

# Roots of the Norfolk & Western Railroad in Columbus, Ohio

By Rowlee Steiner\*

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## THE SCIOTO VALLEY RAILROAD (1876)

In 1876, the Scioto Valley Railroad was completed between Columbus, Circleville, and Chillicothe. The following quotation is from a writer of the Norfolk & Western Railroad, present owners of the Scioto Valley.

"The Scioto Valley was a railroad built to nowhere in particular. It was doomed to failure before it began. The Scioto Valley Railroad was organized in February, 1875, and lost no time building, reaching Chillicothe from Columbus in July, 1876. It was a standard gauge railroad with 56-pound rail. It operated regular trains from Chillicothe with four locomotives, eight passenger cars, and fifty-five freight cars. The road was thru to Portsmouth amid a great celebration in January, 1878, and completed to Coal Grove, across the river from Ashland, in May, 1881.

"The road had changed hands several times and by 1881 it was mortgaged upside down and backward. It had a good agricultural business three or four months a year, but very few manufactured goods were going out. Worst of all, the Scioto Valley Railroad lacked an eastern outlet; it carried no thru traffic. A car ferry was installed at Coal Grove to connect with the Chesapeake & Ohio Railroad, and the car ferry was given much ado and Ballyhoo. The old barge was towed by a side-wheeler, could carry but three cars at a time, and proved to cost more than its revenue. So in May, 1885, the Scioto Valley Railroad went into receivership and under the control of Collis P. Huntington. A lot of little people lost money but Huntington probably got himself a railroad for practically nothing.

"In December, 1889, the road was re-organized, sold, and emerged as the Scioto Valley & New England. There may have been a reason for the 'New England' at the time but it isn't known now. In July, 1890 the Scioto Valley Railroad ceased to exist. It was purchased by the Norfolk & Western Railroad, and operated as a part of that line although the N&W's nearest line was still struggling thru the mountains of West Virginia more than one hundred miles to the east. However, N&W officials knew now that they had an assured outlet to the west and would not have to depend on the vagaries of other carriers. The N&W's western extension reached Coal Grove late in 1892, but it was not until

the summer of the next year that regular train service was established and the Norfolk & Western Railroad was operating thru cars between Norfolk and Columbus."

The Norfolk & Western Railroad enters Columbus from the south, passing thru the eastern section of the city west of Alum Creek, to its terminal facilities in the northeastern section of Columbus north of Fifth Avenue. Inasmuch as Columbus is the northern terminus of the Norfolk & Western, the heavy volume of coal handled by this line is delivered in Columbus to connecting lines, principally the old Sandusky short line (PRR), much of it going via the Great Lakes to the northwestern states.

The Norfolk & Western Railroad was highly instrumental in the development of the West Virginia coal fields. [In 1952] the line operates one name passenger train in and out of Columbus - the Pocahontas, which runs between Columbus and the Virginia seaboard.

The Norfolk & Western Railroad is one of the very valuable asset[s] of Columbus.

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