

French Creek Valley Railroad  
Historical Society

P.O. Box 632 Meadville, PA 16335

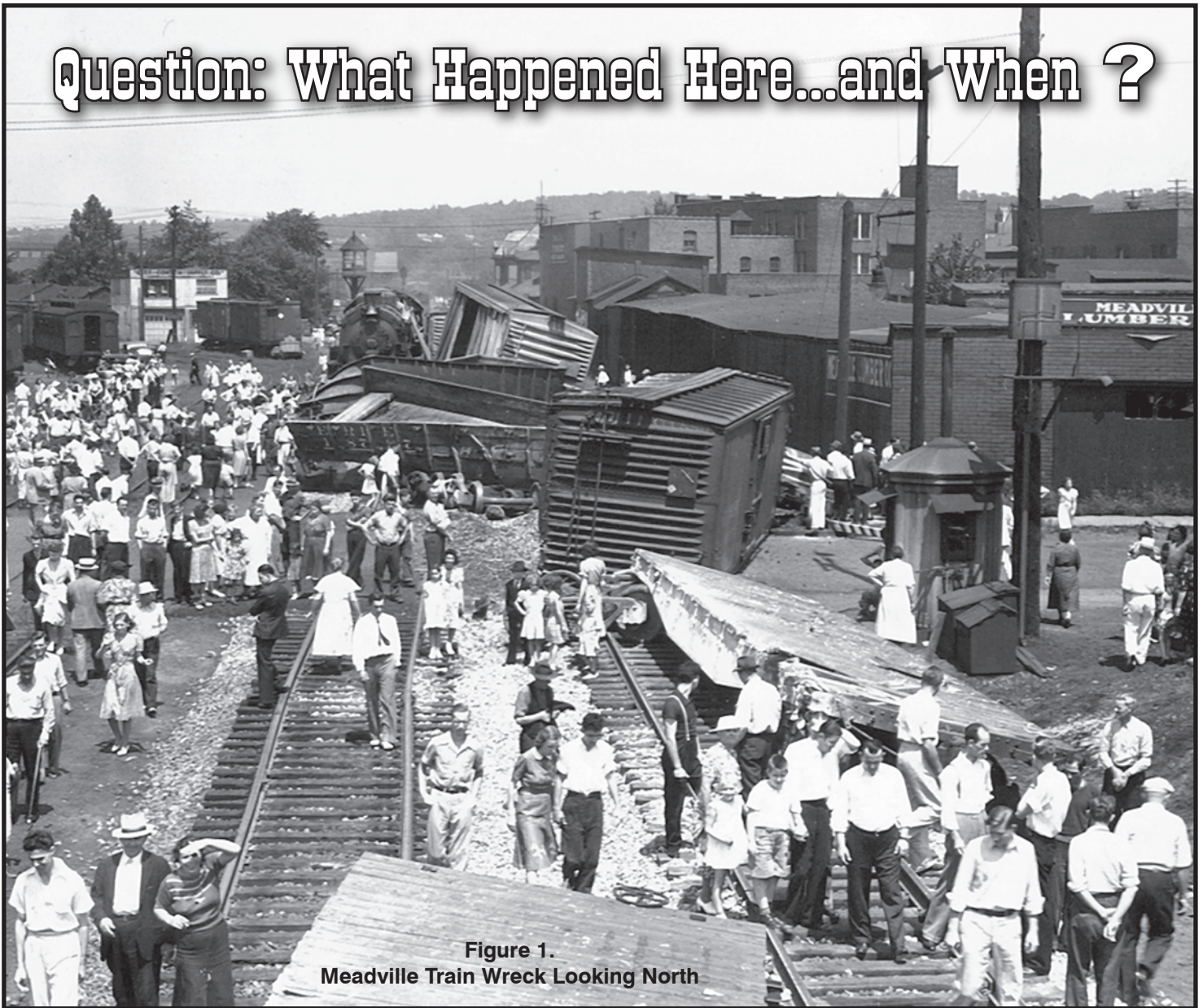
FALL 2009

Newsletter of the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society

Volume 4 Number II

||||| **VALLEY EXPRESS** |||||

**Question: What Happened Here...and When ?**



**Figure 1.**  
**Meadville Train Wreck Looking North**

This past summer one of our new members, Denis Manross, showed me pictures of a train wreck in Meadville. These pictures were passed down from Denis' father, who worked for the Erie Railroad, just as his father had done. Numbering five, these pictures show a fascinating view of the railroad and the surrounding city. Unfortunately, there was no information accompanying the photos to give an indication as to what happened or when. So, with the help of Carl Timko, I began to unravel the mystery of this event.

Figure 1 shows an outstanding view of the railroad in Meadville, looking north from Pine Street. In it you can see the old Meadville depot, along with the Swift Meat Company and Meadville Lumber Company on the right side of the tracks. On the left side you can see City Coal and Supply, the crossing tower at Mead Avenue, and passenger cars on the Bessemer and Lake Erie Railroad tracks. The wrecked gondola is Erie 18797.

*(continued on page 5)*



## From the Stationmaster's Office

In this world of busy schedules, many of us find it hard to stop and read a newspaper, let alone a book. Recently, though, I found time to pause and do some reading. What I took time to read was not on the best sellers list of the New York Times, or anything currently available from Barnes and Noble. No, it was a recently found copy of the 1956 Annual Report of the Erie Railroad. That's right, a report of the company to its stockholders.



It is really a fascinating history book of a railroad that was just beginning to find the values of piggy-back services, automated accounting, and mechanical means of performing labor intensive maintenance of the railroad. "Piggy-back" was in its early days, the extent of its services not yet realized. As is mentioned in the report, door-to-door service was available in 20 states with connecting railroads "extending into New England and areas west and south of Chicago, as far as Texas." Seeing this makes you realize how far railroads have come in fifty-three years.

What I took note of most was what the 'Erie' thought was to happen in the coming future. Then Erie President Harry Von Willer wrote in his letter to the stockholders that he forecasted a slight increase in traffic volume, but a greater increase of gross revenues because of ICC freight rate adjustments. As he wrote: "the Erie could have one of its best years." As history now tells us, 1957 saw the slide into one of the country's hardest recessions. Demands for steel dropped as automotive production dropped, cutting into the profits of the railroads. This report also devoted one paragraph to studies being made to determine the advantages or disadvantages of merger of the Erie Railroad with the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western and Delaware and Hudson Railroads. I'm sure I don't need to tell you what happened there: Erie-Lackawanna.

Quick and interesting reading- an Annual Report gives you an insight to railroad history not found in hobbyshop bookracks. I would recommend this kind of reading to every railroad historian. I give it 5 stars!

*Dennis Mead*

### CONTRIBUTIONS & GIFTS

- Weber Electric Supply
- Staples
- Lloyd's Rental & Sales
- Crawford County Historical Society
- Bob Bingham Memorial
- Western New York & PA RR
- Lake Shore Railway Historical Society
- US Bronze Foundry & Machine
- Pipp Graphics and Design
- Hobby Headquarters
- Bill McComas Family
- Blair Learn
- Carl Timko Family
- Anne W. Stewart
- Tom Collard Family
- Ed Cronin Family
- Bret Devore
- Jack Sheets Family
- Bernie Hanmore

Check out our website at [www.fcvrhs.org](http://www.fcvrhs.org)



## French Creek Valley Express

A Publication of the  
French Creek Valley Railroad  
Historical Society

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**French Creek Valley Express** is published Spring and Fall. Those wishing to submit material must do so no later than 30 days prior to publication, i.e. by April 1st or October 1st. All submissions are subject to editing for length and clarity. Queries must include full name, address, and daytime phone number or e-mail address. Individual membership dues are \$20.00/year, family membership dues are \$35.00/year (\$1.00 for juniors to 18 years) for the period July 1- Jun 30. New member dues received after January 1 are good through the following full year period. Support from local businesses is welcomed: Gold, Silver and Bronze levels at \$500.00, \$250.00, and \$100.00, respectively, are available.

## Budget and Finance

Because of the low turnout of visitors at the caboose this summer and the cost of purchasing a new supply of T-Shirts, the treasury has been somewhat depleted. Some members have taken notice and have made additional donations to the society over and above their dues payments. This Spring the Society received a contribution from the Bill McComas family to help with the newsletter expenses. Our secretary, Carl Timko, also sent a donation to us for general expenses and has again acquired a model train set to raffle off in December to raise money for the Marine Corps Toys-for-Tots program.

Late in June we submitted a grant application to the Harold Heist Trust to pay for additional fencing for caboose display area (\$1,600.00). In September we received an award from the Trust for the amount requested.

-Ed Cronin

## Membership

Our newest members since the last newsletter include (in alphabetical order) Denis Manross and Ronald Stafford. **WELCOME ABOARD!**

We were very sorry to lose Bob Bingham, who passed away in late September. Bob had been a member for less than a year but came to many functions and was always good to visit with. In lieu of flowers, Bob's family suggested a donation to the French Creek Valley Railroad Historical Society. What a kind gesture.

-Ed Cronin

## Museum

The Northwestern Pennsylvania Railroad & Tooling Heritage Center was successful in gaining permission from the State for a change in scope for our First Industries Grant award. On June 1, 2009 a contract was signed with Ann Barton Brown Co. for completion of a business plan and Porter Consulting Engineers for preliminary land development engineering and building renderings. On June 2 officers signed a contract

with Pachek & Associates for the feasibility study.

In late July our consultants spent three days in Meadville gathering data and meeting with the project partners. They returned in late October for more information collecting and a stakeholders meeting. Those invited to the stakeholders meeting included government officials and various agency staff members, educators, other non-profit staff, business owners, other local museum officials, potential contractors and Railroad & Tooling board members. Over forty people attended the Stakeholders Meeting with significant positive input.

We expect one more visit by the consultants before year's end when they present their final recommendations on how large a museum the community will support and how to make it happen. We are still considering the 84 Lumber property.

-Ed Cronin

## Model Railroad

The committee has constructed a display that provides a visual comparison of the seven most popular model railroad scales.

It features ERIE Railroad 40-ft. box cars in "G", "O", "S", "HO", "TT", "N", and "Z" scale and can be displayed anywhere our modular layout is in operation or at a seminar like we held on Woodland Scenics products or DCC operation. Thanks to President Mead for the "G" scale car and for custom painting and decaling the "S" and "Z" scale cars.

If any of our readers have topic suggestions for our 2010 seminar, please let me know as we need to begin planning now. You can reach me at [tcollard@gmail.com](mailto:tcollard@gmail.com). Ideas for other events are also welcome.

-Tom Collard



## History & Archives

According to the Erie Times, the Drake Well display near Titusville, a popular stop for the OC&T Rail Excursion run, will close for two years while the facility is upgraded to include a small audio-visual section. The display had been a feature of the 150-year anniversary "Trail of Oil" program, celebrated this past year. Meanwhile, a temporary trailer will be on site for support and the Museum Store will remain open for sales of gifts and souvenirs. The Johnson-Shaw Stereoscopic Museum, located adjacent to the CCHS on Chestnut Street, continues to offer historically valuable stereoscopic slide viewing of early area businesses and events. The facility is effectively manned by our own Larry Johnson and is open during posted hours and by request.

Archived historical information currently stored at Meadville's ARC Building (Erie) and at Cleveland State University (ELHS data) is in need of a permanent weatherized storage site. The Trolley Station might fill the bill until our Railroad and Tooling Heritage Center is built.

-Pete Gifford



Our portable display of the most popular model railroad scales.

## Special Events / Programs

The Society's Christmas Model Train display has been set up at Hobby Headquarters in the Park Avenue Plaza, where Carl Timko has once again donated a model train set to be won by some lucky ticket holder. A visit by Santa is always a possibility during this annual event.

Members manned tables selling T-Shirts and member items at the Titusville "Trail of Oil" Program this past Summer, the Penn-Ohio Model Railroader Show held at the Shenango Valley VFW in Sharon, and at the Erie Railroad show held at Rainbow Gardens in Erie.

*-Dan Higham*

## Public Relations

The Society held its annual membership dinner and elections at the Elk's Lodge #219, on June 18. Eighteen people were in attendance. After the dinner and elections, we were given a slide show presentation by our guest speaker, Carl Belke, President and CEO of the Western New York & Pennsylvania Railroad. Carl discussed his career in the railroad industry, including his years with the Delaware and Hudson Railroad, and reviewed the beginnings and current operations of the WNY&PA. I would like very much to thank Carl for giving his time to attend the dinner, and giving us an interesting history of his career with the Rail Industry. I really wish we would have had more time to enjoy his stories - especially those about the ALCO's he fondly remembers.

Thanks also goes out to the Elk's Club for the good food and excellent service.

Attendance at the Caboose this past summer season has been slow, but many thanks go out to the volunteers that spent their Sundays working the opening hours there. The C356 is the centerpiece of our organization, and without our volunteers, many visitors would not know what an outstanding piece of historical equipment we have to display.

*-Dennis Mead*

## Property and Equipment

Beginning in late September members began weekly car-pooling to Jefferson, OH to dismantle the Alco S2 #518 Switcher "Shell", which was donated to the Society last year by the Ashtabula, Carson and Jefferson Railroad. Under tacit AC&J (and resident Tabby) supervision, side doors/panels, radiator shutters/cores, engine access covers, fan screen, and bell support were removed from the hood. The hood was then jacked up 4-inches to facilitate removal by crane. These items (less radiator cores) were then transported to Oestler's in Butler, PA for sandblasting and painting. In addition, Cab electrical contacts/relays were disconnected and preserved for AC&J. By mid



November railings and steps were also removed/loosened from each end to reduce the overall height of the remaining frame/cab in anticipation of trucking. Following removal of diesel engine, generator, compressor, air tanks, trucks, and other salvageable equipment by AC&J personnel, the cab/frame assembly is to be trucked to Butler and hence to Meadville, for installation at the caboose site.

The WNY&P track gang has volunteered to level the track panels at the caboose site to accommodate the #518 unit, and the City of Meadville arranged for prisoners to repaint the early Railroad Shop

equipment currently on display adjacent the caboose. In addition, the long sought extension of power to the site is apparently imminent thru the generous assistance by Weber Electronic Supply and Pennilec. Cable extending from the pole to the caboose was buried and awaiting inspection and hook-up.

The signal mast donated by Lake Shore Railroad Historical Society of Northeast, PA will be erected after the #518 is on site. We are extremely grateful for these generous donations of labor and equipment, as well as the coordination efforts by members.

*-Al Reibel / Jack Sheets*

(continued from Page 1)

Figures 2 and 3 show the engine involved in the collision - Erie Berkshire 3391, built in 1929 and scrapped in 1951.

One important detail noted in these views may be the white flags on the engine, indicating the train was an extra.

Figure 4 shows a vehicle parked on Pine Street. On close examination it has been identified as a 1937 Plymouth Sedan. Note, also, the street light is a teardrop style. Figure 5 shows the Pine Street crossing sign laying on the ground, the result of a derailed gondola hitting it. This picture also shows the style of clothing worn at the time. Seasonal clothing plus leaves on the trees in the background confirms the setting as summer time. When shown these pictures, Anne Stewart of the CCHS noted that the styles of clothing, including the type of women's shoe heels, suggest an early 1940's time frame.

With the details noted from the pictures, Carl and I began examining microfilms of the Tribune Republican newspaper at the CCHS office on Chestnut Street. Results? We have not found any reports of the wreck, as of this writing! So, we put the question of what happened to you the reader. Do you or any of your family members remember this event? We want to hear from you! If you have information, contact me or Carl Timko. We will be anxious to hear from you and will report any findings regarding the derailment in a future Valley Express.

-Dennis Mead



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



*In Memorium*  
Robert E. Bingham  
(1931-2009)

Sadly, our organization has lost an outstanding member and friend, Robert (Bing) Bingham. Bob lost his battle with cancer after a 17 month challenge. Bob has always loved trains and has been an active member of the Penn-Ohio Model A Club. He is survived by his wife, Elaine, and six children and families. We will all sadly miss Bob here in the organization.



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Railroad Historical Society  
P.O. Box 632  
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Removing hood  
from #518 in  
Jefferson, OH



French Creek Valley Railroad  
Historical Society  
Program & Events Schedule

Fall 2009

**Nov 23 - Dec 19**  
*Model Train Layout on  
display at Hobby  
Headquarters  
Park Avenue Plaza*

**June 17**  
*Annual Dinner Meeting  
Italian Civic Club*

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