



RAILROAD HISTORY OF BRADFORD, OHIO

This information courtesy of Bill Haines

The following is a discussion of Bradford's railroad history with an emphasis on train operations. It is based on my own memories, the recollections of former PRR Conductor Art Stephan, plus a few resources which I've cited at the end.

Bradford was known as a "railroad town" since for many years the railroad was the dominant industry in this western Ohio village. The railroad employed many people who manned the trains, worked in the switching yards and in the roundhouse where steam locomotives were kept and maintained between runs. Bradford was originally known as Union City Junction but was renamed after railway mail clerk Tom Bradford suggested the town be named after him.

At Bradford a major rail line running from the East Coast split into two lines, one to Chicago and the other to St. Louis. These lines were strategic in the Eastern rail system. At the Bradford depot you could board a passenger train and begin a trip to destinations as close as Piqua or Greenville, or as far away as Chicago, St Louis and New York City. Bradford also boasted a freight yard, facilities for fueling and servicing steam locomotives, and a facility for repairing freight cars.

Until the late 1920s, most trains passing through Bradford changed crews there. This was by virtue of Bradford being an important junction approximately midway between connecting rail terminals at Columbus, Ohio, Indianapolis and Logansport, Indiana. Those crewmen that did not live in Bradford would stay over at the Railroad YMCA while they waited to be "called" for a return trip to their home terminal.

Time has its way with all things. By the late 20s railroad technology had advanced sufficiently to allow a train to make a run between Columbus and Indianapolis or Logansport within the 16 hours that a train crew was allowed to work, eliminating the need to change crews at Bradford. About this same time, in a cost cutting move, the railroad company moved most of Bradford's switching duties to other terminals such as Columbus. This resulted in many railroaders being relocated or furloughed. The railroad had reached it's peak in Bradford and was now in decline, but would still maintain a presence there for many years to come.

The remaining discussion is divided into four parts, one for Bradford's early rail history and one for each of the railroad companies that followed.

The Early Years...1849-1869

The Columbus, Piqua and Indiana Railroad was chartered in Ohio on February 23, 1849 to build from Columbus to the Indiana state line via Urbana, Piqua and Greenville. On March 21, 1851 the CP&I was authorized to change the route west of Covington, and a more northerly alignment was chosen to meet the Indianapolis and Bellefontaine Railroad at Union City, Indiana for access to Indianapolis. The first section, from Columbus west to Plain City, opened June 6, 1853. Extensions opened to Urbana September 19 and Piqua October 16, 1854. The rest of the line to Union City opened March



25, 1859. The CP&I was sold at foreclosure on August 6, 1863 and reorganized October 30 as the Columbus and Indianapolis Railroad.

The Richmond and Covington Railroad was chartered in Ohio by the Indiana Central Railway and Columbus, Piqua and Indiana Railroad on March 12, 1862 to build a branch of the latter from Bradford to the former at the Indiana state line near New Paris. The R&C opened in early 1863, and the Indiana Central's joint operating contract with the Dayton and Western Railroad was dissolved on March 9. On January 10, 1864 the IC, C&I and R&C signed an agreement for joint operation as the Great Central Line between Columbus and Indianapolis, headed by the Indiana Central. The C&I bought the R&C on September 5, 1864. The Indiana Central Railway and Columbus and Indianapolis Railroad merged October 19 to form the Columbus and Indianapolis Central Railway, with a main line from Columbus, Ohio to Indianapolis, Indiana and a branch from Bradford, Ohio to Union City, Indiana. The Columbus and Indianapolis Central Railway later became the Columbus and Indiana Central Railway. In 1868, the Columbus and Indiana Central Railway and Chicago and Great Eastern Railway merged to form the Columbus, Chicago and Indiana Central Railway.

During this time period Bradford witnessed the passage of Lincoln's Funeral Train which moved through town going west toward Greenville during the early morning hours of April 30, 1865. The train was on it's way to Springfield, IL where Lincoln was to be buried.

The Pennsylvania Years...1869-1968

The Pennsylvania Railroad has been a part of Bradford's railroad history since 1869, when the Columbus, Chicago & Indiana Central was leased by PRR subsidiary Pittsburgh, Cincinnati & St. Louis to further the PRR's westward expansion. The PC&STL was formed by the PRR in 1868 to consolidate several companies. One of these companies was the Panhandle Railway Co., so named because it passed through the Panhandle region of West Virginia. Even though the Panhandle no longer existed after the PC&STL was formed, these lines continued to be known as the Panhandle. The PRR line that passed through Bradford was often called the Panhandle and that name is still used to this day to refer to former PRR lines west of Pittsburgh that ran via Columbus.

The PRR used it's rail yard at Bradford to sort freight cars and make up trains. Steam locomotives were serviced and stored in the roundhouse to await their next assignment. Freight cars were repaired at the car shop. Train crews rested at the railroad YMCA while awaiting their trip home. Bradford was a logical crew change point for the PRR since it was near the halfway point on the Columbus-Indianapolis and Columbus-Logansport runs. Being located at the junction of these two lines made it a logical place to sort cars destined for trips over these lines. By 1920, railroad employment in Bradford stood at 2,000. As mentioned earlier, by 1927, operational changes had made the yard obsolete, and new technologies such as automatic block signals allowed trains to cover more miles in less time, which made it possible for the PRR to run it's trains through Bradford without having to change crews. Consequently, the YMCA was demolished in 1937.

During the years that the PRR powered their trains with steam locomotives most trains paused at Bradford so the steam engines could take on coal and water at the coal dock. Bradford's turntable



saw use into the 1950s to turn engines assigned to local freights and also to turn helper engines that had assisted coal trains from Columbus. To further explain this, the PRR's route from Columbus to Bradford crossed several river valleys. This meant that trains traversing the Bradford line had to overcome the hills leading out of these valleys. Coal trains were quite heavy and needed an extra engine to pull these hills, particularly the climb out of Urbana known as Blue Hill. The extra engine would be added to the front of the train at Columbus and then would be taken off at Bradford since the line was comparatively level west of Bradford. Once the helper was separated from the other engine it would proceed to the turntable where it would be turned and then would return to Columbus "lite" (with no train). By 1957 steam engines had been replaced by more powerful diesels which benefited from a technology that allowed multiple diesel units to be operated by one engineer. This "multiple unit" capability gave most trains the power needed to pull the hills without a helper. Diesels burned diesel fuel which meant that Bradford's coal dock was no longer needed, so the PRR demolished it in 1963. The roundhouse had already been torn down, in 1954.

The PRR continued to base several local freights at Bradford after the major yard was closed. These trains would gather up cars in the smaller yard then deliver them to local industries or other railroads. One such train was a "turn" that delivered cars to the New York Central at Meekers then returned to Bradford. During 1923, the PRR delivered 837 cars to the NYC at Meekers and received 838. Another local made a daily trip to Piqua and back to switch the industries there and at Covington. Westerville Creamery, a producer of canned milk in Covington, generated 697 freight cars of traffic for the PRR in 1947.

The Pennsylvania years saw a variety of freight passing through Bradford. There was fruit, vegetables and meat from the west headed to eastern markets. This "hot" traffic was hauled by some of the PRR's most important freight trains, CG-2, CG-8, AST-2 and SW-6, all of which passed through Bradford daily. Live stock was hauled east in ventilated box cars called stock cars. Trains with these cars would slow down going through Bradford so water could be sprayed into the cars by a trackside sprayer. There were even solid cattle trains known as King Ranch Specials that were destined to Columbus. Steel was hauled from Eastern mills to destinations in the West. Coal was hauled from mines in West Virginia to the steel mills of Gary, Indiana. There were train loads of iron ore from mines in Missouri destined to Bethlehem Steel in Johnstown, PA. The remaining freight was made up of general merchandise and commodities such as lumber, grain and sand.

By the mid-1960s rail traffic through Bradford had declined due to various factors, including truck competition, diversion of traffic to the Ft. Wayne line, and the Norfolk & Western merger. The PRR had been able to discontinue several passenger trains on it's Ft. Wayne line to the north. This left room for some trains to be added so the PRR took advantage and moved hotshot trains CG-2 and CG-8 to this faster route. This left the Bradford line with fewer trains and was also evidence of the PRR's desire to downgrade the "Logan Side," which was what Bradford railroaders called the line between Bradford and Logansport. In 1964, the N&W merged with the Nickel Plate and Wabash railroads. This gave the N&W their own route to Chicago so they no longer needed the PRR connection at Columbus.



The Penn Central Years...1968-1976

On February 1, 1968, the Pennsylvania and New York Central railroads merged to form the Penn Central. These two companies knew that since they both served many of the same cities, they could reduce their costs by consolidating duplicate lines and facilities. This was one of the major justifications of the merger. Changes that began taking place shortly after the merger brought new traffic to the Bradford line. Traffic that had been moving between Pittsburgh, Columbus and Indianapolis over the NYC was moved to the Bradford line since it offered a more direct route between these cities. These new trains were called PI-1 and IP-10. In 1970 the PC consolidated five former PRR and NYC yards in Columbus, Ohio in its newly opened Buckeye Yard on the west side of Columbus. Trains OC-1 and CO-2 were added to connect the new yard with the former NYC Robert R. Young yard at Elkhart, Indiana. These trains utilized a PRR-NYC routing that included the Bradford Line, the former GR&I between Ridgeville and Kendallville, Indiana, and the NYC Lake Shore main to Elkhart. Train OI-3 was added to handle former NYC Columbus-Indianapolis traffic that had been running via Ridgeway.

The PC began using Buckeye Yard in early 1970 to consolidate eastbound traffic from former PRR and NYC connections to the west, such as Cincinnati and St. Louis, destined to points in the east such as Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Albany and other locations served by the PC. Several former NYC eastbound trains that ran the former Big Four route through Sidney were eliminated as this traffic was now funneled through Buckeye Yard via Bradford. This resulted in several new trains, CB-8 from the Cotton Belt and MP-8 from the Missouri Pacific.

In October 1972, the Penn Central reconfigured the PRR-NYC crossing at Union City, Indiana, to form a new Columbus-Indianapolis route that utilized portions of both its predecessor roads. Trains would operate over the former NYC between Indianapolis and Union City, and over the former PRR between Union City and Columbus. This new routing would allow the PC to downgrade and eventually eliminate the former PRR trackage through Greenville and Richmond, Indiana. Cost cutting moves such as this were badly needed since the Penn Central, having inherited the precarious financial situations of its predecessor roads, had declared bankruptcy in June, 1970.

Once the new connection at Union City was in place, Columbus-Indianapolis trains began to operate this way as former PRR crews became qualified over the Big Four. The former PRR route through Greenville was consequently downgraded, although track conditions on this line had deteriorated so badly that it appeared to have been downgraded years before. Deferred track maintenance had become the rule since the PC just didn't have the money to spend on repairs. In fact, it had gotten so bad between Greenville and New Paris that several 10 MPH speed restrictions were in place. The track was so uneven that the 10 MPH slow orders prompted one engineer to say, "It aint't even good for that." To circumvent the slow track the PC routed some trains via Dayton until the Union City connection could be opened.

The Penn Central used Bradford as a base of operations for local freights that switched industries between St. Paris and New Madison. Some of the crew members lived near Columbus or other



locations that were too far away for a daily drive so they found accommodations at places such as the Fort Piqua Hotel, motels in Greenville or boarding houses in Bradford.

The Conrail Years...1976-1985

Conrail assumed control of the Bradford rail line, on April 1, 1976. Conrail was short for the Consolidated Rail Corporation, which was an organization created by the government in an attempt to end continuing financial aid to bankrupt Eastern railroads. The government's plan was to consolidate six bankrupt Eastern railroads, including the Penn Central, into one company, then achieve profitability by eliminating surplus trackage, facilities and personnel. The government also invested heavily in repairing track that had been neglected by the financially weak railroads, and on automation intended to modernize the railroad.

During the Conrail years major repairs were made to the Bradford line track, which was littered with speed restrictions due to "rough" conditions. New ballast, ties and welded rail were laid. High speed crossovers, dragging equipment and "hotbox" detectors were installed. Train speeds were increased as track repairs were made. Trees that had grown up into the pole line and hampered communications were cleared. The number of trains increased during Conrail since part of the "Dayton side" had been downgraded to local service only and was no longer available as an alternate route between Columbus and Indianapolis. By 1979 Bradford was seeing 20-25 daily trains.

Conrail, like the PRR and PC, based local freights at Bradford that worked between St. Paris and Greenville. One of the largest customers serviced by the "Greenville local" was Greenville's Corning Glass plant. The railroad hauled silica sand to this plant which was used to make automobile headlight lens. The railroad also hauled boxcar loads of finished lenses out of the plant. These cars were set off in Bradford's westward runner to be picked up by a westbound freight and taken to Avon yard at Indianapolis where they would be put on another freight for the next leg of their journey.

It was great to see so many improvements being made, but more changes were coming as Conrail was not achieving profitability. In 1981, Stanley Crane from the Southern Railway took over as Conrail's CEO and brought forth a change in philosophy intended to improve Conrail's financial position. Rail lines that had been considered necessary were now seen as candidates for downgrading or abandonment. Unfortunately, the Bradford Line was among those lines selected for downgrading and eventual abandonment. Conrail simply didn't need two routes between Union City and Pittsburgh. The former New York Central line just to the north won favor over the Bradford Line since it was a better fit in Conrail's new reduced route structure.

Early in 1981 Conrail began to route its Pittsburgh-Indianapolis trains via the ex-NYC route which was known as the B-line. This meant that trains that once passed through Bradford could now be seen passing through Versailles and Sidney. By 1984 all former Bradford line trains had been rerouted to the B-line. It's sad that Conrail didn't think of this route change before it wasted a lot of money rehabilitating the Bradford Line. Trainmaster Les Brandt summed it up well when he said, "We fixed it up better than it's ever been, and then abandoned it." Conrail removed the tracks through Bradford in 1985. The last chapter in Bradford's railroad history had been written.



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