

Lars Byrne log

3-4-10

Interviewed by Michael Kline in Philippi

Logged by Carrie Kline

1:00 DOB 3-20-49 in Elkins; our generation, 1920s-50. father always been in newspaper business. Owned Randolph enterprise. When I was 18 months old, we moved to Philippi. Dad ran the papers – Barbour Democrat. My brothers and I took over. I sold it but am still editor.

2:30 I'm not a Rrer, but always been interested in RR and Civil War. I've been a RR buff since 1998.

4:30 Through Philippi B and Gray Reunion I met Grafton Railroad Heritage Day folks. I volunteered some in Baltimore at B+O museum. All that gave me some of RR history legend being a rail fan. The behind the scenes aspects of museum in Baltimore taught me how to interpret railroad history.

6:40 b+o first routes, thru middle of civil war. 1820s Baltimore – b+o, ohio river by 1850s.

8:30 baltimore in competition with Philippi. Pennsylvania always enemy to B+O, so routed through then-VA. Had to go over mountains.

10:30 b+o was the schl of Rring of the day. Went onto Chicago. 1950s gigantic systems had to retrench. Demise since 1970s. a few giants left, CSX and Union Pacific.

11:50 more B+o history

12:50 turn of 20th century were hard times for Rrs, including B+O

13:10 golden years between wwI and wwii.

13:25 expansion of tucks under Eisenhower and interstate commerce

14:20 Philippi in Civil War

15:20 McClellan was a railroader

16:30 the Philippi Races

17:00 More Civil War/railroad history

28:30 B+O flooded Richmond with materials in 1864 and '65

29:40 Hengry Gassaway Davis, leap from Civil Wear to industrial revolution. Soldiers walking home saw natural resources and financial potential. So did big financiers, including Davis.

31:40 Davis' rise

34:10 burgeoning petroleum industry; WV was 8th ranked state in petroleum before TX and OK industry developed.

35:00 davis and Camdens interested in petroleum. Talks about Rockefellers, Goulds, Carnegies.

36:50 Davis sold WV Central and Pittsburg in 1905 to W. Md. RR in interest of George Gould, son of Jay Gould

38:20 in 1909 depression, Gould sold W. Md. End of Trans-Cent. Dream, so Belington bypassed.

39:30 business of America might've been transportation. Belington had steel rolling mill.

40:50 we had coal. Could've brought in iron ore. Instead brought coal elsewhere.

41:30 w. md. Returned to minor local line

41:50 after recession, down time in W. Md., while B+O grew
43:00 nice depots around Belington under Dan Willard, B+O chief
43:00 using coal refuse from Philippi due to needs of WWI.
44:40 America still developing then: electricity, glass industry built on WV sand, hauled by B+O.
45:30 clarksburg warehouse
46:00 golden age of the B+O – dan Willard era
48:50 w. md. And B+O were known as good places to work. Today’s workers don’t say that. Each new merger decreases bond between employer and employee.
50:10 B+O and W. Md. Shared track starting in 1930s; met in Belington; had strong ties to Coal and Coke.
51:15 2 lines at Norton
52:00 dispatchers at Norton worked for both parties
54:00 Rrs took turns picking up coal at different mines on different days
55:50 union rep. Ruled the roost
58:50 norton trains came from grafton; Buckhannon trains from Charleston
59:45 lots of unions, as different railroads merge
1:01:00 disagreements between unions
1:05:00 my earliest memories of RR. Remembers day 1st diesel came in mid-50s
1:06:00 june 1957: last steam engine was passenger train
1:06:00 model trains
1:08:00 got education degree; taught fire science
1:09:00 in 1989 resigned from blue and gray reunion; got more involved in railroad
1:10:00 used to go to elkins on bus as kid to visit grandparents
1:11:30 in 1960s economy here slows; interstate highways being built; rr loses mail routes and passenger service
1:13:40 fed. Gov. takes over Amtrak
1:14:00 from day 1, big railroads owned stock in small railroads. But by ‘60s didn’t need to have such lines; so w. md. Was eliminated, controlled by B+O
1:17:40 merger with B+O and C+O

Track 2

0:00 transition to Chessie System
1:40 today’s J.F. Allen salt train has a mix of old cars
4:15 strikes
5:40 transition to diesel. Steam easier to run.
7:30 train maintenance centers 100 miles apart.
8:20 diesel: you have an engineer and a fireman
9:30 diesel doesn’t need to stop along the way; less maintenance needed
11:00 elkins roundhouse burned in 1980s.
11:50 robot replaced 3 men to work on railroad
12:30 guy in Jacksonville, FL throws over switch 9 miles from Elkins
13:00 only biggest coal hauling Rrs had steam until 1960s
13:00 museum is building steam locomotive.

15:00 we have one of mountain's greatest wealth in Cass in form of people who know how to run steam technology
17:00 I have a shop book from 1910 on steam engine technology
18:00 making steam engines in this era – we're not tooled locally for this.
20:50 recreating the skill set to support steam in Elkins
23:00 instead of recreating local skill set, look nationally
24:40 belington mechanic was not laid off this winter as was last year, so 1 full-time job
25:00 now, we're hauling lots of salt and passengers.
27:00 electricians locally can learn to work with steam locomotive
28:00 we try to use retainer system instead of brake. Had an accident in PA.
30:50 We need to record stories of the old Rrers.
32:00 in 1920s had to join KKK to work on RR. Part of life in 1920s. Segregation in Philippi and elsewhere in 1950s.
35:00 Chestnut Ridge – Indian and former Negro slaves including Cherokee
36:00 people in southern West Virginia still not ready to talk all about mine wars, and I don't want to mention which RR the old gentleman worked for.

Track 3

0:19 building the railroads – logging trains in 1870s and 80s. Italian gang, german crew, black crew.
1:10 italians worked at cass. People kept separate by utility and race.
1:50 b+o went from Baltimore to Wheeling. Noel Tenney superintendent for black and Italian crews on B+O.
3:40 different ethnicities on railroad
5:50 dad wouldn't pose for picture with Rfk because he was catholic.
8:40 some tombstones voted for school bond in 1960s or 70s. so dad was trying to be conservative
9:00 failure of railroad, possibility of competing with trucking, can coal survive, etc.
11:00 reasons for not getting passengers door-to-door service again
14:00 some big city trains may service, many may not.