

THE CATAWISSA RAILROAD

Editor's Note: Catawissa, Williamsport and Erie was the first railroad in Columbia County with the train arriving in Catawissa on July 16, 1864, coming from Port Clinton in Schuylkill County. In the fall of the same year, you could take a train from Milton to Port Clinton, via Catawissa, with connections to Philadelphia. The initial railroad went bankrupt in 1860; it was then sold and became the Catawissa Railroad in March 1860. Twelve years later in 1872 it became the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad. The railroad route went up the Catawissa Creek Valley to enter Schuylkill County. It was a costly and a major engineering project to build the line that required seven wooden trestle bridges and several tunnels. Near Mainville there was a large trestle 115 feet high and 727 feet long. The following newspaper article entitled, "The Catawissa Railroad," initially appeared in the Williamsport *Republican* and was later reprinted in the *Columbia County Republican* on September 25, 1890.

At West Milton quite a goodly number of the passengers are transferred onto the Catawissa branch of the Reading road for points east, or to make connections at Rupert with the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western for Wilkes-Barre, Scranton and the Wyoming coal regions. The Catawissa branch of the Reading, which has its terminus at Milton, is one of the oldest railroads in the state, and is noted particularly for the high bridges over which it runs, and the steep grades which are frequently found on that branch. The bridges are a wonder in railroad engineering, and a passenger who once makes the trip never forgets the peculiar sensation experienced while crawling over these high wood structures, beneath which great hemlocks have the appearance of saplings and the roads look like paths. Bob Burdette, the great humorist, upon one of his trips over this road, wrote to his paper, the Burlington *Hawkeye*, giving praise to this veritable "Switzerland of America," as it were, and describing the trip as one skimming over the clouds. This route is often taken in summer time, to Philadelphia, on account of the absence of dust which is always experienced when going by way of Shamokin in through the anthracite coalfields where the road is ballasted with culm. The country through which the Catawissa branch runs is a decidedly pretty one, and it is to this road that the thrifty borough of Catawissa, on the north branch of the Susquehanna, owes its prosperity and reputation as a railroad town. Before the completion of the Lewisburg, Sunbury and Shamokin route about eight years ago, all freight was shipped over this branch, and in those days Catawissa was considered one of the railroad centers of this section, and was the home of more railroad men than even Williamsport or Tamaqua. Since the completion of the new road the freight traffic via this branch has greatly

decreased; but the Catawissa branch is a very important link in the Reading system still.