

Georges Creek & Cumberland Railroad

NOTE: This article is based on information provided by W. Raymond Hicks in his March 1952 article published in *R&LHS Bulletin* No. 85, by Deane E. Mellander in his 1981 book, *Rails to the Big Vein: The Short Lines of Allegany County, Maryland* (Potomac Chapter NRHS, Kensington MD), and by Patrick H. Stakem in his 2002 book, *Cumberland & Pennsylvania Railroad Revisited* (Pats Railroad Books, Laurel MD), especially pages 21-22 and 70-71.

On 17 January 1907, the expanding Western Maryland Railroad purchased the controlling stock interests of the Georges Creek & Cumberland (GC&C) Railroad, which had existed as an independent company operating trains over a twenty-mile long track between Cumberland, LaVale, Vale Summit, Midland, and Lonaconing for more than 26 years. Just fourteen months earlier in November 1905, the WM railroad had acquired over 112 miles of track between Cumberland and Elkins WV, which had once been the main line of the West Virginia Central Railway, built during past quarter century under the leadership of the eminent Henry Gassaway Davis (1823-1916), recent Democratic candidate for Vice President of the United States. Also the WM Railroad had recently completed the construction of its own 78-mile long rail line between Hagerstown, Hancock, and Cumberland, with its first freight train making the inaugural trip on 15 March 1906.

A little over a quarter century earlier, the GC&C Railroad began as the reaction to the high price of transporting coal on the sole existing railroads to and from Cumberland, the local Cumberland & Pennsylvania (C&P) Railroad, and the long-distance Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) Railroad. By the 1870s, the C&P Railroad, owned by the Consolidation Coal Company, had the only track which provided transport service in and out of the coal-rich Georges Creek Valley. Similarly, the B&O Railroad provided the only major rail link to large coal using areas such as the iron and steel plants around Pittsburgh or the East Coast metropolitan centers of Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York.

The solution for two independent coal mining companies, the American Coal Company and the Maryland Coal Company, was get coal transportation cost down by introducing greater railroad competition in Cumberland and the Western Maryland region. The plan was two-fold: (1) Get the Pennsylvania Railroad involved by building a six-mile long connecting line between the PRR's Bedford & Bridgeport track at State Line and the northwest end of Cumberland; and (2) build a 20-mile long railroad between Cumberland and the Georges Creek Valley which would be a rival to the Consol-owned C&P Railroad. Construction on the GC&C Railroad began in the late 1870s. An impressive 18-stall roundhouse with turntable was built in Cumberland near the junction of North Centre Street with North Mechanic Street (where the Southern States Cooperative Supply Store is now located). A double span thru-truss steel bridge carried the GC&C track over Wills Creek at an angle to a place called City Junction. For the first mile, the GC&C track ran next to Wills Creek, along the southwestern side of the Narrows, and opposite to the B&O and C&P tracks on the other side of the Narrows.

At the western end of the Narrows, the GC&C track turned southward and slowly climbed the western slope of Haystack Mountain. Here in LaVale, the GC&C track ran parallel to the old National Road and the C&P's Eckhart Branch line, but about fifty to a hundred feet higher on the side of the mountain ridge. At the southwestern end of LaVale, a long, curving wooden trestle bridge, known as the Winchester Road Viaduct (Bridge 42), carried the GC&C track from the western slope of Haystack Mountain to the northern end of Dans Mountain.

About seven miles west of Cumberland, the GC&C passed through two short tunnels, measuring between 498 and 281 feet long, which bore into promontory outcrops of Dans Mountain. These two tunnels were similar to the two tunnels on the earlier C&P Eckhart Branch line farther down the mountain slope.

High above Clarysville, the GC&C track bends around to the western side of Dans Mountain and goes southward to Vale Sum-

mit. Here the rail line enters the rich coal region of the Georges Creek Valley. A couple of miles farther, the GC&C track arrives at Midland, where the rail line divides. One track, known as the Jackson Branch, continues southward another few miles along the western slope of Dans Mountain to the Bivecol Mine and other coal mines on the eastern side of the Georges Creek Valley. The other track crossed the long Midland Trestle (Bridge 137), going over the C&P main line and Georges Creek to the western side of the valley. This rail line provided service for the Koontz Mine and the Kingsland Mine of the Maryland Coal Company. The 20-mile long GC&C Railroad between Cumberland and Lonaconing by way of LaVale and Vale Summit was completed on 1 March 1880.

Motive power for the GC&C Railroad was provided by ten steam engines constructed by the Pittsburgh Locomotive & Car Works. The first five were built as a group in 1880, and the remaining five were built individually in 1882, 1888, 1890, 1891, and 1895. All were 2-8-0 Consolidation-type freight locomotives except for GC&C 6, which was a 4-6-0 "ten-wheeler" passenger locomotive. Other rolling stock consisted of 200 coal hoppers, ten flatcars, and two boxcars in 1884.

The GC&C Railroad had several passenger cars, which along with the GC&C 6 locomotive, would form a passenger train that made two round trips between Cumberland and Lonaconing every day except Sundays. As of 18 January 1887, the GC&C passenger train would leave Cumberland from the new WVC Railway station on the corner of Baltimore and Canal streets at 7:15 AM and 1:30 PM for the 75 minute trip to Vale Summit, where after a two hour and fifteen minute layover, the train would return back to Cumberland, arriving there at 12 noon and at 6:15 PM respectively.

GC&C trains operated in this manner for over 26 years. Even after control of the GC&C Railroad went to the Western Maryland Railroad in January 1907, there was no sudden change in the daily operation. The primary reason for the acquisition of this short line railroad in Allegany County, Maryland, was so that the Gould interest controlling the WM Railroad could use the provision in the GC&C Railroad's charter to build a rail line from Cumberland to the Pennsylvania state line in the

direction of Connellsville PA, and so connect with the Pittsburgh & Lake Erie (P&LE) Railroad as part of a plan to form a single railroad that would link the Atlantic Coast with the Pacific Coast.

Although the financial panic of 1907 caused the over-extended WM Railroad to go bankrupt, just a year later the railroad company was reorganized under the name of the Western Maryland Railway. Using the provision, of the GC&C Railroad charter, the WM Railway did build its new rail line between Cumberland and Connellsville during 1910 through 1912. The full merger and consolidation of the GC&C Railroad with the WM Railway took place on 23 January 1917.

Two decades later, during the Great Depression of the 1930s, rail traffic on the old GC&C track was greatly reduced. On 18 March 1939, the WM Railway Company filed a petition with the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) requesting permission to abandon 13.38 miles of old GC&C Railroad track between Narrows Park and Midland. The still active remainder of old GC&C track west of Midland was linked with the C&P main line track through connecting rails at Jackson Junction and Lonaconing Junction.

Today, little still remains of the historic GC&C Railroad. Sections of the old road bed may be found if one is careful to look for them. Georges Creek Boulevard in LaVale was built on top of parts of the old GC&C right-of-way. The east-bound lanes of Interstate Route 68 on the northern end of Dans Mountain have obliterated most traces of the old GC&C road bed which once existed there. At City Junction in Cumberland's North End, there still remains the two-span, thru-girder bridge over Wills Creek, built to replace the earlier GC&C bridge that was washed away during the devastating Saint Patrick's Day flood of 1936. Also still in use is the mile-long portion of the GC&C right-of-way in the Narrows now utilized by the Western Maryland Scenic Railroad excursion trains. Perhaps most impressive is the Second Empire style Victorian house at 24 Washington Street; this structure, now known as Emmanuel House, was built in the late 1870s to be the residence of the GC&C Railroad's first general manager and later its president, James Allaire Millholland (1842-1911).