylvania and Mount Joy Railroads would have to be joined in other ways than by merely bolting a few fish-plates to the end rails of the two roads. Rails had not yet been spiked down as far west as Lewistown, sixty miles above Harrisburg, before the Pennsylvania, in 1847, leased the local road for a period of twenty years, which was later extended to nine hundred and ninety-nine years; and under very unique terms. (Merged April 25, 1917.)

Such arrangements, however, were insufficient to accommodate the thousands who were rushing westward as fast as the wheels could turn, towards the Pacific coast where gold had been discovered; or to intermediate places where gold of another type was to be garnered.

To accommodate traffic in this direction, some of which came into Columbia over railroads that had been constructed between Baltimore and Wrightsville, the Board of Directors of the Harrisburg, Portsmouth, Mt. Joy & Lancaster Railroad Company requested permission to extend their tracks from Portsmouth, down river to Columbia, a distance of eighteen miles. Those rails would, of course, parallel, and compete with the State Canal, during those months in (9) which the canal was operating, and at a loss.

The very audacity of the request, while an example of the business acumen of the directors, was also an indication of the prestige wielded by that group, since they had the prayer of their petition granted, against all opposition voiced by members of the Canal Commission and the Legislature.

A volume might be written of this period during which the brothers Cameron fought southern interests, and gained control of what was to be the Northern Central Railroad, from Sunbury to Baltimore; and thereby saved immense amounts of capital invested by northern capitalists for Yankee subscribers to stock in the five individual roads making up that merger.

Nearer home, laying the tracks down river from Portsmouth challenged the ability of the builders most between Chickies Creek and Columbia. Here all available space between the river hills and the stream was taken up by the canal and the turnpike, which had been chartered in 1814, and begun building in 1826. (5)

Unable to finance the removal of native rock and rubble at the foot of Chickies Rock, the pike people had sent their road up river to Jones' Hollow, east of the Rock, then platted a course up the ravine, along the side of the hill until the brow was reached; then down the northern slope in like manner.

The railroad company bought this right of way from the turnpike company, and provided a substitute route (that presently used between Columbia and the top of the hill), blasted away the foot of the Rock, and laid their tracks where the pike had been. Below the Rock, at the point of Furnace Hill, another obstacle was met with, where the canal and turnpike rounded the point at such short radius that the "hairpounders" had dubbed the place, "The Spinning Wheel." Here the present tunnel was drilled before tracks could be laid over which trains could be, and are, safely operated.

The tie-in between politics and railroading then became evident when engines, built in Lancaster, and with names like "Wheatland," "James Buchanan," and "John C. Breckinridge" on their badge plates were operating over the "river-road."

This construction was carried on during the period after Mr. Buchanan had completed a term as Secretary of State (1845-1849), and Mr. Cameron had been elected to fill the seat in the Senate, left vacant when his associate had accepted the portfolio; and was in full operation when Mr. Buchanan was made Minister to the Court of St. James's in 1853.

After welding the several parts of the Northern Central into a unit by 1854, Mr. Cameron was re-elected to the Senate in 1857. In that same year the Pennsylvania Railroad bought the entire State Works, excepting several branches of the canal, which were of small value.

Ten weeks before Mr. Buchanan's term of office as president expired in 1861, South Carolina seceded from the Union, lighting the conflagration that swept the nation for the next four years; during which the wisdom of this pair of railroad builders was tested and proved.

Mr. Buchanan came back to Wheatland, where Hetty Parker, his faithful house-keeper, was immersed in the big spring there when she united with the Baptist Church; while Mr. Buchanan busied himself writing, "Mr. Buchanan's Administration."

Mr. Cameron became Secretary of State, under Mr. Lincoln, and plunged into that task with his usual energy; energy pointed towards preparations for a much longer struggle than his fellow cabinet members thought necessary; and which ultimately caused his resignation, and acceptance of the appointment as Minister to Russia.

Mr. Buchanan's decision regarding his life-time efforts were summed up in the statement, "I fear not the verdict of future times, as to my work and actions. Had I to pass through the same state of things again, I could not before God, see that I could do otherwise than I have done." (3)

A contemporary writer says this, "As for the breaking up of the Union by force of arms is concerned, the attempt came fully a decade too late. It is not impossible, nor wholly improbable, that it might have been successful, in 1850, when over forty per cent of the nation's inhabitants formed a truly 'solid south,' (10) and the opposing sixty per cent of them were scattered from Skowhegan, Maine, to the Mississippi, with no completed means of transportation at either end. By 1860, the gaps were bridged with steel; and recruits from Skowhegan, as from La Crosse, Wisconsin, could be carried by rail to any point along the long line from the Mississippi to Chesapeake Bay."

One may paraphrase that statement and say, "Without the able assistance of Mr. Buchanan, Mr. Cameron, and their associates, it is not impossible, nor wholly improbable, that some of those gaps would not have been bridged by steel, in 1860."

Ironically, while Mr. Buchanan was writing his memoirs, in June of 1863, one who had helped build the Wrightsville, York & Gettysburg Railroad in 1840, returned as General in Command of the troops from Georgia, and ordered the destruction of the tracks and culverts he had helped construct almost a quarter century before. Then, General Jubal Early ruined the vital link with the South, which James Buchanan had been so anxious to have his road along the Susquehanna make connections with; while local patriots burned the bridge, made possible by their father's investments in 1834.

Further evidence of the farsightedness of their planning is presently available in the concrete arch bridge incorporated in the plans of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, opened for traffic last year, near Highspire, only a few miles above where the projectors of the "Mt. Joy Branch" thought a bridge would be necessary a century ago.

While recognizing the fact that these men did make serious political errors; we salute them as having been far superior to other co-ordinators of traffic, of their times.

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