

Roots of the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad in Columbus, Ohio

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THE COLUMBUS & HOCKING VALLEY RAILROAD (1869)

There was no railroad construction into Columbus between 1853 and 1869. In the meantime, Columbus had rail service east, north, and west; and the canal continued to serve south of Columbus, connecting with Ohio River traffic at Portsmouth and tapping the coal fields of the Hocking Valley at Nelsonville. The Civil War was fought from 1861 to 1865, but even before the last shot of the war was fired, another company, the Mineral Railroad, was chartered to build and operate a line from Columbus thru Lancaster, Logan, Nelsonville and way points to Athens. The name of the company was changed in 1867 to the Columbus & Hocking Valley Railroad.

No ground was turned until 1868, but in January, 1869, construction was completed to Lancaster. On January 13 of that year, members of the state legislature, state officials, and citizens, journeyed to Lancaster as guests of the company. A few days later, regular freight and passenger service began between Columbus and Lancaster, and in 1870 the line was opened to Athens. The first freight train from Nelsonville arrived in Columbus in August, 1869, and had on board a small canon the discharge of which gave notice of the approach of the train at various points along the line. The train was laden with coal and consisted of 22 cars of 12 tons each, quite a contrast to the [1952] trains of 160 cars of 70 tons each now hauled by the present-day operators of this line.

The Columbus & Hocking Valley Railroad entered Columbus from the southeast thru Canal Winchester and Groveport, crossing south High Street three miles from Broad and High, then swinging northward parallel to the east bank of the Scioto River and the canal. Almost opposite present-day Whittier Street, the railroad crossed the canal and entered its terminal yard south of Mound Street. In this same area the road built its repair shops and established its freight and passenger depots. The passenger depot at Mound Street was known as the South Station.

In 1872, the company extended its road one and one-quarter miles farther north into the city so as to provide physical connections with the other railroads which had entered Columbus. This was quite a costly undertaking inasmuch as it required two crossings of the Scioto River. Property was acquired north of the Ohio Penitentiary and additional freight handling facilities were established. Then by acquiring trackage rights over the Columbus Piqua & Indiana line, eastward from Dennison Avenue, the

Columbus & Hocking Valley passenger trains entered the Columbus Union Depot.

The Columbus & Hocking Valley story is continued in later paragraphs under the caption of the Columbus & Toledo Railroad.

THE COLUMBUS & TOLEDO RAILROAD (1877)

By the mid-seventies, Columbus was being served by nine railroads, but not a one in the direction of Toledo or northwestern Ohio. And the importance of such a railroad could hardly be overestimated. There were several sizable cities along any route which might be selected; there were four important trunk lines crossing northern Ohio for connections east and west in the states; Toledo was not only an important industrial and railway trunk line city but also the gateway to Michigan; and most important as a rail revenue proposition, Toledo was a Great Lakes port.

In 1872, two companies were chartered to build Columbus-Toledo railroads.

One group was composed of Toledo capitalists, and their route was to be the so called western route via Findlay, Kenton, and Marysville. A railroad via this route was built, but not until twenty years later.

The other company was incorporated under the name of the Columbus & Toledo Railroad, by a group of Columbus men most of whom were stockholders in the Columbus & Hocking Valley Railroad. There was considerable dickering with intermediate communities relative to the acceptable route. The Bee Line, later the Big Four, offered trackage rights over its line between Columbus and Delaware, but the offer was declined. After three years of financing and route considerations, the company chose the route thru Delaware, Marion, Upper Sandusky, and Fostoria. As originally planned, the route leaving Columbus was an extension of the Columbus & Hocking Valley's industrial siding east of the Olentangy River from a point several blocks north of Goodale Street, thence almost directly northward to a point northwest of the Agricultural College (OSU) where it would have crossed the Olentangy River and extended toward Delaware. If this route had been accepted finally, the railroad would have been built on ground now occupied by Ohio Stadium.

Fortunately the Columbus survey was changed, construction was started in 1875, and the road was completed and opened to traffic in 1877. The completed road extended south-by-east from Powell on the west side of the Olentangy River to Goodale Street where it swung eastward across the Olentangy and connected with the tracks of the Columbus & Hocking Valley

Railroad. Trackage rights were acquired over the Piqua line eastward from Dennison Avenue, and the Columbus & Toledo Railroad passenger trains entered the union depot.

In 1880, the Ohio & West Virginia Railroad completed construction of a line from Pomeroy and Gallipolis to Logan, where it connected with the Columbus & Hocking Valley line. In the 70's and 80's, several branch lines were built in the Hocking Valley coal fields which served as feeder lines to the line to Columbus.

The Columbus & Hocking Valley and the Columbus & Toledo roads, having interlocking capital and management, naturally had close working agreements. The Ohio & West Virginia Railroad had to depend on the Columbus & Hocking Valley line as its northern outlet. In 1881, the three roads merged, adopting the name of the Columbus Hocking Valley & Toledo Railroad. In 1896, the company built a road from Dundee to Hamden, Wellston and Jackson, operating both steam and electric car service over portions of the line.

After merged operations for sixteen years, the company went into receivership in 1897, and emerged there from in 1899 under the name of the Hocking Valley Railroad.

The Hocking Valley story is continued in later paragraphs under the caption of the Chesapeake & Ohio Northern Railroad.

THE CHESAPEAKE & OHIO NORTHERN RAILROAD (1910-1930)

At the turn of the century, the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad was a rich line operating between the Virginia seaboard and Cincinnati. It extended thru the coal fields of West Virginia and Kentucky which were then becoming highly productive. The Norfolk & Western Railroad, principal competitor of the Chesapeake & Ohio, had acquired the Scioto Valley Railroad and thus obtained control of an outlet to Columbus which afforded the Norfolk & Western a distinct advantage relative to car loadings, faster service, and a larger percentage of revenue. However, the Chesapeake & Ohio was stymied - it still had to depend on its connections to get its coal out of West Virginia and Kentucky. It had no control of service movements beyond its line and the revenue which originated on its line had to be divided among other carriers. The Chesapeake & Ohio was anxious to acquire a line under its own control to the great lakes. It chose to try the Hocking Valley route which extended all the way from the Ohio River to Toledo. The Chesapeake & Ohio started buying into Hocking Valley. In 1910, it acquired control of latter line, although there was no physical connection between the two roads. Two connecting routes were considered - one was to build a short line to the

Hocking Valley at some point in southern Ohio; the other was to build a longer connecting line all the way to Columbus. Construction would cost more for the latter plan but train operations would cost less. The company chose the latter plan as generally more practical. The route chosen was from Limeville, Kentucky, six miles up-stream from Portsmouth, to a point near Obetz on the southeastern edge of Columbus. Construction was completed from Limeville to Waverly in Pike County, when it was stopped by World War I. During that war, when the railroads were operated by the federal government, Chesapeake & Ohio trains used the completed portion of the new line to Waverly and trackage rights over the Norfolk & Western to Valley Crossing, where a connection was made with the Hocking Valley line. When the war was over the new line was completed from Waverly to the Columbus area. For operational purposes the new road was named the Chesapeake & Ohio Northern.

This connecting line is quite unique inasmuch as it bypasses all cities along its route, and has no stations. All crossing of other railroads are by overhead or underpass, and with a few exceptions the statement applies to its crossing of highways and county roads.

While the Chesapeake & Ohio Northern was in the planning stages, the Chesapeake & Ohio acquired land adjacent to the Hocking Valley road, extending southeastward from Parsons Avenue to Williams Road, and eventually constructed yard and shop facilities in that area. Subsequently the Mound Street shops and terminal of the Hocking Valley Railroad were abandoned.

The Hocking Valley Railroad surrendered its identity to the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad on May 1, 1930.

The Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad [in 1952] has one name train operating thru Columbus - the Sportsman, which runs between Detroit and the Virginia seaboard.

* Text taken from *Columbus Railroads* by Rowlee Steiner, 1952, an unpublished manuscript.