

# A bridge route in the most literal sense

The Lehigh & Hudson River was short but strategically located

**T**he Lehigh & Hudson River Railway was a bridge route in the most literal sense. For much of L&HR's lifetime, New England freight moving via the 6,747-foot-long (including approaches), 212-foot-high Poughkeepsie Bridge over the Hudson River at that New York town was L&HR's essential lifeblood and key to profitability. On-line agricultural, mineral, manufacturing, and passenger business, important in the early years, became increasingly marginal as time passed.

Possessing only 73 route-miles of its own, the L&HR had rights on 35 miles of three of its connections: Jersey Central, Lackawanna, and Pennsylvania. L&HR's own single track was protected by block signals after 1913 and operated under timetable and train-order rules. The locomotive roster was modest in quantity but similar in steam wheel arrangements and diesel models to its neighboring lines. Operated and maintained from headquarters in the rural community of Warwick, N.Y., L&HR always enjoyed a hometown employee base with a strong sense of local pride, loyalty, and identity. Although short in miles, the L&HR was a tenacious competitor to the end and impressive in performance.

Its origins date to 1860, when arrival of "The Work of the Age," the New York & Erie Railroad, at Greycourt, N.Y., 10 miles north of Warwick, prompted construction of the Warwick Valley Railroad under the leadership of Grinnell Burt. A man of integrity, Burt would make a name as a railroad builder. The



Frank Black; collection of Mike Del Vecchio

**Four of Lehigh & Hudson River's 13 RS3's gather at Andover Junction, N.J., in April 1954. The striping pattern was different on their short hoods from that visible here on their long hoods.**

Warwick Valley operated as a 6-foot-gauge feeder to the same-gauge NY&E, using the big road's equipment for two decades. Around 1880, WV assumed its own operations, was standard-gauged, and built the 11-mile Wawayanda Railroad, which tapped agricultural and mineral sources at McAfee, N.J. Further extension southward (westward by timetable) soon followed.

Two projected competitive lines joined as the Lehigh & Hudson River Railroad, extending from a PRR connection at Belvidere, N.J., on the Delaware River, to Hamburg, N.J., where

three miles of isolated Sussex Railroad track linked it to the Warwick Valley. In 1882 the extensions were folded into the 61-mile Lehigh & Hudson River Railway.

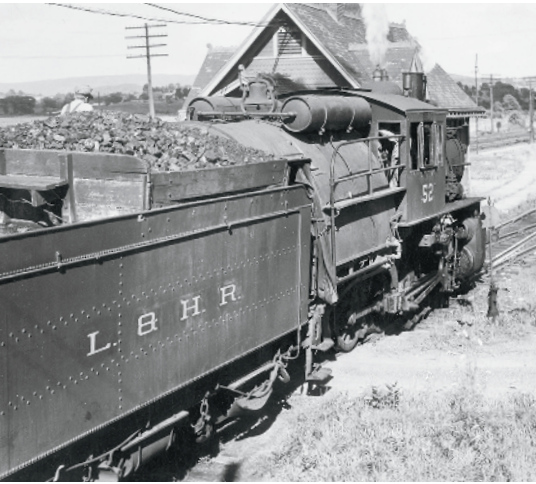
In addition to the New York & Erie's mainline business at Greycourt, its Newburgh Branch provided access to Hudson River carferries crossing to the New York & New England's Fishkill Landing. Anthracite coal, particularly from mines of affiliate Lehigh Coal & Navigation, was a major eastbound commodity. Anticipating completion of the Poughkeepsie Bridge a few miles upstream, the Orange County Railroad built north of Greycourt to connect with the New York, Ontario & Western at Burnside in 1890. Via trackage rights, this provided a first connection with the Central New England & Western at Campbell Hall, N.Y. Within a year, the Orange County was extended from Burnside to CNE's new Maybrook yard.

Simultaneously, trackage rights were obtained from the Pennsy over 13 miles of its Belvidere-Delaware Division ("Bel-Del") to Phillipsburg, N.J. There, disconnected subsidiaries undertook bridging the Delaware to access Easton, Pa., and the Jersey Central and Lehigh Valley. The bridge also opened in 1890, creating a three-state route of



Donald W. Furler

**L&HR looks like big-time railroading as engine 11, one of three 1944 Baldwin B&M 4-8-2 duplicates, charges west at Sugar Loaf, N.Y., in August 1945 with a Maybrook-Allentown freight.**



Kent Day Coes

**Like most anthracite roads, L&HR relied on Camelbacks; it had more than 30. Fireman Moe Dunn rides 2-8-0 No. 52's tender as a local freight arrives at Greycourt, N.Y., an important junction with the Erie, in July 1946.**

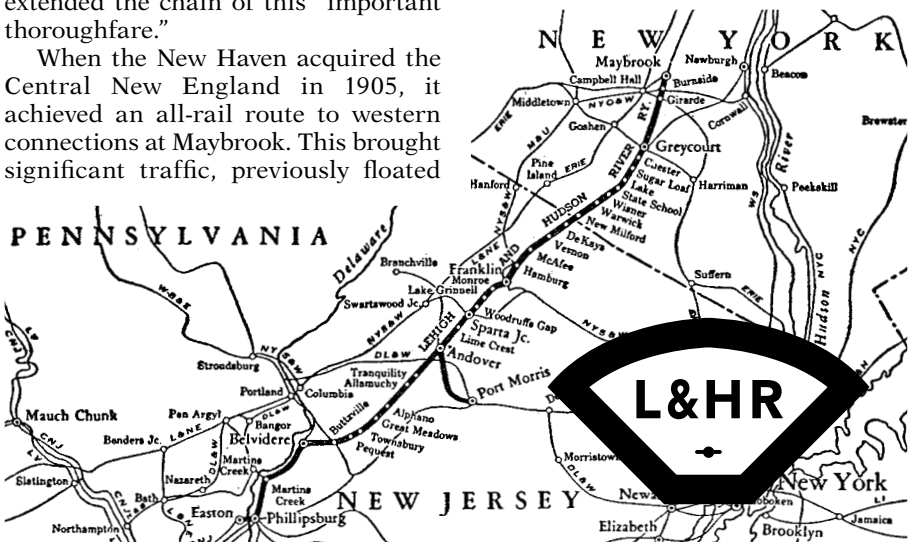
about 85 miles. The L&HR thus fulfilled the prescient faith of the line's 1861 directors, who reported, "It was well understood by those . . . promoting the construction of the Warwick Valley Railroad, that in all probability it would be but a link in a great chain destined to be one of the most important thoroughfares, and to effect an important influence upon the commerce and manufacturers of an extensive section of our country . . ." Additional links soon extended the chain of this "important thoroughfare."

When the New Haven acquired the Central New England in 1905, it achieved an all-rail route to western connections at Maybrook. This brought significant traffic, previously floated

across New York Harbor, to the L&HR. Especially important was New England freight moving via the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western. L&HR, with trackage rights on DL&W's Sussex Branch, gained a through connection at Port Morris in 1905, and more priority freight flowed through Maybrook. This formative year also brought rights over the CNJ to Allentown (Pa.) Yard, where the Reading provided additional western connections.

L&HR thus achieved a formidable and highly profitable bridge-route status which it would maintain for much of the century. An additional 30 route-miles were gained briefly in the 1920's when CNJ extended rights to Mauch Chunk (now Jim Thorpe), Pa., for zinc ore going to the Palmerton (Pa.) smelter.

Zinc, metallurgical products, and agricultural limestone were the most profitable on-line commodities for L&HR, along with milk shipped from creameries in the road's own cars. The Mine Hill Railroad Co., organized in 1891, reached quarrying operations at Franklin, bringing ore to the processing mill. Additional ore came from the New York, Susquehanna & Western's Hanford Branch. When this line was abandoned, L&HR bought two miles of it to reach the source. The road had about 100 ore cars to handle this traffic, which were supplemented by Erie cars provided to NYS&W when it was



**Note Lehigh & Hudson River's connections on this map, from the May 1945 Official Guide.**



J. David Ingles collection

**Alco's first two C420's are just months old in this late 1963 scene at L&HR's big Warwick shop.**

under Erie control. Spurs in McAfee and Vernon reached limestone quarries of Bethlehem Steel and other producers, much of it hauled to Allentown for interchange to the Reading or LV.

L&HR operated through passenger trains for a period beginning with the opening of the Poughkeepsie Bridge and again during 1912-1916, when the Boston-Washington *Federal Express* was avoiding ferrying across the East River. The opening of Hell Gate Bridge moved the *Federal* back to a metropolitan routing. To handle the train safely and quickly, and for the general improvement of its plant, L&HR upgraded with heavier rail and automatic block signals. Its own passenger service was local, with coach seating sufficient to meet demand. A Brill gas-electric car arrived in 1928 to handle mixed service west of Warwick, but it was destroyed in a grade-crossing collision in 1931. Connections between Warwick and the Erie at Greycourt, using secondhand steel coaches, lasted until 1939.

L&HR motive power was well maintained and notable for the center-cab and wide-firebox influence of its anthracite affiliates. Early locomotive types included 4-4-0's, 2-6-0's, 2-8-0's, and 4-6-0's by Cooke and Baldwin. All 20th century steam came from Baldwin: larger 2-8-0's (six were the heaviest of this type); four modest-size, homely 2-8-2's with Wootten fireboxes; four USRA light Mikados; and finally, in 1944, three handsome, modern 4-8-2's,

copies of Boston & Maine's R-1-d class.

Continually expanding heavy-industry, merchandise, and coal traffic found L&HR to be an expeditious route which avoided the congestion of metropolitan yards and interchanges. L&HR kept its physical plant up to the service demand by installing longer sidings, heavier rail, and upgraded signals and maintenance facilities. It was a link in several coordinated freight routes including the Central States (CSD) and Blue Ridge Dispatches. In 1950, it replaced 16 steam engines, including the 6-year-old 4-8-2's, with 11 Alco RS3's numbered 1-11; two more arrived in 1951. Radio communication came in 1958.

The 1960's began with a centennial celebration including steam-powered excursions with a borrowed Reading T-1 4-8-4, but seismic changes followed. The Erie Lackawanna merger in October diverted DL&W traffic to the former Erie direct route into Maybrook, a serious but not critical business loss for L&HR. PRR introduced "Trailer Jet" piggyback service between Chicago and Boston routed over L&HR, and additional TOFC traffic for New England came off the Baltimore & Ohio via the Reading and Allentown Yard.

Alco's first two production Century 420 diesels arrived in 1963, and seven more by mid-1966 shared assignments with the six remaining RS3's. The Penn Central merger in 1968 created a major threat to L&HR's traffic patterns because it afforded former PRR traffic an

in-house route to Boston over NYC's Boston & Albany, but it wasn't until PC's forced absorption of the New Haven in 1969 that the Selkirk gateway became PC's preferred route. Dependent as L&HR had been on PRR Maybrook traffic, this was devastating, and the connection was gradually phased out.

PC's bankruptcy in mid-1970, with the cessation of per-diem car payments to connecting roads, was catastrophic to L&HR. It sold most of the remaining RS3's, consolidated trains, and reduced all possible expenses. It ceased operation into Allentown in late 1971, moving interchange with CNJ and Reading to Phillipsburg. All went for naught, though, and L&HR joined several other northeastern roads in bankruptcy on April 19, 1972.

What would be the final blow occurred in May 1974 when the Poughkeepsie Bridge suffered significant fire damage, providing PC an opportunity to close the Maybrook route to New England. L&HR did its best to force a reopening through political means, even offering its own maintenance force for repairs, but PC was intransigent, and the bridge remained closed. L&HR labor and management cooperated to keep the line running on limited traffic while constantly fighting to collect its traditional rate divisions from PC on detoured traffic.

In 1976 the Federal Regional Rail Reorganization Act that created Conrail took in most northeastern bankrupts including L&HR, and CR's management proved as committed to abandonment of the Maybrook Gateway as PC had been. The former L&HR, reduced to a Conrail branch, limped along, bearing slight resemblance to its former proud, busy self as a few of the remaining C420's served a dwindling customer base. Rail movement of zinc ended in 1980, and the track between Limecrest and Belvidere was removed a few years later.

To the credit of its president, W. Gifford Moore, and trustee, John G. Troiano, L&HR paid off its creditors and nobly entrusted its historical records to the Railroad Museum of Pennsylvania. Since 1986, NYS&W has been operating over the old L&HR between Sparta Junction and the former CR Southern



Wallace W. Abbey

**Train HO-6, the “Central States Dispatch,” passes the coal chute at Warwick, obviously not needed by the RS3’s in charge. L&HR’s office building is visible in the distance.**

Tier line at Campbell Hall, N.Y. From the latter point NYS&W had rights over Conrail (now Metro-North and Norfolk Southern) to Binghamton. Susquehanna has some Alcos, so while the colors and models of locomotive and cars are different, Grinnell Burt would be happy to know that through freights and Schenectady-built power still roar over the route of the Warwick Valley. **1**

## **L&HR FACT FILE**

(Comparitive figures are for 1929 and 1975)

**Route-miles:** 97; 90

**Locomotives:** 34; 6

**Passenger cars:** 14; 0

**Freight cars:** 398; 2

**Headquarters city:** Warwick, N.Y.

**Special interest group:** Anthracite Railroads Historical Society, P.O. Box 519, Lansdale, PA 19446-0519; <http://arhs@railfan.net/>

**Recommended reading:** *Lehigh & Hudson River*, by Jim Boyd and Tracy Antz (Morning Sun Books, 2001); *L&HR*, by Ed Crist with John Krause (Carstens Publications, 1986).

**Source:** *Historical Guide to North American Railroads* (Kalmbach Books, 1999)