

Conrail GG1 4809 and a mate roll west along the Susquehanna River at Safe Harbor, Pa., on Oct. 21, 1979. The train is mixed freight WIPI from Edge Moor Yard in Wilmington, Del., to Conway Yard west of Pittsburgh. The Atglen & Susquehanna Branch can be seen above the train.

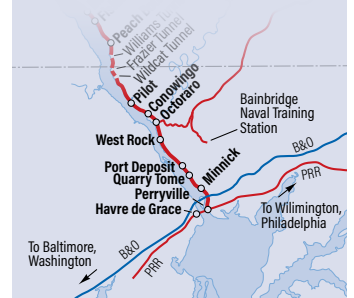
HOW A RIVER MADE A RAILROAD GREAT

THE PORT ROAD GAVE THE PENNSY
THE LOW-GRADE LINE IT NEEDED

BY VICTOR HAND // Photos by the author,
Center for Railroad Photography & Art collection



Map on p. 53 shows the Port Road and related lines from Perryville, Md., to Enola Yard north of Harrisburg, Pa.



Two privately-owned Canadian Pacific 4-6-2's head a Baltimore-Harrisburg, Pa. excursion west along the Susquehanna at Pequea, Pa. on May 18, 1969.

Fifteen-month-old Pennsylvania Railroad SD45 6217 leads an eastbound coal train through Cresswell, Pa., on May 18, 1969. The smoke at left is from the steam excursion pictured above, which has just passed Cresswell.



Two E44 electrics cross Conodowin Creek on Oct. 21, 1968, leaving Enola Yard (across the river from Harrisburg) with an eastbound freight. Famous Rockville Bridge can be seen in the far distance between poles.



// RAILROADS WERE BEING BUILT AT THE SAME TIME AS THE CANALS, AND IT SOON BECAME EVIDENT WHICH FORM OF TRANSPORT WAS SUPERIOR. //



On Oct. 4, 1968, two E44 electric locomotives pump air at the east end of Enola Yard in preparation for their departure with an eastbound mixed freight.

From colonial times the Susquehanna River has been an artery for trade between central Pennsylvania and the Eastern seaboard. In the early days, timber rafts were loaded with coal, lumber, and agricultural products. The boats were floated down the Susquehanna to the Chesapeake Bay and Baltimore. The products were sold, and the rafts broken up, with the wood bringing additional profit. The boatmen made the long walk back upriver for another load.

The success of New York's Erie Canal, completed in 1825, led other states to consider building waterways to protect their trade routes. There was intense competition between New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore for trade with the developing West. In Pennsylvania, the "Main Line of Public Works" legislation was passed by the commonwealth in 1826; construction started the same year. The state built canals from Columbia, on the Susquehanna River, to Pittsburgh, using the Allegheny Portage Railroad between Hollidaysburg and Johnstown.

Connecting canals reached up the west branch of the Susquehanna to beyond Lock Haven and up the north branch of the Susquehanna to the coal fields at Wilkes-Barre. In addition, private canals (the Schuylkill and the Union) were built between Philadelphia and the Susquehanna, and the Susquehanna and Tidewater Canal was built along the rocky lower reaches of the Susquehanna River between Columbia and Havre de Grace on Chesapeake Bay.

PARALLEL CONSTRUCTION

Railroads were being built at the same time as the canals. It soon became evident which form of transport was superior.

The Philadelphia & Columbia Railroad was built by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1834 to connect Philadelphia with the state canals. The Pennsylvania Railroad completed its line from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh in 1854, and in 1857 it purchased the money-losing Main Line of Public Works (the railroads and the canals) from the state.

A westbound freight led by Penn Central E44 electric 4417 on Sept. 5, 1976, crosses the Susquehanna River on the Shocks Mills (Pa.) Bridge.



Two Penn Central GG1 electrics head east with a coal train for Baltimore at Peach Bottom, Pa., on July 27, 1975.



Penn Central 6106 leads an Erie Lackawanna unit on eastbound Conrail train EJ-8 west of Shocks Mills, Pa., on Oct. 22, 1976.



Conrail GP30 2198 is eastbound on the Port Road with a coal train at Peach Bottom, Pa., on Oct. 22, 1978.



Amtrak E8 No. 321 exits Wildcat Tunnel near Wildcat Point, Md., on Nov. 21, 1974. In tow is the lone car of Amtrak train 430, a tri-weekly Harrisburg-to-Washington, D.C., run. Inset, Conrail E8 4020 eastbound on Sept. 5, 1991, heads the business train at the same spot.

By 1861 the Pennsy took control of the Lancaster-Harrisburg link and had a through railroad across the state from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh.

What was to become the Columbia & Port Deposit Railroad (known as the Port Road) began as a branch of the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad, built in 1866 between Perryville, at the mouth of the Susquehanna River, and Port Deposit on the east side of the river. By 1868 this line had been extended up the river to Octoraro, where construction stalled.

During this period the Pennsylvania Railroad was making major investments in the coal fields of eastern Pennsylvania. It was also looking for a way to move the commodity to tidewater while avoiding the heavy grades on existing railroads.

The Pennsy realized a near water-level route along the Susquehanna would be useful and advanced the money to complete the line between Port Deposit and Columbia in 1877.

At Columbia, the line connected with a railroad to Royalton, near Harrisburg, that had been built in 1850. By 1881, the PRR had gained control of the Philadelphia, Wilmington, & Balti-

more Railroad, giving the PRR access to those cities via the low-grade Columbia & Port Deposit line.

GETTING BETTER

The next big improvements came in the 1890s. Traffic growth prompted the Pennsylvania to build the Trenton Cutoff in 1892, providing a Philadelphia bypass for New York traffic. In 1902 construction started on the Atglen and Susquehanna Branch, a spectacular line connecting the Philadelphia-Harrisburg main line to the Pennsy main at Marysville, west of Harrisburg.

This new line met the Port Road at Cresswell east of Columbia and continued across the Susquehanna River on the 2,221-foot Shocks Mills Bridge to a junction with PRR's Northern Central Railway at Wago Junction.

The Northern Central line was used west to Marysville. The huge yard at Enola, across the river from Harrisburg, was built at this time. By 1906 the Pennsy had low-grade freight lines in operation allowing traffic from the West to reach New York, Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore, avoiding congested areas.



Four Conrail GG1s take mixed freight WIEN (Edge Moor Yard, Wilmington, Del.-Enola, Pa.) west at Safe Harbor, Pa., on Nov. 4, 1979. The electrics were long in the tooth, so Conrail often dispatched freights with four motors, in the hope that at least one would be running at the end of the trip.

Conrail 7658 heads west on the Port Road under the massive girders of the Atglen & Susquehanna Branch bridge at Safe Harbor, Pa., on Oct. 21, 1979.

// LOCAL PASSENGER TRAINS SERVED THE PORT ROAD THROUGH THE 1920S. THEY RETURNED TO THE LINE IN 1971 AFTER AMTRAK BEGAN OPERATION. //



Conrail 6210 leads freight PE-3 (Potomac Yard, Arlington, Va.-Enola, Pa.) west after a light snowfall on Jan. 22, 1978.

Empty Conrail grain train JSI-5 heads west at Peach Bottom, Pa., on Oct. 22, 1978.



Construction of several hydroelectric dams on the Susquehanna River early in the 20th century involved elevating the Port Road, and many improvements were made at that time to reduce curvature.

By the 1930s the Pennsylvania had a high-capacity freight railroad east of Harrisburg. The freight lines were electrified in 1937-1938 when the Pennsy extended that capability west to Harrisburg and Enola.

LATER LIFE

The Port Road passed into Penn Central ownership in 1968 and to Conrail in 1976. The latter discontinued electrified operations in 1981 when it rerouted most of its freight traffic to avoid high trackage-rights charges on the Amtrak-owned Northeast Corridor.

It did, however, continue to move heavy freight traffic for Wilmington, the eastern shore of Maryland, Baltimore, and Potomac Yard over the Port Road using an assortment of diesel motive power.

Local passenger trains served the Port Road through the 1920s but were eliminated from the line during the Great Depression. Passenger trains returned to the line in 1971 after Amtrak began operation.

The Northern Central line between Baltimore and Harrisburg had become run-down, and Amtrak ran the Washington section of the *Broadway Limited* over the Port Road until 1975, when this train was rerouted via Philadelphia. A section of the *National Limited* ran via the Port Road until 1978.

When Conrail was split between Norfolk Southern and CSX Transportation in 1997, Norfolk Southern assumed operations over the Port Road. Traffic is still heavy, but except for a few intermodal schedules, most trains operate at night to avoid conflict with passenger traffic on the Northeast Corridor. 📌

Port Road 1946

The PORT ROAD

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FIREMAN'S SIDE OF A "MIKE"

ON ONE OF THE P.R.R.'S CRACK SYMBOL FREIGHTS

by J.F. Quill, MD. DIVN, P.R.R.

ALL PHOTOS WERE TAKEN BY THE AUTHOR ON OCT. 22, 1946

AND, EXCEPTIVE NOS. 1, 3 AND 6, 15 ALL WERE TAKEN WHILE RUNNING



BRAKEMAN BERT MASTON,
CONDUCTOR Jim Mitchell
INSPECTOR (left)



ENGR J.E. "Jack" Pierce
VETERAN of 37 YEARS

P.R.R.
MD: Elec

OBSERVATIONS ON A FAMOUS PENNSYLVANIA MAIN LINE FROM THE LEFT SIDE OF THE CAB

BY J. F. QUILL // Photos by the author

On May 12, 1853, the Philadelphia, Wilmington & Baltimore Railroad Co. was authorized to build a bridge over the Susquehanna River from Perryville to Havre de Grace, Md., the principal condition being it also construct a branch railroad to Port Deposit, a distance of four miles. The estimated cost of construction, less locomotives and cars, was \$165,000.

Thus began the Columbia & Port Deposit Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad, an integral part of the Maryland Division. Today, 93 year later, the C&PD, familiarly known as the "Port Road," is the main artery that pumps the nation's goods into and out of the great freight terminals at Chester, Wilmington, Baltimore, and Potomac Yard, not to mention dozens of other points to which cars which roll over its gleaming rails are destined.

It extends from Perryville in a general westerly direction to Creswell, where it joins with the Atglen and Susquehanna Branch of the Philadelphia Division to form the main freight line of that division from Columbia to Harrisburg and Enola.

From Perryville to Creswell the distance is 38.3 miles; through its length it wanders, in the leisurely fashion of an age long gone, along the east bank of the Susquehanna through some of the most breathtakingly beautiful country imaginable. Its casual appearance belies the fact that hundreds of thousands of tons of freight roll daily up and down its hills and curves. Single trains whose consists march impressively to figures like 10 and 11 thousand tons are the rule.

Except for a short distance just east of Conowingo, the roadbed is never out of sight of the river. Twisting and winding at the foot of, and in places through, huge rocks and wooded hills now ablaze with all the glory of autumn, the vistas which unroll themselves like a series of magic carpets each more lovely than the last are truly indescribable. The great pity is that it is exclusively a freight branch.

Even the three huge power dams, Conowingo, Haltwood, and Safe Harbor, seem to compliment nature instead of detracting from her handiwork. The names of the tiny settlements through which the road passes are as picturesque as the countryside; mostly cottages use in summer and as fishing and hunting lodges: some of them are Peach Bottom, Fishing Creek, McCalls Ferry, and Pequea.

Electrified these past few years, the power most frequently seen consists mainly of the P5a boxcab and, as my engineer calls them, "sport model" (streamlined) P5as and the GGa electric locomotives, and about an equal number of L1s Mikados and M1 Mountain type steam engines. Steam is used principally on the Thurlow, Edge Moor, and Baltimore trains; electric power almost exclusively handles Potomac Yard trains.

Columbia handles, by way of CTC, what required 14 towers in manual block days. Trains are operated in both directions with and against the current of traffic, which is westward, by automatic signals and the Pennsylvania's famous four-indication continuous coded cab signals. Between points where rock slides are apt to occur, both wayside and cab signal



Top: Brakeman Bert Masten, Conductor Jim Mitchell, and a car inspector appear below a locomotive. Middle: Engineer J.E. "Jack" Pierce, with 37 years service, waits for Mitchell to highball the train out of Thurlow. Bottom: Class L1s 2-8-2 686 appears at Thurlow Yard near Philadelphia ready to leave with train TH1.



Conductor Jim Mitchell calls Marcus Hook Tower in the distance and the Mikado eases through the interlocking.



First stop, Bellevue. Edge Moor Yard in Newark, Del., isn't ready for the train's arrival yet.



Running the northbound track, the train eases into the yard at the north end to pick up at Edge Moor.



Now 32.5 miles from Edge Moor, the train enters the Port Road at Perryville via the north leg of the wye.

Twisting and winding at the foot of, and in places through, huge rocks and wooded hills now ablaze with all the glory of autumn, the vistas which unroll themselves like a series of magic carpets each more lovely than the last are truly indescribable.

circuits are connected with slide protection fences for maximum safety.

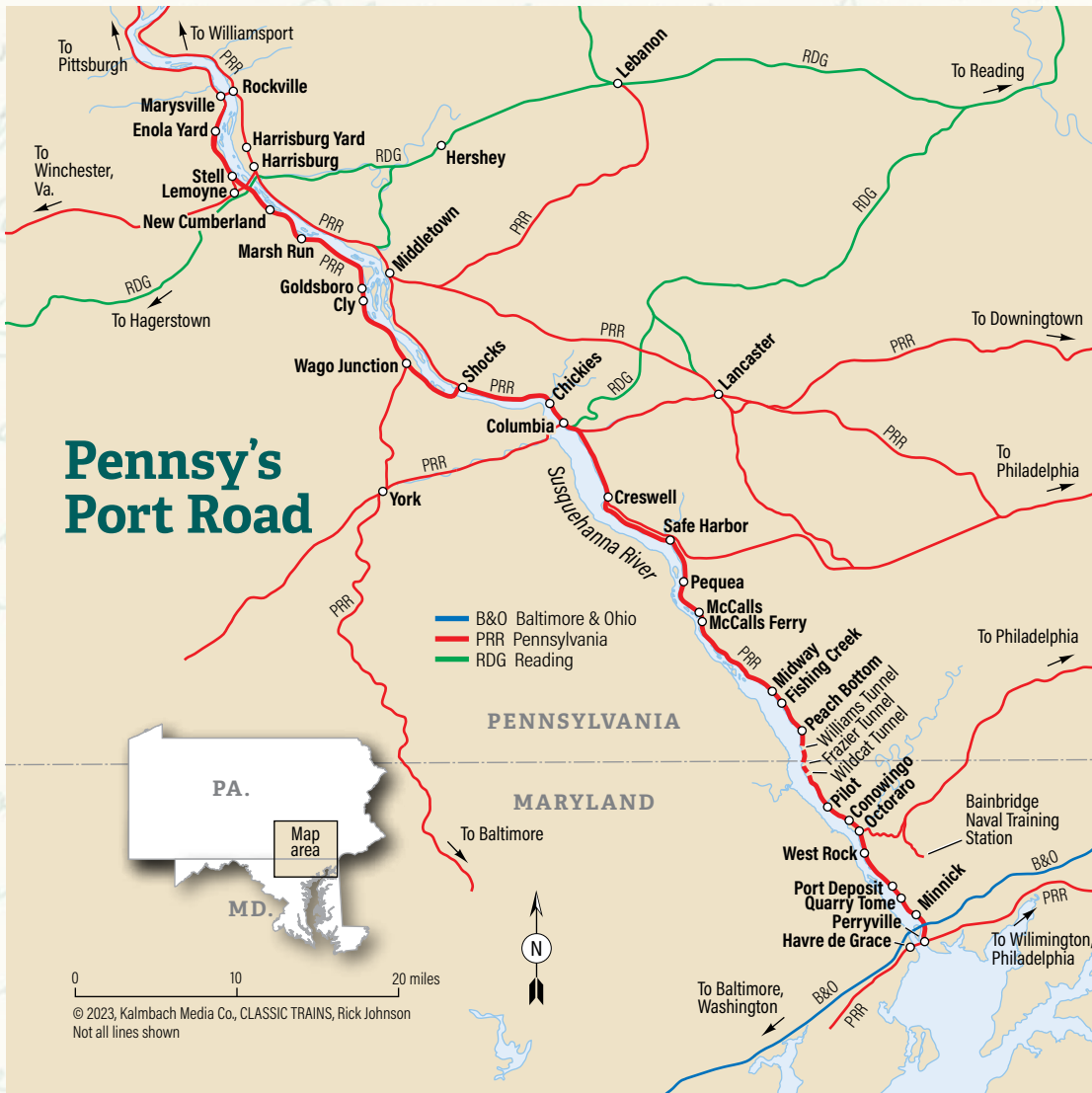
Sidings, of no assigned direction, and which are taken on signal indication, are at Pilot (145 cars) and Harbor (140 cars). Double-track is laid between Minnick and Quarry Tome and West Rock; Midway and McCalls; and numbered "one," eastward, and "two" westward.

The writer works in the pool which handles the trains known as "TH1" and

"Adv. TH1," TH2" and "Adv. TH2." Home terminal of this pool is at Harbor, headquarters of the Chester, Pa., district. Usually, we pick up cars at Edge Moor on the daylight job, TH1, leaving the yards there by way of the Shellport branch, which connects with the main line at Ragan, just below Wilmington. A little under 30 miles south we enter the Port Road at Perryville, which is a very busy tower, to say the least. There all the westbound freight

from Thurlow, Edge Moor, The Delaware Road, Baltimore, Washington, and Potomac Yard funnel onto the Port Road. East- and southbound freight from the west also feeds out on the main line here; and this betwixt and between all of the Washington-New York passenger traffic, local trains, Washington-Philadelphia express and freight trains, Potomac Yard-Jersey City freights, together with helper engines, work trains, wire trains, and sundry other traffic.

All steam-powered trains stop at Minnick for water. East Rock interlocking guides the single track Octoraro Branch



The train makes a water stop at Minnick. At left is a work train with a class H9s 2-8-0.

East Rock is the connection with the Octoraro Branch, which breaks off No. 1 track at left.





The train enters Wildcat Tunnel. There are three such bores — Wildcat, Williams, and Frazer — and they're really only holes blasted through huge rocks.



Near Midway the broad expanse of the Susquehanna is recorded for posterity.



A view west of Conowingo Dam, faintly visible in the distance. The rear of the train is hidden behind the nearest catenary pole.



Approaching Safe Harbor, the trestle of the Atglen and Susquehanna Branch looms. Left of here is the third of three great power dams along the Port Road.



West of Harbor, two of the overhead water drainage chutes are visible. They help direct water off the railroad right-of-way.



At Creswell, between Safe Harbor and Columbia, the consist trails back into double track at the point where the Port Road ends and the Philadelphia Division begins, 38.3 miles west from Perryville.



The train passes Columbia, and its tower, whose operator handles the Port Road. Here the Columbia Branch from Philadelphia joins the route, providing a freight bypass around Harrisburg.



Cly, on the west bank of the river now, we meet one of our crews, TH2 with M1 No. 6917, while taking water. Left are the tracks of the "N.C." (Northern Central), which handles passenger trains from Washington.



End of the run, pulling the train upon the hump at the huge classification yards at Enola, northwest of Harrisburg. In a few minutes 686 will be put away and the crew will head for the showers.

(once known as the Baltimore Central) into the Port Road. Here, during the war, thousands of U.S. Naval and Marine personnel changed direction en route to and from Bainbridge Naval Training Station, the branch from which joins the Octoraro about six miles above.

Wildcat Tunnel is one of the three holes blasted through solid rock to carry the roadbed. Even a camera can't do this justice. I ride this road at least six times a week and never tire of its glorious beauty.

Approaching Harbor, the A&S Branch, known as the "Low Grade," snakes out of the hill and on to the trestle to practically run over our heads to Creswell. The "Chute" drains the Low Grade roadbed and carries water over us into the river. Creswell ends the Maryland Division and begins the Philadelphia, going west.

Columbia, whose tower is now officially known as "Cola" (some of us are wait-

I've heard it said that a man who hasn't a hobby is already half dead. I'm one of those who makes his living at his hobby. Would you say that I'm twice alive?

ing for Perryville to be renamed "Pepsi"), was once a much larger railroad terminal; construction of the huge yards at Enola spelled its doom.

Cly, while not a junction, is the first interlocking west of Wago Junction, where the Northern Central from Baltimore via York runs alongside. From here to Lemoyne the four tracks are eastward and westward passenger and freight, numbered 1, 2, 3, and 4, from west to east.

I've heard it said that a man who hasn't a hobby is already half dead. I'm one of those who makes his living at his hobby. Would you say that I'm twice alive?

Sometimes I feel as though I am, for believe me, there's no thrill that quite

equals the one you get when you hear an M1 crack through those hills on a frosty morning, especially when you're making the stuff that make it crack.

Down along the Port Road, we often see deer coming down to the rivers to drink; duck by the thousands; quail, and pheasants so fat they can hardly fly. Swans have been seen along here, though I never have been fortunate enough to be around when they are. Warm summer nights are often scented with an odor like cucumbers, and you know what that means.

It's magnificent country. Railfans ought to get and prevail on the PRR to run a special next spring and fall. I'll go, and I work on the road every day. 🚂