

PRRTHS BUCKEYE CHAPTER

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NEXT MEETING IN MARION, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

Our next Chapter meeting will be at the Station in Marion, Ohio on Sunday, December 14. The facilities here will be opened up by 11:30, and the business meeting will be at 2:00 pm.

This is planned as a day of train watching and slide viewing. The station is right by the Norfolk Southern Sandusky line (former PRR Sandusky Branch). CSX is also prominent there, both North/South and East/West. A slide projector will be provided for showing slides. Bring your slides to show when the trains are not running or if the weather is too inclement for standing outside to watch trains. We need member participation here! AC Tower will be open and there will be an operator on hand to demonstrate the workings of the tower.

There will be space available to show your models (finished or under construction) and railroad memorabilia and artifacts, so bring what you want to show and share with everybody. If you have shown models previously, bring them again. There may be people in attendance who haven't seen them before. PRR or PRR related, of course.

For those who arrive early and are looking for lunch, The Shovel restaurant is next door to the station and is a favorite railfan hangout. It has a reputation as a good place for sandwiches.

NATIONAL CONVENTION, 2011.

The PRR T&HS Board of Directors approved Columbus as the site for the Annual Meeting in 2011. We now need some volunteers to step up to chair some of the activities for the meeting. We have filled the positions for Hotel/Banquet, Registration and Treasurer. We will need chairpersons for Programs, Model room, Tours, etc. This event will be the main topic of discussion at the meeting. Volunteers are needed and suggestions are welcome. This is our chance to show Lines West to be a major part of the society!

We realize that there is nothing left of the PRR in the Columbus area, and have expressed that fact to the National officers numerous times in the past. They nevertheless have continued to express interest in having the annual meeting here. That being the case it will be our challenge to provide a strong in-the-house program to showcase the PRR in Columbus to make up for the lack of physical remnants of the Pennsy in this area. We also should look for Lines West topics for lines in and out of Columbus to help point out the importance of Columbus, for instance; the Panhandle, CA&C, Sandusky, Columbus & Xenia, etc.

CRESTLINE ROUNDHOUSE IN THE LOCAL PRESS.

PRR in Crestline By Ron Widman.

(Note) Since the early 1950's, Ron Widman has been involved with the PRR history while focusing on the roundhouse operation in Crestline. Ron has compiled the following article from past articles in the *Crestline Advocate*. Originally from Bucyrus, Ron lives in Columbus with his wife Deb and works with WBNS-TV.

Crestline is a railroad town. Always has been and always will be. I recall when every major road entrance into Crestline had a huge cast sign in the shape of the state of Ohio, which said: "Crestline. An Ohio Railroad Center since 1850." Most of you whose age is over the half century mark can recall when Crestline was a very busy railroad town, being on the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad between Pittsburgh and Chicago. Many passenger and freight trains would pass east and west through town daily. Also present in Crestline were the "Big Four" north/south tracks owned and operated by the New York Central Railroad, running from Cleveland to Cincinnati.

The PRR was the largest corporation in America during much of its lifetime. Almost everyone in Crestline worked for the PRR. Jobs on the PRR were many. My uncle told me that one man's lone job was to fill and tend to the many kerosene lanterns with coal oil and to keep them burning night and day. . Kerosene lanterns were used to signal train crews, and as switch lanterns placed along the track at switches long before portable batteries were available. Jobs on the railroad ranged from ticket agent to tower operator, track supervisor to gandy dancer (track gang), engineer to conductor, roundhouse foreman to machinist and from locomotive hostler to crew dispatcher. .

The roundhouse at Crestline operated 24 hours per day, seven days a week, employing many highly skilled tradesmen. Their primary job was to keep the engines alive and ready to pull the many passenger and freight trains leaving Crestline daily. The *Crestline Advocate* reported in January of 1904 at the first roundhouse near downtown, one steam engine "ran straight through the side of the house" while two other stalls of the house fell in and the debris caught fire and was extinguished. "The roundhouse is in very bad shape and is dangerous to those who are employed there," the *Advocate* reported. The first roundhouse was nearly 50 years old then.

A new roundhouse was constructed in 1918. The PRR Crestline roundhouse in 1924 had a total of 30 locomotive stalls for repair and inspection of steam locomotives. The machine shop attached to the west side of the roundhouse took care of all metal fabrication and regular steel maintenance on the huge steam locomotives. Many skilled craftsmen in the machine shop handled the intricate steel fabricating work which also included turning locomotive steel “tires” and making metal parts from scratch when replacements were not available.

A January 1924 story in the *Crestline Advocate* reported the Pennsylvania railroad efficiency committee for the Crestline and Mansfield shops in the semi-monthly inspection of the roundhouse found it was in “tip-top shape.” The February 7, 1924, front page railroad articles said W.W. Atterbury, PRR Vice President; E. T. Whiter; Vice President Chicago Headquarters; M.W. Clements, general manager east of Pittsburgh and officers in New York City and other PRR officials stopped off to make an inspection of the yards and roundhouse with local Ft. Wayne division officials. A special train carrying the railroad “Top Brass” arrived as the men went for a quick tour of the PRR Crestline yards and engine facilities.

In February 1924, the *Advocate* reported the ash pit at the roundhouse was to be reconstructed to improve safety. The ash pit was located between the roundhouse and the coal dock and was used to dump all steam engine coal residue, ash, also known as cinders. The deep pit held a lot of cinders and water was added to put out the hot coals coming from the locomotive ash pans. Seems as though the ash pit was designed to take care of the ash/cinder problem from the engines but little was known or thought about the operational safety of workers in the immediate area. Sadly enough the human side of the operation was not considered too well. The story states: “Since the ash pit was constructed during the war (WW I) close to a half dozen have lost their lives in it. The pit is about fifteen feet deep and at times is filled nearly to the top with ashes and water, making escape practically impossible for one who is unfortunate enough to fall in.” The plan was to put in a false bottom of iron construction about five feet below the ground level. This was an early safety measure implemented by PRR Civil Engineer John Sherman of the Ft. Wayne Shops. The work necessitated the employment of another crane man in order that the work of removing ashes from the pit could be carried on sixteen hours per day, two tricks. One man working only one eight hour trick formerly took care of the ashes. An average of 70 steam engines per day would pass through the roundhouse & ash pits. Safety was always a great factor when working for the railroad. It grew to be a big concern throughout the entire PRR history and over the many years of operation.

The PRR in Crestline used about seven million gallons of water per day for the steam engines and other uses. The RR reservoir west of Thoman Street was getting low so officials began pumping water from the Leesville pumping station. Later it was reported the operation at the Leesville pumping station had been discontinued as the reservoir at the original roundhouse downtown had filled up again and all water tanks are now filled from here. In April it was reported at the PRR car shops near Thoman Street, workers were busy repairing one of the three 148’ high smoke stacks. Strong winds had blown part of one stack over during a heavy evening rain.

A change in making steam engine repairs at the Pennsylvania roundhouse became effective May 1, 1924. From that date on the Crestline shops took care of all heavy repair work on passenger engines except work that was absolutely necessary to be done in the Chicago shops when the engines reached that terminal. All passenger engines that left Crestline, under the new order, went through to Chicago with their trains, and engines leaving Chicago roundhouse came through to Crestline instead of changing at Ft. Wayne. This meant that the passenger repair work in the Ft. Wayne was reduced to a minimum. The change did not affect the crews, who continued to change at Ft. Wayne as usual. With the added passenger engine work given to the Crestline shops the great bulk of heavy repair work on freight engines was transferred to Ft. Wayne shops. This meant a slight reduction in forces in the Crestline shops. This reduction was made on May 1, although the men laid off on that date were not all employed on freight engine repair work.

An index of the slump in railroad business during early 1924 is indicated in the report of engine dispatched from the Crestline roundhouse during the month of April. A total of 1,737 were dispatched which is nearly 200 less than were sent out from the local house for the month of March.

During the month of February 1924, heavy and light running repairs were made to 1818 engines in the Crestline roundhouse which was 102 less than for the month of January. At that, roundhouse officials figure more work was done during the month of February, comparatively speaking, than was done in January, due to the fact that there were three more working days in January. Figuring an average of 70 engines per day, the record for February would have been 2028 engines figured on a basis of 31 days, the same as January. Of the total of 1818, fifty-three were in for heavy repairs as compared with forty-two for the month of January. Heavy running repairs were made on more engines for the month of February than any month since last summer. There was 37,053,300 pounds of coal unloaded from cars during the month and 38,108,500 pounds consumed.

After the conversion of the Pennsylvania Railroad to diesel locomotives in the 1950's, work at the Crestline facility dwindled to a trickle. It was finally closed in the mid 1960's. The roundhouse was sold and sold again in the following years. Each owner had special interests. One owner processed manure and sold it in plastic bags, another used the empty place for a scrap yard and in particular, the same owner was determined to scrap and recycle all he could from the steam locomotive facility. The huge turntable, overhead crane, track, power house boilers, material from the machine shop, the metal from the diesel sheds and the diesel fuel tanks and huge steel water tower were all recycled and a good profit was seen by the owner.

The present owner was under pressure when a youngster was injured while exploring the engine house, and was treated by doctors. When the owner was assessed \$5,000.00 in medical bills, as he decided to tear it down and cash in on his investment.

The end of the story of the Crestline PRR Roundhouse, after many years of no maintenance and disrepair, was that it was torn down during the first part of 2007. It is believed that the Timken Company in Canton bought most of the steel "I" beams from the support structure. But the demolition was not a total tear down. The owner left standing the brick office building on the east side of the complex, the water treatment building along Bucyrus street, the original store room and machine shop (on the west side) plus a few remaining stalls that could be stall number 25-30.