

Lehigh & New England: Based on anthracite

Owned by a mining firm, this coal-hauler aspired to go east of the Hudson

Although it is perhaps not as well known as, say, Upper Michigan's Lake Superior & Ishpeming, the Lehigh & New England was similar in being a transportation subsidiary of a mining firm. L&NE's logo of a white circle with a concentric red dot came to the railroad in the 1930's from owner Lehigh Coal & Navigation Co. Chartered in 1822, LC&N was one of the nation's oldest and largest anthracite mining companies and claimed creation of America's first commercially successful railroad in 1827. LC&N's declining fortunes led to L&NE's demise in 1961.

The railroad originated in a proposed 500-mile route to connect the Pennsylvania Railroad, near Harrisburg, with Boston. Shorter than existing routes, the line would avoid major cities by paralleling the eastern ridge of the Appalachians (Pennsylvania's Blue Mountain) and have proximity to the state's hard coal region. Several rivers, the biggest being the Hudson at Poughkeepsie, N.Y., would have to be crossed.

Begun as the South Mountain & Boston in 1872, the effort stumbled through bankruptcies, foreclosures, sheriff's sales, and reorganizations for almost two decades. Out of the legal maze and failed efforts of a dozen companies, the Pennsylvania, Poughkeepsie & Boston, incorporated in 1887, in 1890 opened a 96-mile route—almost half on trackage rights—between the Lehigh Valley at Slatington, Pa., and Campbell Hall, N.Y., on the Central New England & Western (later part of the New Haven).

CNE's 1889 opening of the Poughkeepsie Bridge promised eventual success by providing access into southern New England, but PP&B entered receivership in 1892 and the road was leased to Archibald A. McLeod's Philadelphia & Reading. But P&R was over-expanded and had to surrender PP&B the next year. PP&B lines in Pennsylvania were then leased to the LV, while track east of Hainesburg, N.J., was leased to the New York, Susquehanna & Western for three years. The road was reorganized as the Lehigh & New England in 1895, and a more astute management, plus an expanding national economy, put success in sight. New branches, spurs, and connections were added as the 20th century approached. Quarries for slate,



Bob Collins; Gene Collora collection

L&NE's signature location was its big Lehigh River bridge at the Lehigh Gap. Its locomotives burned anthracite and so had wide Wootten fireboxes; this is F-1 2-10-0 402 on May 16, 1948.

metallurgical and construction stone, and cement mills and farm products became sustaining sources of revenue.

New ownership, prosperous times

LC&N acquired the L&NE in 1904. It already owned several rail properties including the profitable 100-mile Lehigh & Susquehanna, leased by Central Railroad of New Jersey (CNJ) since 1870. Some of the smaller lines were then linked to L&NE. A period of expansion and income graced annual reports, mainly due to LC&N's connections to iron, steel, and other heavy industries along the Lehigh River. The railroad expanded to 175 miles, and better times were ahead. L&NE's lack of direct access to LC&N's Panther Valley mines was addressed in 1910 with the 32-mile Tamaqua Extension, westward from the main at Danielsville, which angled across the Lehigh River and used the Lehigh Gap to gain the western slope of Blue Mountain. It accessed the Little

Schuylkill River valley to reach LC&N's Panther Creek Railroad at Tamaqua. The Lehigh Gap bridge was impressive, especially with the arrival of big 2-8-0's and 2-10-0's, which began moving coal trains east in the 1920's.

Panther Creek's 15 locomotives and 60 miles of track became part of L&NE in 1913. A tunnel through Nesquehoning Mountain at Lansford had earlier provided a connection to the Nesquehoning Valley Railroad, another LC&N subsidiary leased to CNJ. L&NE would later reach LC&N's colliery with its own 2-mile branch from Lansford Tunnel. Several mines in this northeastern area of the Southern Anthracite Field were the source of LC&N's "Old Company's Lehigh" brand coal, and the firm's No. 8 and 9 Collieries were said to be the largest in the anthracite region. Their output now reached market via L&NE as well as Reading and Jersey Central.

L&NE was operated as two divisions in 1912. Lines west of Hainesburg were

the Pennsylvania Division, while lines east (including 18 miles of trackage rights on the Susquehanna and 17 miles on the Erie) were the New Jersey Division. Anticipating heavy tidewater anthracite business, L&NE got an additional 60 miles of rights, good until 1918, over NYS&W to Little Ferry, N.J.

New construction and purchase of Crane Railroad trackage brought L&NE to both another Lehigh River crossing and CNJ connection, at Catasauqua, Pa. The branch provided new connections with Reading and LV at West Catasauqua. Further, the 1.23-mile Palmerton Branch was built from the east end of Lehigh Gap to New Jersey Zinc's Chestnut Ridge Railway, providing access to the metal refining complex. L&NE began extensive modern shop and yard facilities at Pen Argyl, Pa., in 1914, centralizing operations and maintenance.

A 1919 valuation reported L&NE owned, leased, or ran 415 miles of track with 27 interchanges to 12 railroads, creating the impression of a terminal railroad, at least on the Pennsylvania Division. Actual route-mileage was closer to 200. A new yard at Arlington handled coal out of Panther Valley, and another at Tadmor, near Bath, took in soft coal for the cement mills and billed outbound cement loads.

Passenger operations had been local and confined to short runs in Pennsylvania, plus a Goshen, N.Y., to Swartswood, N.J., service. Two Brill Model 250 gas-electric cars arrived during 1926–28 and worked until the end of passenger



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Brill car 90 moved to a New York short line.

service in 1938. During 1930–1945, the CNJ-RDG *Williamsporter* passenger service used L&NE as a link for 6 miles between Hauto and Tamaqua.

The 1922–1931 period brought 17 engines—some of the heaviest of their types—to L&NE: 7 E-14 class 2-8-0's, 6 I-5 0-8-0's, and 4 F-1 2-10-0's. They were most welcome on coal drags and the 2.74-percent grade of the Bethlehem Branch, where the E's and F's used Bethlehem Steel-built boosters on their rear tender trucks to advantage.

To provide lower cost for bulk shipments from cement plants, L&NE converted some coal hoppers into covered cement cars in 1932, possibly the first road to do so. Eventually it got a fleet of new and converted covered hoppers. Line cutbacks in the 1930's included the original west end from Slatington to Danielsville. Four 1915 PRR L1s 2-8-2's, made excess by electrification, arrived in 1941 (classed G-1 by L&NE), to haul increasing defense traffic including troop and POW trains. L&NE 2-8-2 503, ex-PRR 1719, was the last steam engine



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Two sets of FA's (and FB's) gather at L&NE's Pen Argyl, Pa., shop in October 1961, just before the end. Note the slightly simplified striping on the repainted 706, leading the set at right rear.

Fallen Flags Remembered



Gene Collora

At Bath Junction, Pa., on October 1, 1961, L&NE RS2's 651, 663, and 661 lead a coal train north from Allentown toward the cement district.



Gene Collora

L&NE employed six of Alco's workhorse 1000 h.p. model, the S2; No. 611 is at the Pen Argyl, Pa., operating headquarters in March 1960.

on L&NE's roster, though the last one it bought new, 1936 Baldwin 0-6-0 207, toiled in industrial use into the '60's near Detroit [see "Second Section"].

Line abandonments continued after the war as agricultural, LCL, some quarry traffic, and much of the anthracite disappeared, but the railroad's dividends continued as they had since 1913. An ex-U.S. Army center-cab Whitcomb, L&NE's first diesel, arrived in 1947, and by the end of 1949, 32 Alcos—6 S2's, 13 RS2's, and 10 FA1 and 3 FB1 road units—had replaced steam with a predicted annual savings of \$850,000. The simple black-with-white-stripe diesel livery was said to reflect the coal and cement commodities so essential to the road. More

off-line traffic solicitors were added, and an industrial development office was opened in Bethlehem with hopes that new traffic could replace coal.

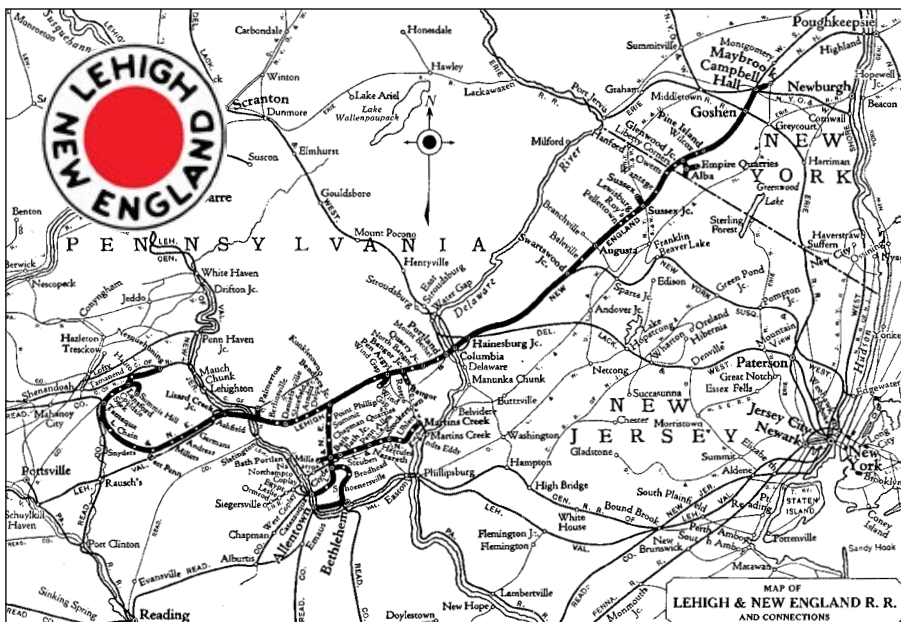
A 1958 study to partially consolidate L&NE with the Lehigh & Hudson River [Fall 2007 "Fallen Flags Remembered"] suggested the former cross the Delaware River at Martin's Creek, Pa., to the Pennsy's Belvidere-Delaware Branch. Trackage rights would then lead to Belvidere, N.J., where L&NE trains would enter L&HR and proceed to Maybrook, N.Y., for New England interchange. This would have permitted abandonment of L&NE's route east of Pen Argyl, including the Delaware River bridge. Embraced by L&NE and PRR, the plan

was rejected by L&HR.

In 1959, Pennsylvania's Public Utilities Commission reversed itself on an earlier ruling prohibiting over-the-road truck haulage of bulk cement. It was feared that 50 percent or more of this remunerative commodity would leave L&NE as a result, and this proved to be the case almost immediately. From the mid-1940's to the mid-'50's, LC&N management had stubbornly believed that anthracite would revive and poured improvement capital into mines and breakers rather than employing a diversification strategy. When it finally did so, its choices did poorly in the economic downturn of the late 1950's, and it feared L&NE would become another albatross. More than 70 years of rental income, once good for \$2 to \$3 million per year from CNJ's use of the Lehigh & Susquehanna and other LC&N lines that comprised CNJ's Pennsylvania Division, was diminishing as CNJ also faced declining business.

Profitable, but doomed

In 1960 LC&N's president had the rail holdings in mind when he reported that "... certain assets ... did not merit retention when measured by the yardstick of long-term earnings potential." Although L&NE was still profitable, only one-fifth of its 178 route-miles (main, branches, and trackage rights) was originating loads. Overhead traffic required only three trains a week to Maybrook. LC&N's directors saw larger and more immediate profits in selling off or liquidating their rail subsidiaries (L&NE in 1958 had a net book value of \$20,229,420). Although interested initially, the Reading didn't buy the L&NE,



This map anchored a 1940 brochure highlighting new 400-barrel cement covered hopper cars.

but CNJ, with an ICC guaranteed loan, picked up 34 miles and most, if not all, of the covered-hopper fleet. Erie Lackawanna also bought some track near Pen Argyl. CNJ formed the L&NE Railway in 1961 primarily to serve the cement mills still requiring rail service, plus a few miles at Tamaqua to connect Greenwood Breaker to the Reading.

LC&N's seemingly sudden decision to liquidate L&NE was not unexpected. It was still a nominally profitable railroad and didn't suffer the indignities that were to befall virtually all its northeastern neighbors. While some of the locomotives and rolling stock needed washing and paint, they didn't rock and roll over track plugged with slow orders, nor did the auditors face stacks of past-due bills from suppliers. Shippers were still getting good service. The Alcos rumbled through Lehigh Gap and over the farm fields of New Jersey's Sussex and Orange counties with decreasing frequency, but still did so at 40 mph. The last trains ran in October 1961, maintained and operated by proud railroaders working for a going company. **I**

L&NE FACT FILE

(comparative figures are for 1929 and 1960)

Route-miles: 217; 177

Locomotives: 61; 32

Freight cars: 3,457; 3,730

Headquarters cities: Bethlehem, Pa.
(earlier, Philadelphia)

Special interest group: Anthracite Railroads Historical Society, Inc., P.O. Box 519, Lansdale, PA 19446-0519;

www.anthraciterailroads.org

Recommended reading (and sources):

Lehigh and New England, by Ed Crist with John Krause (Carstens Publications, 1980); *Only Yesterday on the Lehigh & New England Railroad*, by Robert F. Fisher (Garrigues House Publishers, 2008); *History of Lehigh and New England Railroad Company*, by Randy Kulp (Lehigh Valley Chapter NRHS, 1972); *The Lehigh and New England Railroad*, by E. Douglas Lilly (Anthracite Railroads Historical Society/Garrigues House, 1988); *Death of a Great Company, Reflections on the Decline and Fall of the Lehigh Coal and Navigation Company*, by Julian Parton (Center for Canal History and Technology, 1986).