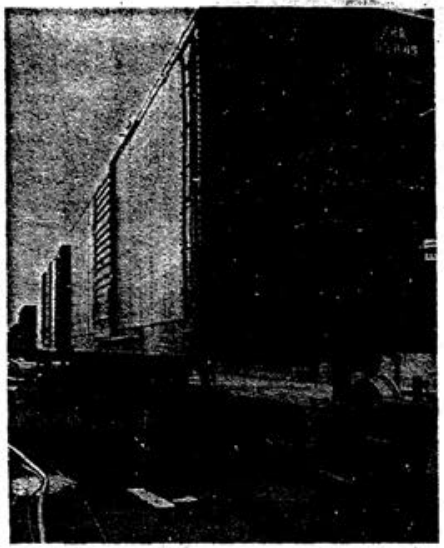
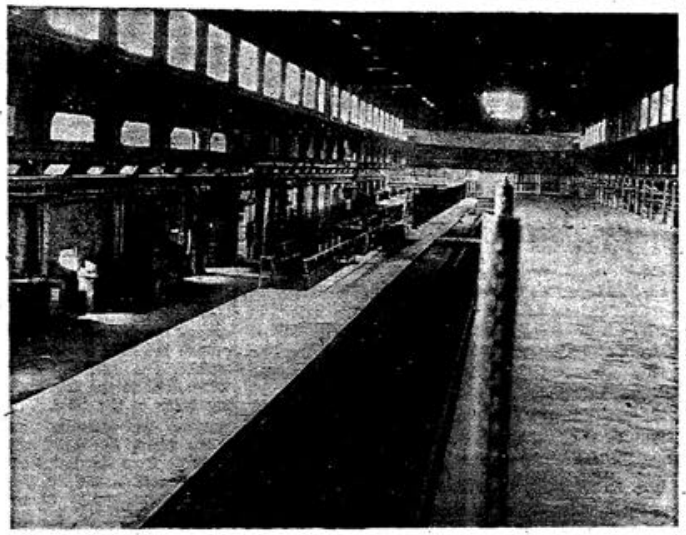
Panhandle Shop Activities in Decline Since Steam Era

ONCE BUSY—Emergency repairs and adjustments of the Pennsy's diesel equipment are made in the 20th St. roundhouse, pictured.



ALMOST DESERTED—Freight cars are on "horses" awaiting replacement of trucks or other "running repairs" by the force of 190 workmen. As much maintenance as possible is done in the almost deserted yards, where thousands once gave the Pennsy shops the name of being Columbus' biggest employer.



NO MORE ENGINES — Diesel locomotives formerly were "spotted" in this building for monthly inspections and heavy repairs. Its future occupants: Freight cars requiring more extensive running repairs.

7600 Workers Were Employed At Pennsy 20th St. Operations

By MARDO WILLIAMS

The Panhandle Shops have lost their bustle. Their role in Columbus growth is little more than a memory.

Once the city's biggest employer, the Pennsylvania Railroad's 20th St. locomotive and car repair operations have grown anemic.

DEMISE OF the steam locomotive, advent of steel-framed freight cars and activation of more modern repair facilities elsewhere are blamed.

The result is apparent.

Gone are the color, the activity, the pride of achievement, scores of shop buildings, and some 7600 workers.

Today, the Pennsy shop is doing only running repairs on locomotives and freight cars — in a fraction of the sprawling yards and with a sprinkling of the employes it once had.

THE LOCOMOTIVE repair crew, for example, once consisted of more than 2000. It is down to 131.

Freight car repairs accounted for added thousands of employes. That force has been cut to 191.

The most recent order abolished 170 positions in the locomotive repair shops. Fifty signed for jobs in other cities along the system; the remainder chose to remain in Columbus.

THE ECONOMY move brought reminiscences and nostalgia. Oldtimers recalled:

Just after World War I, the 20th St. operations had some 8000 employes.

During World War II, the number ranged upward to 4500 and as recently as 1951, the shops employed 3300.

Employment dipped to 2800 in 1953, shortly before the first mass layoffs.

TWO YEARS LATER, 178 were employed on car repairs and 1186 on engines—a total of 1364.

Physical plant deteriorated as local operations were reduced.

Planing mill, tank and paint shops were closed, six departments (which once employed a total of 2000) were merged to form a machine shop, and a score of buildings with once-bustling operations were razed.

THE SHIFT TO longer operation, more troublefree, lower maintenance diesels was a factor. They had uniform parts.

Steam locomotives not only were of varying sizes and types but repair crews frequently were forced to fashion drive shafts and other parts in the blacksmith shops to meet emergency needs, Master Mechanic James Stuart explained.

The Panhandle Shops were built here in 1886 to supply locomotives and parts to the entire western region of the Pennsy. They were enlarged in 1902, 1919 and 1944.

WITH COMPLETION of modern repair facilities in Altoona and Conway, Pa., the nation's biggest railroad found it profitable to shift more and more work to those centers.

A. L. Hunt, Columbus district superintendent, said emergency diesel repairs will be made at the Columbus shops but heavy repairs and monthly inspections will be a responsibility of the Conway, Pa., operation.

Only Class 4 maintenance (running repairs) currently are made in the Columbus car shops.

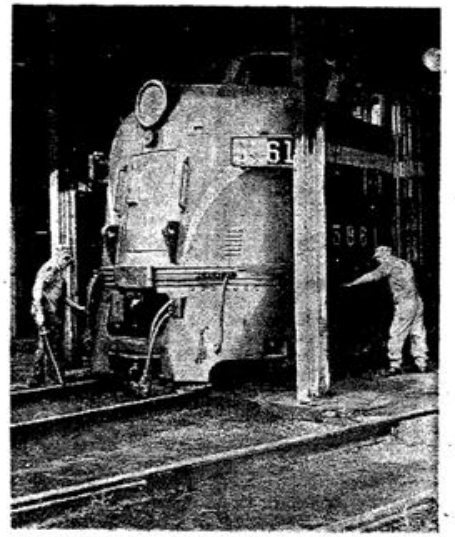
STUART OFFERED hope that Columbus may eventually pick up a few jobs as the and diesel operations are converted to freight car repair, Although first section of the original Pennsylvania Railroad began operating near Pittsburgh on Sept. 1, 1849, it did not enter Columbus until May, 1868.

At that time, the Pittsburg, Cincinnati and St. Louis Railroad merged with Panhandle Railroad, Holliday's Cove Railroad and Steubenville & Indiana Railroad Co. — one or more of which had been operating in Ohio since 1832.

THE PENNSY LATER acquired seven other Ohio operations and four lines serving Indiana and Illinois.

The 78-year-old Columbus shops initially were designed to serve the road's entire western region to Chicago and St. Louis.

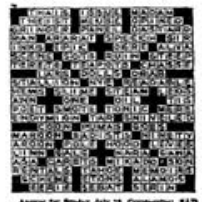
Cutbacks were ordered over the years as it became less costly, more efficient and more convenient to concentrate repair facilities in the "more central" location in Pennsylvania, Hunt said.



ADJUSTMENTS—Two workmen make hurried adjustments on a diesel locomtive, as it is shelved temporarily in the roundhouse for running repairs before being returned to service. Hundreds once worked at locomotive repair in the Columbus shops; now there are 131 employes.

present diesel shops are concentrated in the roundhouse.

Puzzle Solution



Puzzle Appears on Page 26B

BRIDGE ACTIVITIES

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