

Once Upon a Time...There were Railroads in Union County

[source: *Union County: A Celebration of History* by Charles M. Snyder]

Railroads were an important advance for commerce in Pennsylvania. Many early railroads in the 1830s began as short lines - financed locally by stocks and bonds - such as the rail lines for mines in central Pennsylvania.

As railroads expanded in the 1840s, Union County planners considered joining the route between Pittsburg and Philadelphia. Delegates, including bridge builder James Moore II, were sent to a railroad convention in Philadelphia in 1847. An effort to bring the Susquehanna Railroad along the west bank of the Susquehanna River towards Lewisburg, financed by a bond issue, was unsuccessful. In 1853, another attempt was made to connect Lewisburg with rail lines in the Susquehanna and Juniata valleys. Local investors included William Cameron, George F. Miller, John Walls, Peter Beaver, John Chamberlin, Thomas Hayes, William Frick, Eli Slifer, and Geddes, Marsh and Co.

By 1856, two rail lines came near Union County: the Catawissa and Danville through Milton, and the Pennsylvania and Erie stopping at Montandon between Sunbury and Lock Haven. In 1858, the line connected to Harrisburg, thence to Philadelphia.

After the Civil War, rail construction increased across the US. In order to connect Lewisburg to the PA and Erie line at Montandon, the bridge over the river had to be rebuilt; it had been destroyed by the flood of March 1865. The railroad agreed to build the track, if Lewisburg built the bridge and railroad station. The project was not without drama, as Mifflinburg residents wanted to connect the rail line at Milton, and then run through Buffalo Crossroads, Cowan and Mazeppa. The *Lewisburg Chronicle* newspaper, supporting the Lewisburg connection, suggested that the line be extended to Mifflinburg mile by mile, as those who would benefit from the line purchased stocks.

Lewisburg raised the necessary funds and the bridge was constructed to hold vehicles and pedestrians, with a depot at North Second and St. John streets.

The *Lewisburg Chronicle* reported that on 23 July 1869, Congressman George F. Miller, President of the Lewisburg, Centre and Spruce Creek Railroad, and five guests came across the new bridge to an empty train station, whereupon the train returned to

Montandon until a suitable crowd was assembled for the occasion. Soon engine #1008, pulling car # 1047, crossed the bridge to the station, the crowd cheering its arrival.

The next railroad expansion via the Lewisburg, Centre and Spruce Creek line would connect Union with Centre County. It was decided, after discussion of narrow gauge track, that the railroad would be built with a gauge of 4 feet, 8 1/2 inches.

By October 1871, trains were bringing goods and passengers to Mifflinburg, although Mifflinburg residents were not completely happy with the train or their depot.

Those along the rail line gave land for a depot and siding, creating Vicksburg, which soon would also have a gristmill and other new businesses.

As the rail line went westward, other stations were opened. A siding towards Hartleton became Swengle, another became Millmont. The stop at Laurelton was first called Laurelton Station, then Rutherton, then Laurel Park. The siding for the Berlin Furnace was called Glen Iron. Land was given by local residents for a depot at Swengle, which acquired a post office, grist mill, saw mill, new houses and a church; and at Millmont, which added new buildings and a church.

The Pennsylvania Railroad leased the line in 1876. To continue westward, engineers designed two tunnels, at Paddy Mountain and between Cherry Run and the Forks (Coburn), and the line was continued to Spring Mills in 1877.

On July 4, 1877, about 1200 Union County residents took the train to Spring Mills for the rail lines' Grand Opening. The Lewisburg and Freeburg coronet bands provided music. Picnics were followed by games, music, dancing, speeches and fireworks. For many people it was their first train ride, first ride in a tunnel, and first time in the mountains of Union and Centre counties.

Photographs on Following Page:



Pennsylvania Railroad Station at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania



Pennsylvania Railroad Station at Vicksburg, Pennsylvania