

## **INTRODUCTION**

Controlling train traffic on the five Columbus Class I railroads fell to the dispatchers, train directors, agents, operators and switchtenders working in over twenty-five locations around Columbus. At the heart of the network were the towers, some being interlocking towers with operator controlled switch and signal levers, and others employing switchtenders to manually throw the track switches. The term "towers" implies a two story building situated alongside the tracks. In many cases that was true, however, in others the building was actually a single story or the function was located in a more distant building such as a yard master's office.

Twelve of the Columbus towers were located at junctions where one railroad crossed another. The remaining towers controlled entrances to rail yards, crossovers on the mainline or points where single track transitioned to double track or double to triple track.

Agency locations like the C&O's South Columbus depot will be included in this look at the train control network.

### **Interlocking**

Like so many railroad advances the interlock plant was a reaction to safety problems. The railroads needed a failsafe method to align complicated track switches and coordinate that with the signals given the trainmen. The interlock was a way to ensure the multiple moving parts of switches and signals were moved in the proper sequence to ensure safe operation of the trains. The proceed signal could not be given to the trainmen until all the switches were properly aligned.

There were at least four ways to control switches with interlocking plants. A mechanical connection using pipes and levers often referred to as an "armstrong" plant. It could take a lot of muscle for the operator to move the levers. Another type of plant, the electro-pneumatic, moved the switch parts with air pressure. This was much easier on the operator. A third type of plant used electric switch machines. There was also an electro-mechanical variant.

Typically the interlocking plant was installed in a two story building or "tower". The first floor was for equipment. The towerman or operator worked on the second floor. The second floor perch had the added advantage of giving the operator a clear view of his domain. However, there were several variations as you will see in the individual descriptions for each operator location in Columbus.

### **Building Terminology**

It has been difficult nailing down the correct terminology for these railroad control points. Different railroads used different terminology and it is easy to confuse function with a physical building. All the towers, dispatcher locations and other locations along the railroad like hump offices and depots had a name, and almost always, a two letter telegraph identifier. The PRR typically referred to a tower by name which was the name of the local village or in larger cities the closest street. Sometimes it was by the name of

the railroad it was crossing but typically not its 1950's name but rather the railroads 19<sup>th</sup> Century name like "Miami Crossing" or "Valley Crossing".

The C&O referred to its towers as a cabin as in "HV Cabin" with "HV" being the telegraph call sign for a particular tower. The B&O called one tower "US Tower". "US" were the telegraph call letters, but putting the word tower in the name was a little unusual. Even within a specific railroad the naming convention was not always consistent.

### **Corrections Welcome**

Corrections and additions are most welcome and should be sent to columbusrailroads.com at [columbusrr@att.net](mailto:columbusrr@att.net).