

The Railroad Background of the Pine Creek Rail Trail
By David Ira Kagan

On May 9, 1883, the Jersey Shore, Pine Creek and Buffalo Railroad was completed through Pine Creek Valley. On that day, a work crew from the north met one coming from the south at "Ross House," about 10 miles north of Waterville. This main line allowed narrow-gauge logging railroads to be constructed up into the mountains from the villages, with the resultant changeover from log drives along Little and Big Pine Creeks to transportation of lumber to Williamsport by rail.

Years of desire, hope, thought, intentions, and legal maneuverings and actions finally culminated in the driving of that "golden spike" at the double track called Ross Siding in 1883. According to Spencer Kraybill, in his monumental 1991 book, "Pennsylvania's Pine Creek Valley and Pioneer Families," historian George F. Bailey had written of a charter having been formed way back in 1836 for a railroad to run up Pine Creek.

Decades passed, however, before, according to Kraybill, "The Pine Creek Railroad Bill passed both houses in the Pennsylvania legislature" in 1870. Then it was another 12 years before there was "a meeting of the stockholders of the Jersey Shore, Pine Creek and Buffalo Railway Company" on January 23, 1882, when they elected officers and "passed a resolution to the effect that operations should be commenced at once for the building of the railroad from Williamsport, via Jersey Shore, up Pine Creek to the mouth of Marsh Creek, in Tioga County; thence up Marsh Creek to Stokesdale, in the township of Delmar, near the line of the borough of Wellsboro, connecting with the Corning, Cowanesque and Antrim Railway."

Within just another year-and-a-half, the railroad became a reality. There was now "a connecting line from the New York Central Railroad at Lyons (the "L" that exists today on the remaining stone mile-markers along Pine Creek) and Geneva to the anthracite regions of Pennsylvania, the semi-anthracite of Dauphin County, and the vast deposit of iron in Lebanon, Lehigh and other portions of eastern and central Pennsylvania." Coal soon began to be transported regularly from Pennsylvania mines and from the Beech Creek Railroad to the industries of New York and other northeastern states. And for the lumber industry's benefit, the line ran through the great "hemlock regions of Tioga, Potter and Lycoming Counties."

Also, by the next year, 1884, "passenger trains began running between Wellsboro, Jersey Shore and Williamsport." And "the same railroad opened a short branch line from Fall Brook (founded by the Fall Brook Coal Company in 1860 and now a ghost town) to Morris Run in Tioga County."

The first notable train wreck occurred on February 2, 1888. According to that day's "Wellsboro Agitator" newspaper, "Early this morning freight train No. 91 going south on the Pine Creek Railway, as it ran upon the long trestle-work at the Blackwell bridge was thrown off the track by a broken frog. The locomotive mounted the rail again, however, and passed over the

bridge all right; but the freight cars tore the trestle to pieces, and ten loaded cars went down with the structure and eighteen cars also went off the track but did not go down with the trestle.”

On May 1, 1899, the railway was leased to the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad Company. Almost 30 years had passed since the formation of the Jersey Shore, Pine Creek and Buffalo Railway Company on February 17, 1870. That initial name had been changed to just the Pine Creek Railway Company on February 6, 1884, and then to the Fall Brook Railway on July 1, 1892.

As an intriguing historical sidelight, a train in the fall of 1921 brought the carefully dismantled and marked pieces of Williamsport’s Vallamont Theater (a social center at the turn of the century) to the newly established Boy Scout Camp Kline along Pine Creek about eight miles above Jersey Shore. Reassembled and remodeled there, it served as the camp’s dining hall until the camp’s closure in the mid-1970s. It remained standing until about the year 2000, when winter snow caused its roof to collapse, and the rest was soon razed.

On August 28, 1933, a second serious train wreck occurred, this time across from Camp Cedar Pines (the New York Central Railroad/Jersey Shore YMCA summer children’s camp), just south of the village of Cedar Run. The engine was turned onto its side, with several of the cars landing at the water’s edge of Pine Creek.

Yet a third happened on January 30, 1951, again up at Blackwell’s bridge. The middle span of the three-span bridge was demolished. As reported in the January 31st issue of the Lock Haven Express, “No one was injured in the accident. Four cars of the southbound freight train were derailed. Railroad officials said a crane on one of the derailed cars apparently caught the bridge span as the train was passing over (with the crane actually plunging into the creek).”

Finally, a fourth major wreck (fortunately, as with the other three, involving no fatalities) occurred on December 15, 1956, just south of the village of Slate Run. Eyewitness Grant Tomb was just a young boy at that time, never forgetting that he “swam into the cold water to get watermelons and bags of potatoes from the cars that spilled them into the creek.”

In 1966, after a merger, the railroad became the Penn Central. Bankruptcy led to Conrail taking it over in 1976.

With the diminishing and finally ending of the railroad’s freight-carrying assignments, excursion trains occasionally coursed through Pine Creek Valley, especially when fall colors peaked. These popular outings ran through 1985.

In February 1989, the last train, led by Pennsylvania Conrail’s Electro-Motive Diesel (EMD) engine No. 8219, click-clacked through the valley, with the tracks pulled out shortly afterward that year. Just over 105 years of rail service through Pine Creek Valley ended.