

A NEW RAILROAD COMES TO BERWICK

Editor's Introduction: The Susquehanna, Bloomsburg, and Berwick Railroad organized in 1902 originated from the Wilkes-Barre and Western Railroad established in 1885 that built a line from Watsonstown on the West Branch of the Susquehanna River to Millville in 1887 and later to Orangeville in 1891. It was referred to at times as the "Weak & Weary" railroad, implying that it was not a financial success. In an effort to revitalize the railroad in 1893, the management "formed a combination with the Williamsport and Orangeville and Lehigh roads" and changed the name to the Central Pennsylvania and Western Railroad. Despite this reorganization the railroad in 1902 was not profitable because it served so few industries of any size.

Berwick was the home of Columbia County's largest industry, the American Car and Foundry Company, usually referred to as A. C. & F. It employed 2,600 workers that made steel railroad freight and mine cars. By 1905 the firm expanded its line to produce the first all steel passenger cars in the country. The company was experiencing significant growth in the early 1900s after

investing three million dollars in plant expansion. To sustain this success there was a need for better railroad facilities than what the Delaware, Lackawanna, and Western Railroad could provide. In addition, it wanted to have more than one option, rather

COLUMBIA COUNTY RAILROADS Circa 1910



LEGEND: 1 Bloomsburg & Sullivan, 2 Delaware, Lackawanna, & Western, 3 Lehigh Valley, 4 Pennsylvania, 5 Philadelphia & Reading, and 6 Susquehanna, Bloomsburg, & Berwick. SOURCE: Edwin M. Barton, "Columbia County, A History," Manuscript, 1983, p. 262b.

than Berwick's only railroad, D. L. & W., in shipping its products to customers throughout the country.

Early in 1902 creditors foreclosed on the Central Pennsylvania and Western Railroad. With this development, A. C. & F. realized there now existed an opportunity to solve their railroad requirements. The company's interest in having a direct railroad link to Watsonstown that would give it access to the Pennsylvania Railroad prompted various investors to purchase C. P. & W. Railroad's franchise now owned by Bondholders' Protective Committee. Using the former railroad route as a base, it would build a new track from Berwick, eighteen miles long, to connect with the old C. P. & W. at Evers Grove. This new railroad, called the Susquehanna, Bloomsburg, and Berwick, would increase Berwick's railroad facilities and would in turn help attract other industries to the town. With an increase in freight business from Berwick's growing industries, a belief existed "that the new blood infused in the road will make it a paying investment." A. C. & F. close ties with the S. B. & B. Railroad was well established with Frederick H. Easton, president of the company, serving as a member of the railroad's board of directors.

Laying new tract from Berwick passed through Briar Creek, then to Lightstreet, crossed Fishing Creek, turned north and followed Little Fishing Valley up to Mordansville and Evers Grove started on September 30, 1902. From there it used the former C. P. & W. tract to Watsonstown, and distance of approximately eighteen miles that served the towns of Jerseytown and Turbotville. The new sections from Berwick to Evers Grove required several new bridges and reinforcing the bridges on the old C. P. & W. tract. The S. B. & B. retained the short branch line from Evers Grove to Millville. However, it decided to discontinue the old C. P. & W. line to Orangeville since it yielded little business. Marking the completion of the new railroad occurred on August 31, 1903, at Light Street in a ceremony in which the last spike was driven into place. On the same day the first S. B. & B. train traveled the entire route from Watsonstown, and when it passed through Briar Creek it began blowing its whistle continuously until it arrived in Berwick at 1:30 where a crowd had assembled to witness the event.

The content for this introduction comes from the following newspaper sources: "New R.R. Outlet for Berwick," *Democratic Sentinel* (Bloomsburg), August 8, 1902, "A New Railroad," *Berwick Enterprise*, August 9, 1902, "S. B. & B. R. R. Completion," *Berwick Enterprise*, July 11, 1903, "First Train Over S. B. & R.," *The Morning Press*, September 1, 1903., and "The First Train," *Berwick Enterprise*, September 5, 1903.

The following newspaper article appeared in the *Berwick Enterprise* on October 4, 1902, which gave an account about building the S. B. & B Railroad.

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A NEW RAILROAD

Work on the Susquehanna,
Bloomsburg, and Berwick

Railroad Was Begun at This End on Monday

Work on the Susquehanna, Bloomsburg, and Berwick Railroad is being pushed rapidly and all towns along the route are enjoying a boom and a season of excitement hitherto unknown. The small villages of Mordansville and Light Street are filled with busy workers Shanties have been erected and every empty house is now occupied by transient laborers.

Five hundred men the majority of whom are Americans, striking miners, are employed and every day more apply for work. Three hundred are stationed at Mordansville, one hundred at Light Street, and one hundred are at work on this end of the road. At present a mile three quarters of rail have been laid at this end extending from Pine Street down through the Ferris farm. The track runs through the baseball field and between the Steel Plant and the Malleable Iron Works.

A vacant house on the Freas farm is sheltering the workmen. The contractor Mr. McManus expects next week to have at work one hundred teams besides fifty horses and carts. It is necessary to get as much of the grading done as possible before the winter comes as the cold weather will delay the work. The building of the road with the exception of about four miles, where it must be built through rock, will be comparatively easy. It is expected that a trestle will have to be built across the creek near Shew's paper mill at Light Street. The Berwick Station will be located at the corner of Sixth and Pine Streets. With the increased railroad facilities that this new road will give to Berwick the substantial boom now being enjoyed and the almost certainty of new industries in the near future, is it any wonder that Berwick's unprecedented era of prosperity is attracting the attention of the entire surrounding country and that the moneyed men are anxious to invest in real estate and business ventures.

Postscript

The article reported that some of the construction workers were striking miners. They were from the anthracite mining area that went on strike on May 12, 1902, which did not end until October 21 when President Theodore Roosevelt appointed a commission to mediate the dispute. One of the consequences of the strike was that it provided workers in search of employment a job in building the new railroad.

When the A. C. & F. plant closed at Berwick in the early 1960s, traffic on the S. B. & B. Railroad sharply declined. Over the years the railroad was referred to at times as the "Sweet, Bye and Bye" since train traffic was intermittent, and they traveled at a slower speed. The Agnes flood in June 1972 destroyed much of the track and brought an end to railroad. Over the years the steel rails were removed and all that remains today are some traces of the railroad bed.

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