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Message from the President

Important information to all members! Two important policy changes were made at the last board of directors meeting. One involves the upcoming elections, the other the publication of the yearly calendar.

2020 elections: With the continued lack of volunteers and the increasing amount of time and duties on officers and a handful of committee people, we are adding assignments to directors. In several historical societies directors are required to perform certain duties as well as monitor the finances and achievements of the society. Thus will our directors following the annual convention in October. With the upcoming bicentennial of the B&O, the available time for the president to conduct everyday operations is going to be reduced. Therefore, it will be up to the directors to assume some tasks. After the election of the directors at the annual business meeting, each will select one of the following tasks and be responsible for developing, planning, and implementing their duties for the next twelve months. If you are interested in serving please submit your name and resume to the society by June 1st.

Director of Regular Publications—Reports to the Vice-President, responsible for the development and implementation of production of the calendar, the *Sentinel*, Mini-Con Flyers, and Convention handout. Production of the items will be on time according to these dates: Calendar ready for sale no later than June 1st, Western Mini-Con Flyer to go with 1st quarter *Sentinel*, Eastern Mini-Con Flyer by the 2nd quarter *Sentinel*, and Convention handout ready by September 1st. Finally, the *Sentinel* ready to be mailed by January 2nd, April 1st, July 1st, and October 1st. This director will communicate with Mini-Con Coordinators, Convention Coordinator, *Sentinel* Editor, and find volunteers to produce the yearly calendar. This director will send a progress report to officers and directors by May 31st with an action plan for the remainder of the year to keep everything on schedule.

Director for Membership—Reports to the Secretary, responsible for the development and implementation of events and programs to increase membership among younger candidates and maintain current

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On the Covers

FRONT COVER: MK Tower controlled the connection between the B&O Baltimore-Chicago mainline and P&LE Youngstown-Connellsville mainline. Photograph taken July 5, 1964. (Photograph by Bob Withers)

BACK COVER: Besides handling high priority trains such as trailer jets and featured manifest trains, the P&LE mainline also handled extras such grain, coke, ore, and coal. With an array of puff clouds dotting the sky, a three-unit consist takes charge of a Grain Piker as it rolls eastbound through McKeesport, Pennsylvania on April 8, 1987. The train is enroute from Grand Ledge, Michigan to Locust Point Grain Elevator at Baltimore. (Photograph by Dave Ori)



24 Hours at MK Tower

by
Dave Ori

MK Tower was located at the east end of McKeesport. This is where the B&O and P&LE mainlines connected. MK Tower was constructed in 1934 after the B&O entered into a trackage rights agreement with the P&LE, allowing B&O trains to operate over the P&LE mainline between McKeesport and West Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, located east of New Castle Junction. There was no interlocking at MK; instead a switchtender handled the crossovers while the operator controlled the signals. On July 3, 1964, the operator and switchtender await the next movement at MK Tower. *(Photograph by Bob Withers)*

RAILROAD TOWERS have played an important role in the movement of passenger and freight traffic since the late 1800s. Throughout the last several decades, modern technology such as CTC (centralized traffic control) and other technologies, such as DTC (Direct Traffic Control), have enabled railroads to eliminate the need to operate towers. In the Pittsburgh region, the B&O maintained several towers such as Glenwood (WJ), Etna (BG), Eidenau (MU), FY Tower, GN Tower at Laughlin Junction, R Tower at Bessemer, WD Tower at Wildwood, and MK Tower at McKeesport. In this article

we will cover the history and movement of trains in a 24-hour period as recorded by the train movement record sheet at MK Tower in McKeesport, Pennsylvania.

MK Tower was located at MP 407.4 in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. This is where the B&O's Baltimore-Chicago mainline connected with the Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad's (P&LE) Youngstown-Pittsburgh mainline. The history of MK Tower can be traced back to 1934 when the B&O negotiated a trackage-rights agreement with the P&LE. The B&O sought an alternate route for its passenger and high priority manifest trains between Pittsburgh

and UN Tower at New Castle Junction Pennsylvania, a distance of 58 miles. The B&O's original route via the P&W (Pittsburgh and Western) Subdivision was a tortuous piece of railroad, with several curves and steep grades, while the P&LE's route followed the contour of the Beaver River Valley. After 1934, all B&O passenger trains and manifest trains that didn't have to work Pittsburgh area yards utilized the P&LE mainline west of McKeesport.

In order to reach P&LE rails a double track connection was built allowing B&O trains to operate to and from the P&LE mainline. MK Tower, a two-story wooden

The Next Train Coming Is...

Train markups or "soup tickets" have been a part of tower operations since the mid-1800s. They summarize important information about a single train, including engine numbers, number of cars, tonnage, and train length. The information was relayed by Morse code, and in later years, by telephone or dispatcher line from station to station, or tower to tower. The information was transmitted from the Chief Dispatcher to regional dispatchers. Once received from the Chief Dispatcher, the dispatcher would relay the train markup to online towers. For instance, at MK Tower, the operator at D Office at Connellsville (station code VI) would issue train line-ups for all westbound trains enroute to Pittsburgh, New Castle, and Butler. The operator at D office ensured that the MK operator received these markups. Once received, the MK operator would notify the P&LE and give a "figure" (estimated time) of arrival at MK Tower. Usually, one hour and five minutes after passing BF Tower at Broadford. The operator at D office issued "19" (Form 19) orders to first class trains only, and Broadford (BF Tower) issued 19 orders to westward extra trains.

UNTower, which was located at the east end of New Castle yard, gave eastbound line-ups to the B&O P&W (Pittsburgh & Western) Dispatcher and/or the P&LE Dispatcher. MK Tower had no need for lineups of eastbound trains, because the operator knew what trains were coming east on the B&O side, and the P&LE Dispatcher would give a figure of arrival on eastbound trains operating on their (P&LE) railroad. For example, If a trailer train such as New York Trailer Jet (NYTJ) was figured to arrive at MK Tower at 1:00pm, the operator would notify the B&O dispatcher and Chief Train Dispatcher at Pittsburgh, and would order a main line crew for 2:00pm to handle the train between Connellsville and Cumberland (information courtesy Paul Bodnar).

NC97 2430
4509 WE Bushenberg
5489 BW Pidgeon NY
3-47 C/450P
79x4 6457
7702 7038
all OD Y11 3x0
Y7 53x4
BT 12x0
Y3B 6x0
16 hrs 435A Conde only

Figure 1

Chgn
3731 2408
3686 P&LE
3694 P&L Harbway NY
3-47 C/450P
61x41 5025
6555
2 hr 41 34L

Figure 2

Butler 9-10-69
3686-3689-3698
H&H Whitehouse cab
3033
74 L Harbway
ed 105 PM B.D. 3-106
BD-101- 9336
10841
P&L-10033
58 # 2370
43 misc
B D - 2 16 pm
mk on bell 315-309
OK P & L 6

Figure 3

3847 RX97
7095 #340
JKLINE FELTER 2906
RT QUINN
830-938
24x21 2491
2806
OD+RD-FILLBOT
1040
OK-P&LE FIG

Figure 4

Demmler Train 2951
6617 J.C. McCauley
6618 RT Quinn
OK 9600 PM
OK 818 PM
84 727P
47x1-
835 PM
890 OK
3952 tons
P&L BO-3-107
Y3U 7x0
Y3A 24x0
Y3AA 16x1

Figure 5

Sally
9162 G&E District
9160
9053
27x35 3007
13 URR DENNISTON
#2

Figure 6

The above soup tickets/line-ups were issued at MK Tower during the year 1969. (Dave Ori collection)

Figure 1
NC97 New Castle 97
c/VI-450p Units (4509-5489)
79x4 6457 tons 7038 feet
Y11-3x0 Punxsutawney and beyond
Y7-53x4 Pittsburgh-Glenwood and beyond
BT-12x0 Butler
Y3B-6x0 Pittsburgh-Denniston District including Union Railroad

Figure 2
CHGN Chicagoan
c/VI-405p Units 3731-3686-3694
61x41 5025 tons 6555 feet

Figure 4
RX97-Willard 97
C/840a units 3847-7095
24x21 2491 tons 2806 feet
Pick up at Glenwood and Willow Grove Fig MK at 1040a-Ok via P&LE

Figure 5
Demmler Extra
C/600p Units 6617-6618
47X1 3952 tons
Y3U-7x0 Pittsburgh-Union RR
Y3A-24x0 Pittsburgh-Demmler District
Y3AA-16x1 Pittsburgh-Allegheny District
Ok via P&LE at 840p

Figure 3
Butler Extra
C/105p Units 3686-3689-3698
cab 3033
43 misc 2370 tons
By BF (Broadford) at 216p
On the bell at MK at 315p
Ok via P&LE

Figure 6
Sally (Local)
units (9162-9160-9053)
27x35 3007 tons
includes 13 cars for the Union RR at Denniston
Use track #2



A pair of EMD GP9s, one sporting B&O livery and one sporting Chessie's vibrant scheme, lead a Connellsville Extra eastbound past P&LE's Riverton Yard at McKeesport, Pennsylvania on August 14, 1983. P&LE's Riverton Yard serviced several US Steel facilities in the Pittsburgh region, including the National Tube plant in McKeesport. (Photograph by Steve Salamon)

tower, controlled the connecting tracks. MK Tower was not interlocked. The B&O employed an operator-switchtender around the clock at MK. Duties included the throwing switches by hand, OS-ing trains, and giving trains authority to pass MK by lantern signals. The MK operator-switchtender also controlled an absolute signal east of McKeesport, and westbound trains using the P&LE were held there unless the P&LE was ready to handle them. The western portion of the connection was controlled by a P&LE operator, who was located a block away from MK. This operator also threw the switches by hand.

In order to relieve congestion near US Steel's Edgar Thomson Works, the B&O removed a two-mile section of mainline between Bessemer and Rankin in 1960. This trackage once passed through US Steel's Edgar Thomson Works and the steel company wanted the tracks removed to end congested rail traffic so vehicular traffic

could move in and out of the complex more smoothly, and open up area for expansion of the steel facility. The B&O tracks also passed through the downtown section of Braddock, causing considerable congestion, since all the road crossings were at grade. Therefore, a new double track connection was built at Rankin, allowing access to the original B&O mainline to the west. Once the connection was opened, all B&O trains used the P&LE between Demmler and Rankin. The original B&O main tracks were converted to running tracks, which were used by local and switch crews, and controlled by the P&LE Dispatcher. One of the tracks became a controlled siding and was used by B&O trains that were scheduled to work Demmler Yard. The B&O main tracks between Demmler and Bessemer were sold to the Union Railroad.

The second major change, in the late 1960s, was the removal of the trackage

through downtown McKeesport. Longer and heavier trains caused major congestion as they passed through downtown at only 12mph, causing major back-ups at the many grade crossings through the city. This was also a costly venue for the B&O, as it had to employ a small battalion of crossing watchmen, as well as maintain the crossing towers and signals through the downtown district. Once again, they approached P&LE management and received trackage rights from about a half mile west of Versailles to MK Tower. The B&O's mainline was diverted to a new double track bridge over the Youghiogheny River. At the western end of the bridge, the B&O met P&LE's line to Connellsville at a control point called Belle Vernon Junction. Once the new line configuration was complete in June 1970, all B&O trains utilized the P&LE between Sinns (CP17) and MK Tower. The trackage through downtown McKeesport was removed from service. The B&O kept



A local market vendor witnesses the passage of train 548 as it trundles through a residential neighborhood in McKeesport, Pennsylvania in 1952. Train 548 was a commuter train that operated between B&O's Smithfield Station at Pittsburgh and Connellsville, Pennsylvania. The train was discontinued in 1965. (Cliff Scholes Collection)

the old main tracks as far as Christy Park to provide service to the steel plant and other local industries there.

In 1967, the P&LE embarked on a CTC program along its Pittsburgh-Newell route, and on its Connellsville line as far as Sinns. During the mid-1960s, the P&LE Youngstown-Pittsburgh mainline was handling over 200 moves daily, including B&O train movements. In a typical day, upwards of 44 train movements operated across the P&LE mainline. Traffic peak periods were from 6-9am and 3-8pm. During this period, when operation of the railroad was under control of operators at five centralized traffic control or interlocking machines, it was determined that the operators made about 3500 movements to position switches or clear signals for trains in a 24-hour period. Once CTC was installed, B&O's MK Tower and the P&LE's nearby tower were removed, and all mainline switches were interlocked. B&O still needed to employ an operator in

the area to provide train orders and messages, and OS trains between the P&LE and B&O at Versailles. The operator position at MK was transferred to the depot at Versailles, retaining the MK call letters. In downtown McKeesport, the old freight and passenger stations were demolished, and a new station was built along Lytle Avenue for B&O commuter trains and the few remaining long-distance passenger trains. The P&LE's dispatching office was located inside the P&LE's headquarters building in Pittsburgh.

The following information was obtained from a train movement sheet from MK Tower dated June 8, 1969 (See train movement record).

TRAIN MOVEMENTS

During the 1950s, many of B&O's featured passenger trains operated through Pittsburgh and across the Pittsburgh Division. Such trains as the *Capitol Limited* (5&6), *Shenandoah* (7&8), *Chicago*

Express and *Washington Express* (9&10), *Cleveland Night Express* (17-18), *Ambassador* (19-20), and *Columbian* (25-26) were handled west of Pittsburgh by the P&LE and Erie via MK Tower. All through trains stopped at B&O's Smithfield Street passenger station and P&LE's Pittsburgh Station, located across the river from downtown Pittsburgh. By the late 1960s, only four passenger trains, the *Capitol Limited* (5&6) and *Shenandoah* (7&8), were scheduled to operate through Pittsburgh.

On the freight side, the B&O operated numerous trains through the Pittsburgh region daily. The majority of these trains operated via the P&LE mainline between Sinns and West Pittsburg Pennsylvania, then to UN Tower. Westbound trains included the *Advance Chicagoan*, *Chicagoan*, *Chicago Trailer Jet*, *Chicago 97*, *Cleveland*, *Detroit*, *Second Chicagoan*, *Westerner* and *Willard 97*. Eastbound scheduled trains consisted of the *Baltimore Jet*, *Baltimorean*, *Cumberland 92*, *New*