

# The Sentinel



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SECOND QUARTER 2021



- Getting Freight Through Chicago
- Blue Line Transfer
- Building to Cumberland
- The Case of the Missing Warehouse

# Message from the President

## Fellow Society Members,

Spring is here and things are beginning to look much improved. We are hoping to be back to normal operations by the middle of summer, but things are not completely positive, especially with the mail. As of this writing many of us from Central Maryland still do not have the first quarter *Sentinel*. It is now going on twelve weeks and I live less than twenty miles from where they were mailed on December 24th. A complaint has been filed weeks ago with the postal system and as you can tell NO results. For the members who have yet to receive their issue, please do these two things. First file a complaint with your local postmaster. Second send us a postcard or email to [president@borhs.org](mailto:president@borhs.org) with your address so we can begin to put pressure on the post office from this end.

The Board of Directors met on February 19th and a number things came up for discussion. One was the upcoming elections. Grant Berry, our current vice president would like to step down. He is 76 years young, but will be moving soon and to prepare for the sale of his current home,

and do improvements to his new home, he needs his time back. Mike Shylanski, director, has announced that he will not be running again. Thank you, Mike, for your service to the society, especially the interviews you completed on B&O employees. Director Nick Fry will handle the elections this year. Please consider serving.

We are determined to revamp the website to operate on a this-century platform. Director Travers Stavac is seeking help on the technical end. If you have webpage skills please assist him. See his article in this issue.

At the board meeting I proposed for discussion that the board consider a possible due increase in 2022. Here is my rationale for such a change. First, we know that postal rates are going to increase due to the disaster of the last several months. Second, there are plans to increase the *Sentinel* by four pages to include a modelers section. Third, we need to plan for the future of the society by eventually establishing an endowment fund to support the society as membership declines. We have seen small

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# The Sentinel

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## On the Covers

**FRONT COVER:** B&OCT SW1200 9606 at Ash Street in Chicago. Heads Run 210 from Barr Yard to Homan Yard. (Photograph by Thomas White)

**BACK COVER:** Outbound Pere Marquette train No. 603 passes Western Avenue tower in Chicago. A Gulf, Mobile & Ohio, transfer run heads for Robey Yard. Note the red marker lights on locomotive 1455, that were accidentally left lit by the hostler crew when they backed the unit to Grand Central Station. In order to not unduly delay No. 603, the engineer will not be told about the markers until the train reaches Brighton Park (no radio). There, the switch tender will notify the train crew when they make a statutory stop at the non-interlocked crossing on Chicago's South Side.



This classic publicity photo showcases the advantages of the railroad over the earlier canal technology: speed, capacity, and versatility. Railroad technology continued to develop apace, while the older canal technology appears frozen in time. Closed in 1924, the canal is now a national historic park. (B&O Railroad Historical Society Archives)

# Building to Cumberland: *Railroad v. Canal*

By James Hunt

In the 1820s, Baltimore and its neighboring city, Washington, forty miles to the south, were searching for a faster and more efficient way to do business with the fast-growing states west of the Ohio river, as were the larger cities to their north, New York City and Philadelphia. They were all looking for a better means of transportation than by slow and cumbersome Conestoga wagons.

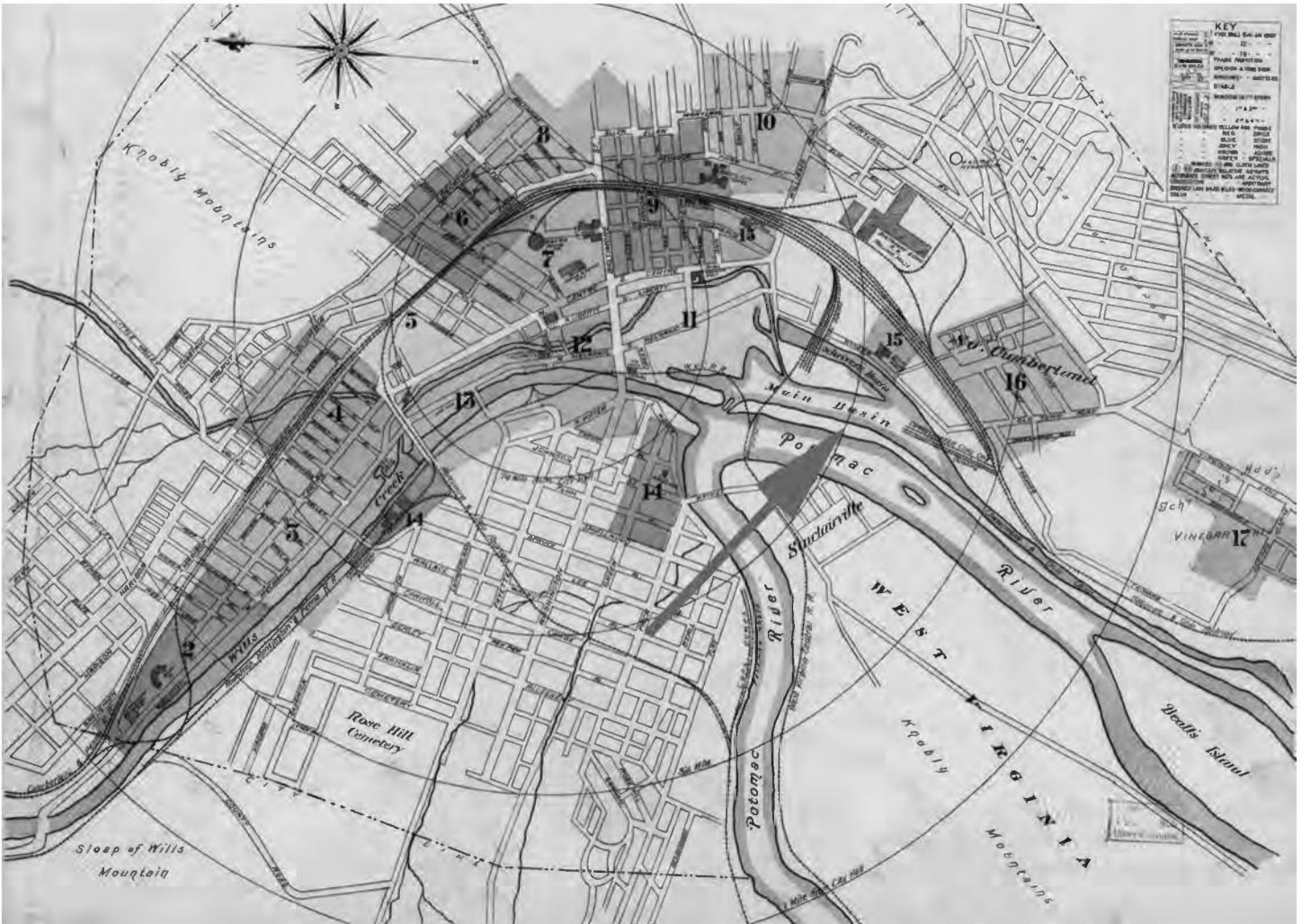
New York was the first to come up with an improvement by building the Erie Canal that stretched from the Hudson river across the state to the Great Lakes. It was an immediate success, which Pennsylvania

planned to emulate by building a system of canals and railroad from Philadelphia to the Ohio River at Pittsburgh called the Main Line of Public Works.

The city of Washington followed with a plan for a canal to follow along the Potomac River, the boundary between Maryland and Virginia, from Georgetown in Washington to Cumberland Maryland, at the base of the Allegheny mountains, and then to the Ohio River. It was called the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal (C&O), a successor to an earlier but unsuccessful attempt by The Potomac Company to make the river navigable.

Baltimore in turn considered building a canal to the Potomac to link up with the C&O Canal, but instead gambled on a new and technologically advanced form of transportation, a railroad, called the Baltimore and Ohio. In England, railroads were starting to be used as an alternative to canals.

While railroads had been operated by a few mines and quarries, the B&O would be the first in this country to carry people and freight, and being a new form of transportation would have to be built by trial and error. Pennsylvania would not start building a railroad for another five years.



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Cumberland, Allegany County, Maryland. The arrow indicates the western terminus of the C&O canal. (Sanborn Map Company, November, 1887. Retrieved from the Library of Congress)

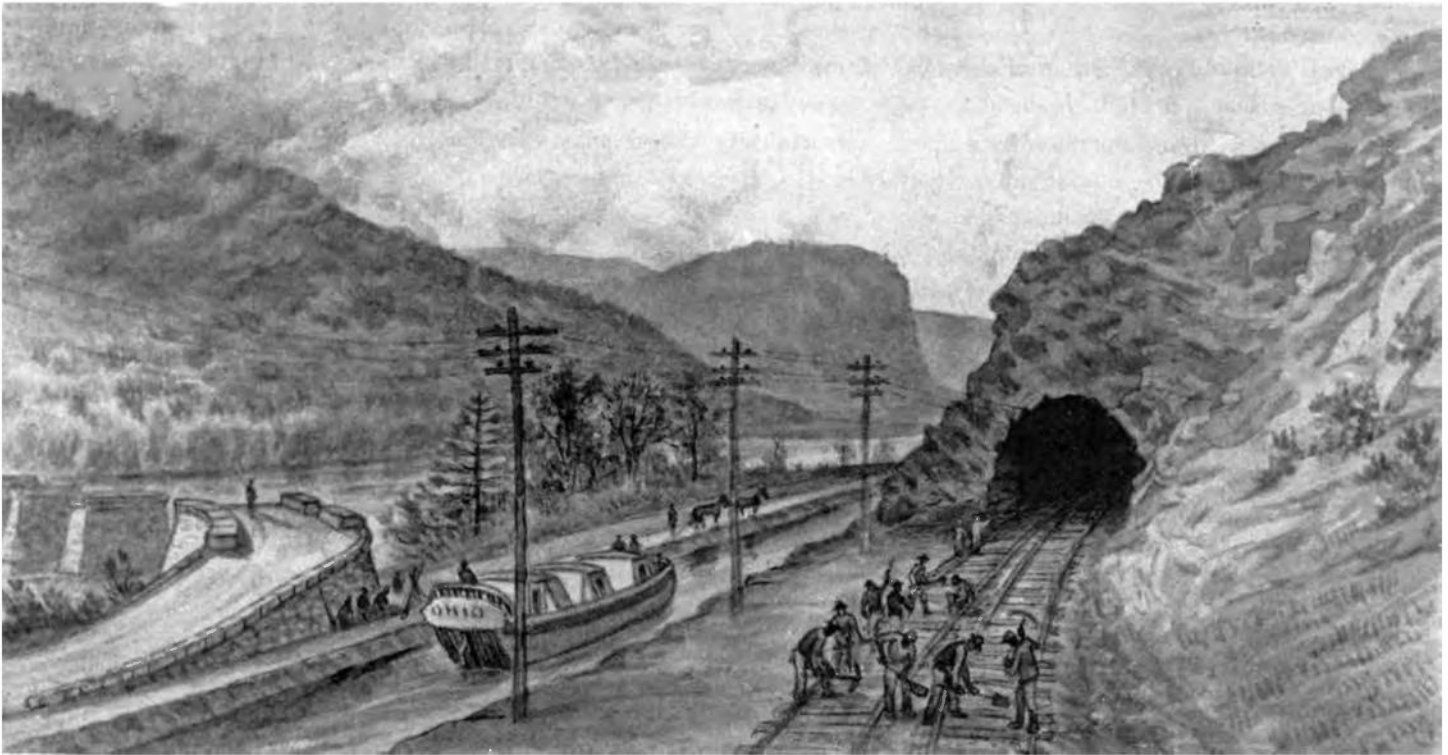
The railroad would be built westward from Baltimore to the Potomac and then, like the C&O, follow along the river to Cumberland. From there it would go over the Allegheny mountains to the Ohio River at Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia) and/or Pittsburgh. At the Ohio it would connect with steamboats to reach trading partners as far away as St. Louis. The B&O also planned to build a branch line from Baltimore to Washington.

The mountain crossing was expected to be the railroad's greatest challenge, but even before reaching the mountains it would have to overcome a series of hurdles. The first would be a clash with its budding rival the C&O Canal over a passageway to Cumberland.

Both the C&O and B&O held their groundbreaking ceremonies on the same date, July 4, 1828, and both planned to follow the Maryland side of the Potomac



Canal boat being towed along the C&O Canal. In 1944 the DC Public Library purchased over 1800 lanternslides and glass plate negatives from E.B. Thompson, a photographer who opened a store in NW DC in 1904, for \$1,000. (Photograph by E.B. Thompson. Retrieved from the DC Public Library)



A sketch of Federal soldiers working on B&O at Point of Rocks, Maryland. A canal boat heads upriver toward Harpers Ferry, Maryland. Ruined bridge over Potomac River at left. The bridge was destroyed in 1862 during the Antietam Campaign by Confederate Colonel John S. Mosby and his Rangers. (*Western Reserve Historical Society*)

to Cumberland. As the B&O's tracks were about to reach the Potomac at a place called Point of Rocks, it was hit with a court injunction from the C&O ordering it to stop work. The C&O was also reaching Point of Rocks about the same time as the railroad, and for the next twelve miles to Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia) the river passed through three gaps in the Catoctin Mountains. The C & O believed the passes were barely wide enough for the canal to pass through, let alone both the canal and railroad, and claimed that it had the right to build through the gaps. The Baltimore and Ohio countered with its own injunction claiming that it had the right of passage. Unable to settle the dispute, the parties awaited a judicial ruling. In 1832 the Maryland Court of Appeals issued its decision and sided with the canal. This placed the Baltimore and Ohio in a difficult situation: it could try to find a route elsewhere in Maryland, cross the Potomac and find a way through Virginia, or accept the C&O's proposal for the railroad to end at that point and join forces with the canal to build it to Cumberland and the Ohio river.

These alternatives were not acceptable. There were no gaps in the Catoctins to pass through in either Maryland or Virginia other than along the Maryland side of the Potomac, and the idea of throwing in with the canal was out of the question. There was, however, another alternative for the resourceful railroad: a political solution. Both the Baltimore and Ohio and C & O depended on financial support from the State of Maryland, but the railroad knew that of the two it was more favored by the state's legislature.

The B&O then had the friendly legislature pressure the C&O to force it to compromise. The basis for a deal acceptable to both sides was due to the cooperation of the railroad's chief engineer Jonathan Knight and his counterpart with the canal, who found that there was just enough room for both the canal and railroad to squeeze through the gaps, although in places the railroad would have to be built almost over the canal. The resulting agreement provided that the canal and railroad would be built together to Harpers Ferry, that the C&O would do the construction at the gaps with financial support from the B&O, and that at Harpers Ferry the railroad would

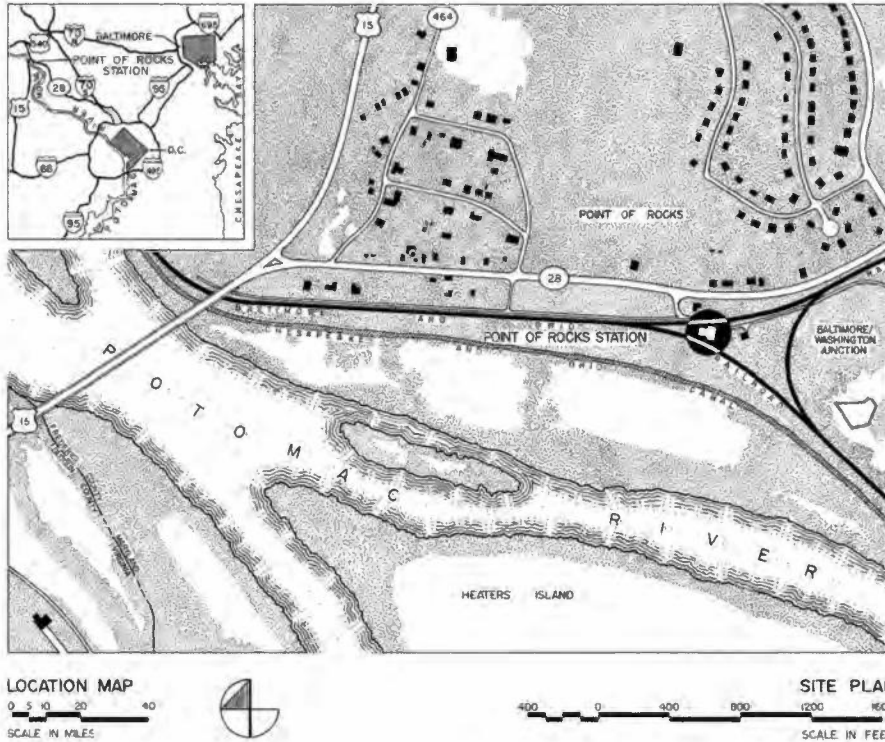
leave the Maryland side of the Potomac and build its road through Virginia until it reached the vicinity of Cumberland.

Two years later with work through the passes completed, the Baltimore and Ohio was across the river from Harpers Ferry and starting construction of a bridge to Virginia, which would connect the B&O with the Winchester and Potomac Railroad, giving it access to the produce of the rich Shenandoah valley.

Prospects were now looking good to the company for an uninterrupted ninety miles of roadbuilding to Cumberland when it was suddenly struck with a new series of unexpected setbacks, starting with the bridge. It was supposed to have been completed in 1836, but was found to have been built with such shoddy material by contractors it had to be rebuilt twice before it was ready for service. Then, work on the road to Cumberland came to an abrupt halt. The B&O had almost run out of money and it could not have come at a worse time. The country was entering a severe depression called the Panic of 1837 and money for any purpose was scarce.

Compounding the crisis was the company's realization that the time had come

# BALTIMORE AND OHIO RAILROAD POINT OF ROCKS STATION, 1875



SITUATED AT THE JUNCTION OF THE B&O'S MAIN LINE TO BALTIMORE AND BRANCH TO WASHINGTON, IS ONE OF THE MORE PICTURESQUE RAILROAD STATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES. POINT OF ROCKS STATION DATES FROM 1875 WITH ITS ARCHITECTURAL STYLE CATEGORIZED AS VICTORIAN, GOTHIC REVIVAL. THE STATION PROBABLY WAS DESIGNED BY E. FRANCIS BALDWIN, WHO SERVED AS ARCHITECT OF OTHER B&O RAILROAD STRUCTURES DURING THIS TIME PERIOD.

THE BUILDING HAS BEEN CAREFULLY MAINTAINED BY THE RAILROAD AND IS A POPULAR SUBJECT WITH MODEL RAILROADERS.

THIS RECORDING PROJECT WAS CONDUCTED BY THE HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD (HAER), A LONG-RANGE PROGRAM TO DOCUMENT HISTORICALLY SIGNIFICANT ENGINEERING AND INDUSTRIAL SITES IN THE UNITED STATES. HAER IS ADMINISTERED BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR. THE B&O RAILROAD SURVEY WAS COSPONSORED DURING THE SUMMER OF 1970 BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE UNDER THE DIRECTION OF JAMES C. MASSEY, CHIEF, HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY; THE DIVISION OF MECHANICAL & CIVIL ENGINEERING, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF HISTORY & TECHNOLOGY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION; THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CIVIL ENGINEERS (ASCE); AND THE CHESAPEAKE & OHIO BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD.

FIELD WORK, MEASURED DRAWINGS, AND PHOTOGRAPHS WERE PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF ERIC DeLONY (COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY), PROJECT SUPERVISOR, AND ROBERT M. VOGEL OF THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, PROJECT ADVISOR. RECORDING TEAM MEMBERS INCLUDED STUDENT ARCHITECTS GREGORY S. BREZINSKI (UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA), JEFFREY R. JENKINS (UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI), MICHAEL G. MASNY (UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS), AND CHARLES A. PARROTT III (UNIVERSITY OF IOWA). DRAWINGS OF POINT OF ROCKS STATION WERE COMPLETED BY DONALD G. PRYCE AND TIM WOLOSZ IN 1971, AND CHRISTOPHER V. STROIK IN 1984.

DRAWN BY: CHRISTOPHER V. STROIK, 1984	NAME AND LOCATION OF STRUCTURE B & O RR POINT OF ROCKS STATION, 1875 200 FT SOUTH OF STATE RT. 28, 0.5 MI. EAST OF U.S. 15 FREDERICK CO.	RECORD NO. MD 14	HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD SHEET 1 OF 3 SHEETS
OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION B & O RAILROAD SURVEY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR	POINT OF ROCKS	MARYLAND	

Map showing B&O Railroad Point of Rocks station, 1984.  
(Drawn by Christopher V. Stroik, National Park Service,  
Historic American Engineering Record. Retrieved from the Library of Congress)

when it had to pay a steep price for being a pioneering railroad: its original line between Baltimore and Point of Rocks had to be virtually rebuilt because of its decision to build the line with tight curves and iron-capped wooden rails. They had once been adequate for slow and lightweight engines, but not the heavier and faster engines now in use. Trains derailed on the curves, and wooden rails broke under their weight. Straightening the line and replacing the wooden rails with ones made of iron would be time consuming and costly.

Moreover, wooden rails were not only antiquated, their iron strips were also a liability and a danger to riders. They would rip loose, tear through the bottom

of coaches, and terrify passengers. They were given the ominous name "snake heads."

Still, the Baltimore and Ohio was fortunate. Unlike many newer railroads that went bankrupt and were forced to shut down, it managed to stay in business during the depression with income from its existing operations, but not enough for a further extension. The principal task for the Baltimore and Ohio's president, Louis McLane,



West portal of B&O Railroad tunnel at Point of Rocks, Maryland, circa 1892.

(Photograph by William Henry Jackson. Detroit Publishing, Company negative no. 6116. Retrieved from the Library of Congress)