

THE LANCASTER, OXFORD
& SOUTHERN R.R. COMPANY

A posthumous account by the late Harry Baughey of an unusual narrow-gauge railway of lower Lancaster County, a sleepy little agricultural line facing constant bankruptcy, but ending with a windfall for its investors.

Railroading on the old Lancaster, Oxford and Southern narrow-gauge railway, was an exciting occupation. If the engine affectionately called the "Coffee Pot" didn't jump the track the coaches were blown into adjacent fields by storms. Snow drifts, washouts and destroyed bridges added to the troubles of the crew, the members of which never knew what was going to happen next.

Exciting and unexpected incidents were of daily occurrence during the early operation of the road which ran between Peach Bottom, Lancaster County, and Oxford, Chester County. Despite many handicaps, however, it furnished transportation to residents of southern Lancaster County for a period of nearly forty-five years.

"We never knew what was going to happen when we started out," said J. Clinton Gorsuch, formerly of 11 Cornell Avenue, West Lancaster, who was a conductor on the road from 1878 until 1897. No matter whether trouble was encountered with the mechanical parts of the engine, or whether it had to do with the track and roadbed, we always managed to get to our destination.

"In the early days of the road before improvements were made to the track and rolling stock, passengers often were jerked out of their seats when we started and stopped. The coaches weren't equipped with present-day couplings and the old 'link and pin' method caused plenty of jolts.

"At that time the rails and ties were small and the rolling stock light. Consequently when a heavy storm came along it either undermined the track or blew the coaches off the rails," he concluded.

One car was blown off seven times and Gorsuch was in it six of those times, which, of course, made the job of conducting an exciting one. Washouts were frequent occurrences along the line which ran along creeks, over rough terrain and through many portions of low land and often the crew had to "get out" with picks and shovels and dig the engine out of the mud. If it went over on its side it was put back on the rails by means of jacks which were carried on the engine.

Sometimes the locomotive jumped the track three times in one day during the early era of the road. A bursted flue, however, was the only mechanical "accident" that held the train up. It didn't matter whether one cylinder refused to function — the other furnished enough power to haul the train to its destination where the disabled part was repaired.

Once when the crew had armed themselves with picks, axes and shovels in preparation for trouble along the line, a storm lifted the coach bodily from the rails and after turning it over five or six times, deposited it upside-down in a nearby field. During its transit shovels, axes and other implements flew in every direction and Jesse Leek, one of the passengers, received a cut on his face.

That was enough for Jesse who promptly decided to "get away from there" and made a "bee-line" up the track. The engine—running free—progressed some distance up the track but Jesse overtook it and kept on going. Later he was met by a friend who asked him what had happened. "The L. O. and S. blew off the track again," he shouted. "When it's too windy to sow clover that d---n road isn't safe," he said.

The best speed that could be obtained during the early years of the line was from 10 to 15 miles an hour.

After the roadbed and rolling stock was improved they made 25 miles an hour and often 30. If a flue burst it meant a hold-up of many hours. There were no telephones and one of the crew had to borrow a horse and carriage and drive to Oxford for help. Other mishaps such as broken springs and leaking pipes never caused hold-ups — the engine always managed to limp "into port" although the running time was upset considerably.

Once during the great blizzard of March, 1888, the train, after battling its way through innumerable snowdrifts, finally reached Eldora, Fulton township, where Gorsuch and the late W. Morgan Spear, Peach Bottom, who was engineer from 1887 until the road ceased operating in 1918 got out to look things over. Both were apprehensive as to the possibilities of proceeding any further. The rule that "the train must proceed" was a fixed one, however, and Gorsuch, going ahead of the engine, gave the "Go" signal and Spear opened his throttle.

Then things started to happen. The driving-wheels, whirling on the ice and snow-covered tracks, threw a large cake of snow on top of Gorsuch, throwing him backward over a fence upon which he had seated himself, headfirst into a snowdrift. Then the pilot of the engine, encountering a large mass of ice which was concealed beneath the snow, turned over. To make matters worse, the engineer noticed something trickling down the back of his neck. Greatly alarmed he jumped from the cab and running over to Gorsuch, who had by this time extricated himself from the snow, he shouted, "I'm cut! The blood's running down my neck!" and pointed frantically to his head. Gorsuch took one look. Then he hastened to the cab and brought out a dinner pail which once had contained three soft-boiled eggs. "That's not blood," he assured the engineer, "That's what's left of your lunch."

Putting the engine back, however, was a serious problem. The earth was soft and the locomotive was deeply imbedded in it. Finally, after vari-

ous plans had failed, Gorsuch suggested placing the rails under the engine. This was accomplished with the aid of shovels and plenty of "elbow grease" and at last the crucial moment arrived when it was to be put back on the track. If it didn't go down correctly, it meant further work and if it did, all was well. Fortunately, however, when the engine finally was tilted to an upright position by means of two small jacks placed against the running frame, the wheels dropped on both rails and the trick was done.

At another time during a trip over terrain which had received the brunt of a devastating storm, the roadbed was undermined for nearly a mile and as the engine traveled around a curve, a three-foot section of rail flew off while the train was passing over it, throwing the engine over on its side on the edge of a small stream where it hung precariously.

Some weeks later when everything seemed serene and nothing had happened so far that day, the train suddenly was brought to a jolting stop by the ringing of the gong in the engineer's cab. The startled crew and many of the passengers got out to look for the trouble but at first found nothing wrong. Then they discovered that a turkey had been the innocent cause of the sudden stop. The line, running near Lafe Clendenin's farm, passed beneath a large walnut tree upon which a limb of which Lafe's turkeys were accustomed to perch. The exhaust from the "Robert Fulton's" stack had proved too much for one of them and it had flopped in a heap on the platform of the coach. In its transit, however, its body had landed on the bellrope which explained why the gong had rung.

During the long winter months it wasn't anything unusual for the crew to be marooned for hours at a time. Sometimes, after battling with snowdrifts all day the train was able to proceed only one mile, then it was tied up again. During those periodic hold-ups food was brought to the crew by farmers who lived along the line and during a severe storm the crew fought four days before the terminal at Peach Bottom was reached.

When fairs and festivals were held in various towns along the road the L. O. and S. installed long benches on flat-cars to accommodate its patrons. These hard seats, which ran the full length of the cars, were rarely used by the regular patrons who preferred the plush seats in the passenger coach if they were available.

During one of these fairs the road hauled certain prominent individuals from Philadelphia and Swarthmore who found the long seats so unique that they chose them in preference to the others despite the fact that smoke from the stack rolled over them in billowy, smudgy waves.

In the late 1850's numerous agricultural and commercial interests located in southern Pennsylvania in the 50-mile wide band between the Pennsylvania Railroad's main line and the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad's main line began discussing the construction of an East-West railway to serve the region. The proposed railroad would be constructed in many sections, with separate companies building each link. Wilmington, Delaware, was the center of agitation for the road, influenced, no doubt, by the competition of Philadelphia and Baltimore, both of the cities being the terminal points of the two large railways to the West. Dubbed the "Wilmington and Western," it never got beyond the point of trial surveys when the Civil War erupted.



A L. O. & S. Locomotive at the Quarryville Depot.

In October, 1861, William H. Brown, then only 24 years old, ran a trial survey from Lombardville in Maryland to Peach Bottom in Lancaster County. The W & W Railroad was to leave Wilmington, pass through Newark, Delaware; Lewisville, Penna.; Lombardville, Maryland; Peach Bottom, Penna.; then over the Susquehanna River and through York County to York, and points West. Brown's survey took the proposed road from Lombardville to Hilaman's Tavern, thence to a crossing with the Baltimore Central Railroad between Beatown and Nottingham, and on down the Octoraro slope passing eastward of Glenroy. Following Blackburn's Run, the survey extended across the Octoraro Creek at Rea's woolen mill (Harkness Bridge), and followed Ballance's Run through the Scott farms, passing between Elim and Fairmount. Crossing the Conowingo valley, the survey passed near Levi Brown's farm and went down to Peach Bottom. This last portion of Brown's survey was the only section finally used because new railroads necessitated changes in the territory to be served.

Expansion of the Baltimore Central eliminated the need to connect with Wilmington. The Baltimore and Philadelphia Railroad Company was chartered in Maryland in 1852, and the Philadelphia and Baltimore Central Railroad Company was chartered in Pennsylvania in 1854; these two companies intended to construct a line between the two cities, but difficulties arose.

Later in 1854 the P & BC absorbed the Maryland company. It built a track from West Chester Junction in Penna. to Octoraro Junction in

Maryland in 1869. Upon its leasing of the West Chester and Philadelphia Railroad Company and the Chester Creek Railway, the Philadelphia and Baltimore Central Railroad afforded service from West Philadelphia to Oxford and much of lower Chester County, with connections to Wilmington and Baltimore. Samuel R. Dickey was a director of the P & BC RR.

Despite the diminished need for a railroad serving the lower counties of Pennsylvania, farmers in lower Chester, Lancaster and York counties persisted in demanding their own railway. As a result the route of the proposed Wilmington and Western Railroad was altered and shortened. It became the Peach Bottom Railway. On 24 March 1868 the Peach Bottom Railway Company was chartered.

Those concerned in the building of the Peach Bottom - Oxford division included S. R. Dickey, Oxford; Robert L. Patterson, Spruce Grove; J. P. Ambler and Levi K. Brown, Goshen; and Dr. Charles H. Stubbs and Isaac Bradley, Penn Hill.

The "middle division" — that stage of the contemplated road extending from the Susquehanna River to York, was championed by Charles R. McConkey, Peach Bottom, York County.

The prime-movers, however, found the project from Broad Top to York too difficult to handle so they concentrated on a road between York and Oxford but separated into two divisions each of which was controlled independently of the other.

The project got under way in 1871 when the first rails were laid at Oxford. The line finally reached as far as "Fulton House" in 1874, and Peach Bottom in 1882. During its construction the company often was seriously handicapped by lack of funds. Rails cost \$73 a ton as compared to today's price of \$20.

All the work was done by means of picks and shovels and for many months the company didn't own an engine — the flat cars used to haul supplies being pulled by horses. When the road reached "Fulton House" a turn-table was installed and trains were "headed about face" for the return trip.

During the panic of 1873 money was scarce. Supplies were needed for the road, however, and an agreement was reached with the Allentown Rolling Mill Company to supply 30-pound rails in exchange for bonds. Then Moro Phillips, a prominent fertilizer manufacturer of Philadelphia, agreed to ship car-load lots of his product on the road, taking bonds for the fertilizer which, subsequently was sold for cash by the company to the farmers "along the line."

This arrangement was successful in averting financial disaster but miles of road remained to be built. As the rails were laid the people in the community got together and raised funds by festivals and fairs for the purpose of erecting stations.

By this time the road extended as far as Eldora, Fulton township. Much grading remained to be done and Isaac Bradley, Dr. Charles H. Stubbs, Thomas Stubbs and Joseph C. Stubbs succeeded in getting residents in the neighborhood to "put their shoulders to the wheel."

Those who put in a full day's work were given a round-trip from the end of the road to Oxford in return for their service — the fare at that

time amounting to 90 cents for the round-trip.

These items from the **Oxford Press** describe the progress of the young enterprise:

April 17, 1873—"Grading of the Peach Bottom Railroad now rapidly being pushed forward. A contractor commenced work at Fulton House and one at Oxford."

August 6, 1873—"The Peach Bottom will lay track presumably next month. The erection of the new bridge over the Octoraro near Pine Grove has been commenced."

Sept. 3, 1873—"The first hundred tons of rail are on their way. The Philadelphia and Baltimore Central workmen are removing some buildings at Oxford to make some space for the junction with the narrow gauge."

Sept. 24, 1873—"Contractor Regan is pushing work on the narrow gauge. The bridge masonry at the Octoraro Creek is now finished."

Nov. 11, 1873—"On Wednesday last, the new locomotive "Samuel Dickey" made a trial run over the road already completed from Oxford to a point 3½ miles west at the Octoraro Creek.

Dec. 12, 1873—"The bridge over the Octoraro Creek was finished so as to be crossed by the first train on Saturday."

Jan. 8, 1874—"The track of the Peach Bottom line now extends from Oxford to within a quarter of a mile of White Rock, in Lancaster County."

Feb. 5, 1874—"Workmen on the narrow gauge started last week to lay a third rail on the P. & B. C. tracks at Oxford so that the narrow gauge trains could use the Oxford station of the P. & B. C."

Feb. 25, 1874—"Tracks laid a mile above King's Bridge and within a few days will reach Fulton House."

March 30, 1874—"At noon, on Friday last, the directors and officials of the narrow gauge made an inspection trip over the new line. The train stopped at White Rock, where the party dined as the guests of Mr. Alexander. Regular passenger and freight trains will begin running Monday next. However, a formal opening of the road will not be held until the line reaches Susquehanna."

May 13, 1874—"Peach Bottom Railway tracks have reached Claudenin's Summitt, the dividing ridge between the Conowingo and Octoraro streams."

Aug. 5, 1874—"The earnings of the narrow gauge are reported to amount to over one thousand dollars per month."

Nov. 25, 1874—"Tracks of the Peach Bottom now laid down as far as Goshen Station and trains are now running regularly to that point."

March 5, 1875—"The narrow gauge put three new box cars out on the road last week."

May 26, 1875—"A new locomotive will be placed on the road in the middle of June. It is being built in Pittsburgh and will weigh fifteen tons—five tons more than the "Samuel Dickey."

June 30, 1875—"Engine number two of the Peach Bottom Railroad arrived in Oxford from Pittsburgh on Monday."

July 7, 1875—"Work on the narrow gauge has been suspended as most of the laborers have left to help with the harvesting."

July 21, 1875—"A new train was put in service on the narrow gauge making now three daily trains in each direction between Oxford and Goshen station."

"The name of the new station at Puddle Duck Creek has been changed from Wood Dale to Arcadia. It was first called Bicknell's, then Wood Dale, but was changed to Arcadia so as not to confuse with Wood Dale on the Philadelphia and Baltimore Central."

Sept. 30, 1875—"The Peach Bottom Railroad is now building a new enginehouse in Oxford borough."

Dec. 15, 1875—"Track now laid as far as Eldora and trains will begin running to that point as soon as a schedule is arranged, it was announced."

Jan. 27, 1876—"It is expected that the grading of the railroad will reach Dorsey's Mill in about two weeks."

May 13, 1876—"Dr. C. H. Stubbs is erecting a very neat and substantial station at Westbrook, while timber is being obtained for the erection of a station at Arcadia."

It was a gala occasion when the road was finally completed from Dorsey's to Peach Bottom in 1882. Folks all along the line rejoiced and trains were decorated with bunting and flags. The first engine, named the "Sammy Dickey" in honor of the road's first president, was procured in 1872 and weighed ten tons. It was made by the Porter-Bell Company, Pittsburgh, and had four driving wheels and a pony truck.

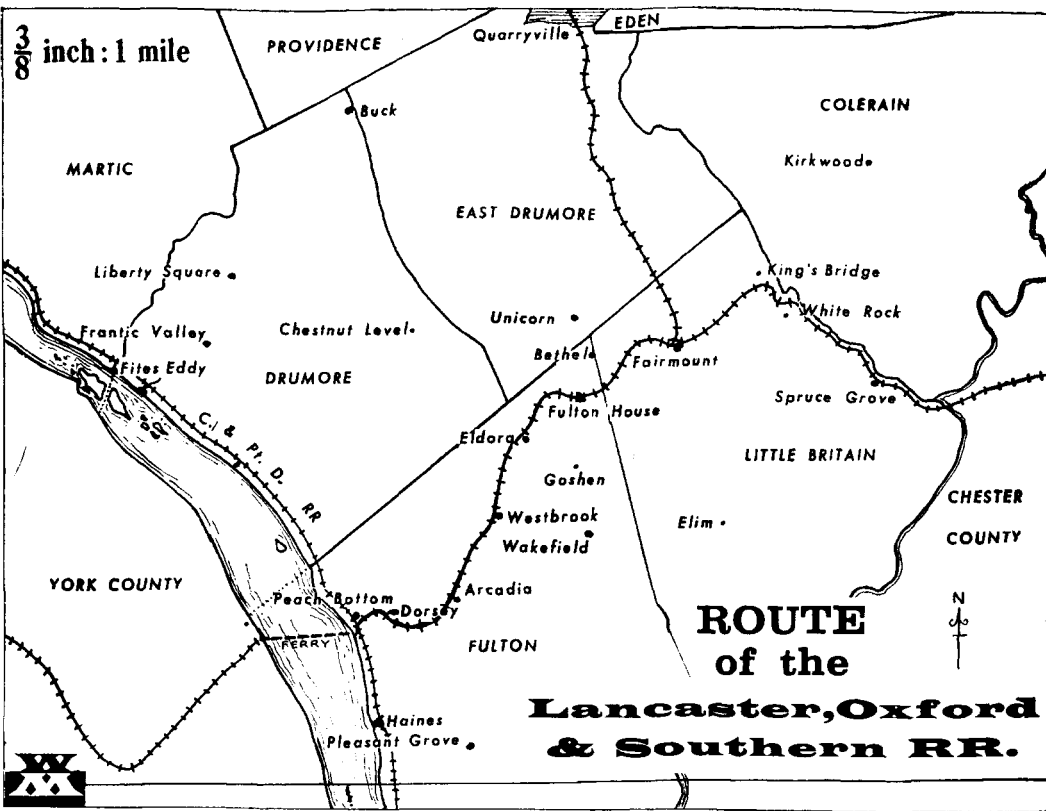
The second engine — the "Robert Fulton" — which weighed 15 tons, was followed by "Old Number 3" weighing 20 tons. Number 4 which was purchased some years later weighed the same as Number 3 and the last locomotive, Number 5, weighed 25 tons.

The first coach, built in Oxford, had a capacity of eight tons. The company later purchased cars from the Clarksburg & Western railroad at the time the road was taken over by the Baltimore and Ohio.

The track had a gauge of three feet which then was a prevailing width all over the country. The Reading Railroad from Camden to Atlantic City originally was of the three-foot gauge variety as was the Denver & Rio Grande Railroad in the west. This type of track played a prominent part in early railroad activities because of its economy.

Grades on the Peach Bottom Railroad were excessive — often 105 feet to the mile. "The Fulton House" — Fairmount grade was the longest. It was two miles long and necessitated a climb of 210 feet in that distance — Fairmount being the summit of the water-shed between the Octoraro and Conowingo creeks. The light-weight rolling stock and the narrow gauge track helped greatly in negotiating the grades.

During the long period of years the railroad was in operation the roadbed was frequently undermined by floods which cost the company thousands of dollars for repair. Every year large sums of money were expended in this manner until in 1892 larger ties and heavier rails were substituted for those of the earlier type and the roadbed greatly improved. This change resulted in a decided decrease in the number of wash-outs and other difficulties which formerly had caused so much trouble for the crew.



In 1914, after a short period of inactivity, the road was purchased by a group of men from southern Lancaster County for \$43,000.00. At this time the old engine was discarded in favor of a gasoline-driven coach, which was assembled and built at Oxford under the supervision of J. Clinton Gorsuch who conceived the idea. This early gasoline-propelled car was the first of its kind in the United States — a type that came into daily use on many railroads throughout the country.

Its construction, however, entailed many problems which were extremely difficult at that time. One was the task of transmitting power from the gasoline motor to the wheels — a problem which was finally solved by extending the shaft down through the king-pin of the wheel-truck.

That predecessor of the present-day gasoline-coach ran for three years during which time the car amply proved its value. Despite the improved transportation facilities afforded in this manner, the financial affairs of the company gradually grew worse until in 1918 the road was sold, bringing to an end a railroad project which was one of the most colorful and interesting in the history of transportation.

The presidents of the company were S. R. Dickey, C. W. Levitt, Walter M. Franklin, Frank Patterson and Frank M. Greenleaf. The superintendents were John A. Alexander, G. R. Dickey, Benjamin Newton, A. M. Nevin, A. Snavely, Frank Nauman, Randolph Dickey and George Wagner.

CHRONOLOGY

- 23 May 1873 Mortgage for \$250,000.00 issued.
- 1 September 1881 Mortgage foreclosed; railroad sold to Charles W. Leavitt.
- 19 October 1881 Reorganized and renamed Peach Bottom **Railroad** Company.
- 26 November 1881 Two mortgages, being a total of \$150,000.00 issued.
- 16 June 1890 Mortgages foreclosed; railroad sold again to Charles W. Leavitt.
- 3 September 1890 Reorganized and renamed Lancaster, Oxford and Southern Railroad Company.
- 16 February 1905 Mortgage for \$200,000.00 issued.
- 4 March 1911 Railroad bankrupt; sold to Fred S. Williams for \$50,000.00.
- 9 January 1913 Fred S. Williams sold property to newly-organized L.O.&S. Company for \$43,000.00.
- September 1918 Railroad ceased operations.
- 11 October 1919 Equipment sold to highest bidders. H. M. Foster & Co. of Baltimore bought the rails and switches for \$47,494.00, and A. Abelson of Altoona bought the rolling stock for \$5,124.00.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Harry Baughey was a music teacher in the county schools for many years prior to his death. He spent his spare time gathering railroad and trolley car information and pictures, amassing a sizeable collection.