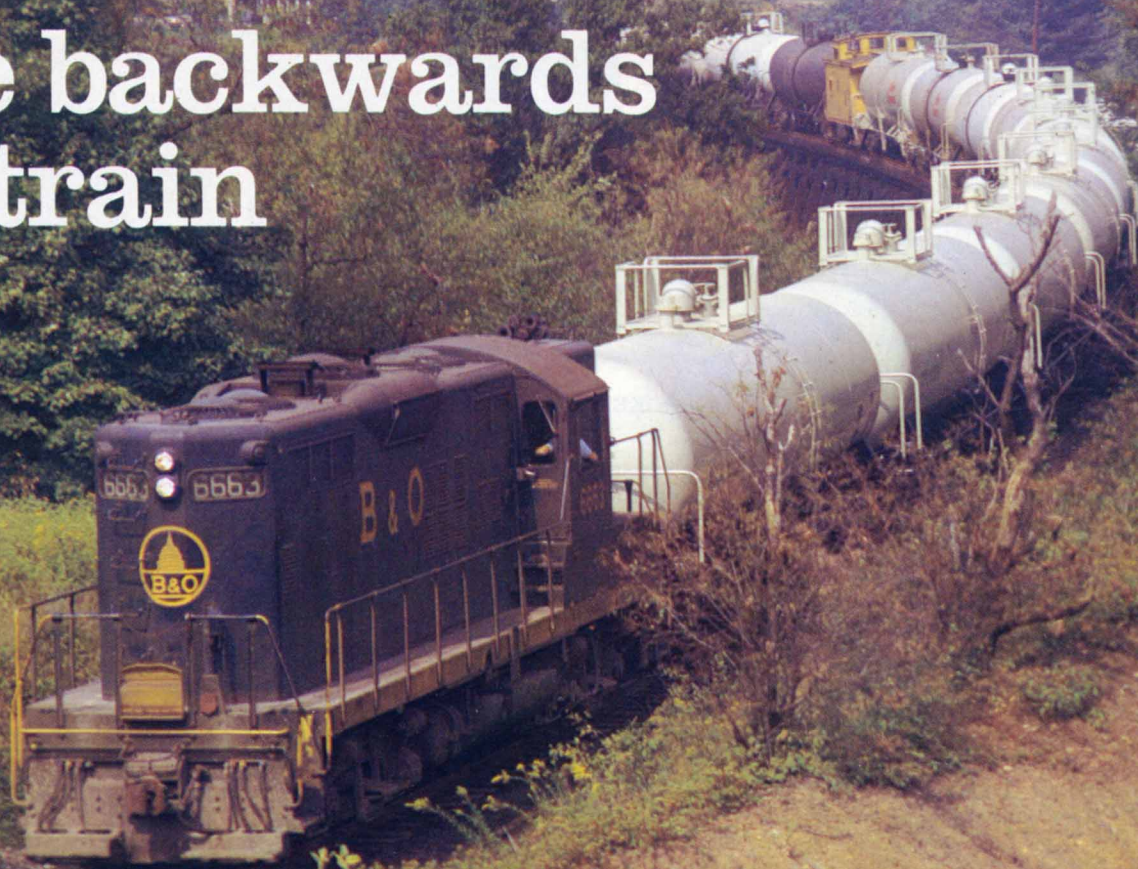


The backwards oil train



A surprise at the south end of B&O's CT&V Subdivision

JOHN E. BEACH

photos / **THE AUTHOR**

1 SWITCHBACKS are largely a memory in 1983. To be sure, thousands of tourists are intrigued every summer by the reverse movements at Cass Scenic in West Virginia, and until 1982, thousands of tons of limestone annually still zigzagged down from Monarch Pass on the Rio Grande in Colorado. The action is gone forever, though, from quaint but costly operations such as Great Northern's first line over Stevens Pass, Wash.; Baltimore & Ohio's route through Foxburg, Pa.; and Western Maryland's Chaffee (W. Va.) branch, home of the last of its Shays.

Even though most switchback operations have disappeared, along with the routes on which they were bottlenecks, the railroad fan who visits eastern Ohio still can find one in service on a main track. Three or four times each week, a Baltimore & Ohio local freight crawls across a long wooden trestle to what looks like the end of track, then reverses for another 3

miles to the real end of the line, actually on a former branch.

The switchback, at the south end of B&O's 70-mile Cleveland-Mineral City line, came into being not of necessity but by default. Until 1938, the line ended 2 miles farther south at Valley Junction, where connections were made with the Wheeling & Lake Erie main line and the Pennsylvania's Bayard-Marietta, O., line. Construction of a flood control dam nearby forced the abandonment of those southerly 2 miles, though, with relocation via trackage rights over the Pennsy to a new Valley Junction yard. Just enough of B&O's former main track was retained beyond the switch to permit short trains to reach the branch, so now the access is, in effect, a switchback. Also remarkable is that the bulk of the business on this 3-mile spur is oil traffic that has been around for less than two decades!

THE entire line was chartered in 1873 as the Cleveland Terminal & Valley Railroad, intended to tap the eastern Ohio coal fields and to provide a through route to Wheeling. (The

name has stuck around, for a century later it's still officially the CT&V Subdivision of B&O's Akron Division.) Construction languished until 1879, perhaps in part due to a novel "war" with the Atlantic & Great Western near Akron. The "Valley Road" attempted to build its track under the Erie predecessor's trestle, but the A&GW demanded tribute for replacing the trestle with a stone arch. The Valley at first refused to pay, but conceded when A&GW workmen with large stones were stationed on the bridge.

Train service between Cleveland and Canton began in 1880, and the line was extended south to Mineral City and Valley Junction in 1882. Connections were made there with a branch of the Cleveland & Pittsburgh and with the Wheeling & Lake Erie, which had just arrived from the west. The Valley Road had expansion plans, but the troubled "Wheeling" grabbed the initiative and pushed its own line through to the Ohio River by 1889; the Valley Road had to be content with a trackage rights agreement, worked out with W&LE in 1896.

LEFT: In 1972, before idler cars were inserted next to tanks, local doubled to branch at Mineral City with 15 cars.

RIGHT: In August 1959—i.e., before oil—one S2 left Mineral City with coal, clay products, and an empty box car.

That agreement gave both roads unlimited access to both Cleveland and Wheeling, and surely looked like a prelude to merger. Inexplicably, however, the Wheeling bought the Cleveland, Canton & Southern 1899 and canceled the trackage agreement. Having lost its route to Wheeling, the Valley Road became affiliated with the Baltimore & Ohio, which bought it in 1915 for better access to Cleveland's industries.

As part of the B&O, the Valley Road persisted for a while as a semblance of a through Cleveland-Wheeling route, with B&O trains running over 7 miles of the Pennsy beyond Valley Junction to B&O's Cleveland, Lorain & Wheeling line at Dover. Mainly, though, the line survived by hauling coal from Valley Junction and local mines, as well as by serving a dozen or so clay plants, the steel mills of Cleveland, the rubber mills of Akron, and modest-size industries along the narrow yard in Canton. The connecting roads in Canton got the steel mills there, but B&O shared in that business via interchange and for a time even had trackage rights over the W&LE to the Republic Steel plant.

B&O inherited a flock of 0-6-0's, 2-8-0's, and 4-6-0's from the Valley Road, and the line south of Akron remained a haven for small engines until the end of steam. Eight-wheelers and Ten-wheelers handled the varnish until bumped by Brill motor cars shortly before the end of passenger service, and Consolidations were the mainstay of freight service. Mikados sometimes ventured to Canton in the early Fifties, but ore trains often were handled by doubleheaded Consolidations. On occasion, a brace of 2-8-0's would caboose-hop to Valley Junction to bring back a coal train.

THE Valley line is well known today for the weekend operation on its north end of former Grand Trunk Western 2-8-2 No. 4070, sponsored by the Cuyahoga Valley Preservation and Scenic Railway Association. The northerly portion of the line also hosted the *Chessie Steam Special*. Earlier, Louisville & Nashville's touring Western & Atlantic No. 3, the *General*, rode B&O rails to Canton in 1963, as did General Motors' *Train of Tomorrow* in 1950.

Regular passenger service on the

Valley ended in 1962 when B&O's last pair of Cleveland-Washington trains, which ran over the 36 miles between Cleveland and Akron, were abolished. Before the Great Depression, five passenger trains and three freights daily vied for the right of way on this single track. Three of the varnish diverged to the main line at Akron, with a local and the B&O-PRR Marietta train serving Canton and Valley Junction. For the 185-mile, 8-hour run to Marietta, Pennsy supplied most of the cars, but power was not pooled, since the arrival of both trains at Valley Junction at noon each day allowed each road to turn its engine and send it right back. The local passenger trains were abolished in 1930, and the Marietta trains' schedules were lengthened to include additional station stops. Through service ended in 1932, but B&O provided local passenger service to Valley Junction until 1935.

Diesels were still a novelty in Canton when the B&O opted for internal combustion in 1948. A single Alco switcher replaced the three Consolidations used on the two yard jobs and the Valley Junction local freight. The meager steam facilities at Canton were dismantled, except for the air-powered turntable and the water plug still needed by the two daily turns from Akron.

Business declined sharply in the early Sixties, and a yard crew and one of the turns were abolished. Then the two remaining road crews were combined into one Akron-Valley Junction local. Later, the Canton yard crew was also abolished, and what little work it had left was added to the "Canton Turn." Finally, the single Alco was replaced by first one, then two, GP9's to lift the heavy trains out of Akron. In 1976, well into the Chessie System era, Western Maryland Geeps took over the chores much of the time, but

in recent months they have been pretty much replaced by B&O's own Geep 9's, 30's, and 35's.

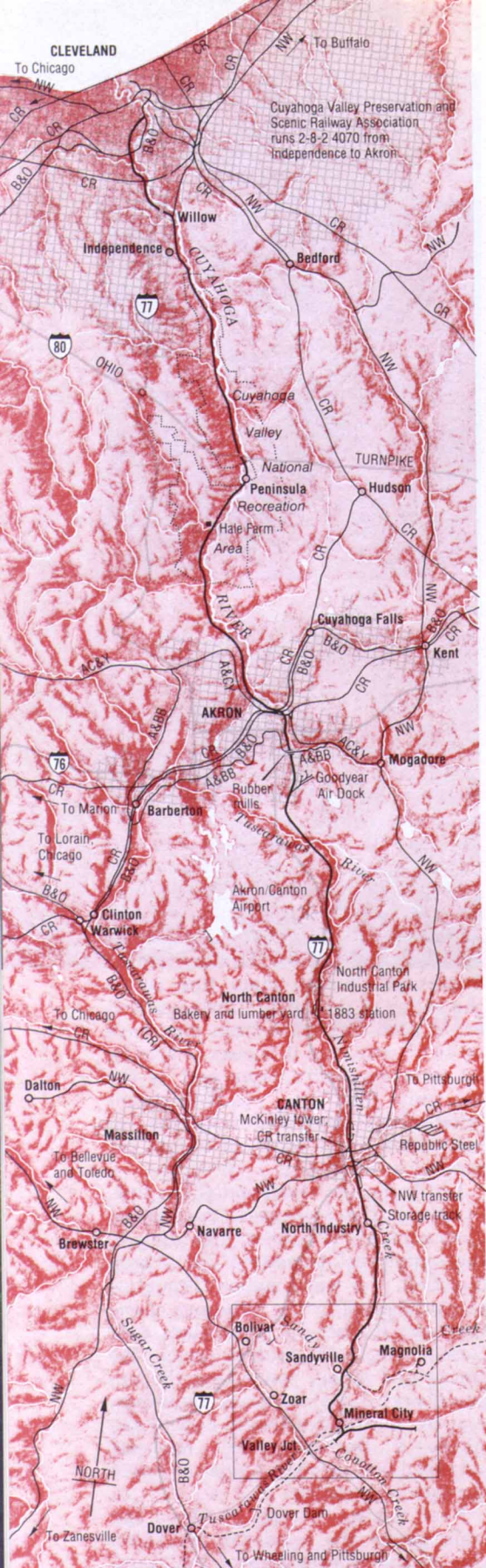
NOT much is left of the original operation, but the single daily train out of Akron is easy to follow owing to its leisurely pace, and since it is freight-only, the train-chaser need not feel any twinge of conscience over not buying a ticket! Called for about 9:30 a.m., the Geeps which normally handle the run are dispatched from the Akron Junction roundhouse, located at the foot of the fill that carries the Pittsburgh-Chicago main line across the valley of the Little Cuyahoga River. In good times, the train may have up to 65 cars, and it is easy to spot by its carloads of scrap iron and by the big white tank cars, which in recent practice are separated from the caboose by a single worn-out freight car serving as idler.

Unlike on the south end of the line, in Akron the scenery is man-made. Just a mile south (east according to the employee timetable) of Akron Junction, the train passes through a canyon formed by the buildings of the Goodyear Rubber Company plant, now closed. Enclosed bridges span the tracks and street, connecting the upper floors of the old brick buildings. A more substantial trestle carries the Akron & Barberton Belt Railroad overhead and through a side canyon of the factory complex.

Near the south edge of Akron the train passes the Goodyear Air Dock. One of the world's largest buildings, the arch-roofed hangar once housed the U.S. Navy's ill-fated dirigibles *Akron*, *Macon*, and *Shenandoah*. The giant airships have been gone since the Thirties, but aerospace manufacturing continues at the huge complex, which is switched daily by Akron yard crews.

The first of several summits is sur-





mounted just south of the Air Dock. On welded rail (which now extends to near Rock Cut siding), the train crosses the headwaters of the Tuscarawas River, a wooded but sometimes swampy, sometimes hilly area that is feeling the inroads of creeping suburbia. A gentle grade along a sluggish tributary leads to another unspectacular summit and the valley of Nimishillen Creek, which is followed for the next 20 miles. Woods give way to bottomland farms and finally the North Canton Industrial Park, a recent development almost entirely innocent of steel tentacles on cellulose sleepers.

A local bakery unloads box cars from the North Canton passing track, however, and cars arrive infrequently for a lumber yard siding across from the 1883 freight station. Switching is usually completed on the southbound leg of the run, allowing the camera-laden railfan several opportunities to juxtapose train and train-order board on film. The station has been closed for several years, and the structure would be gone but for a clause in the original right-of-way grant that requires it to be there.

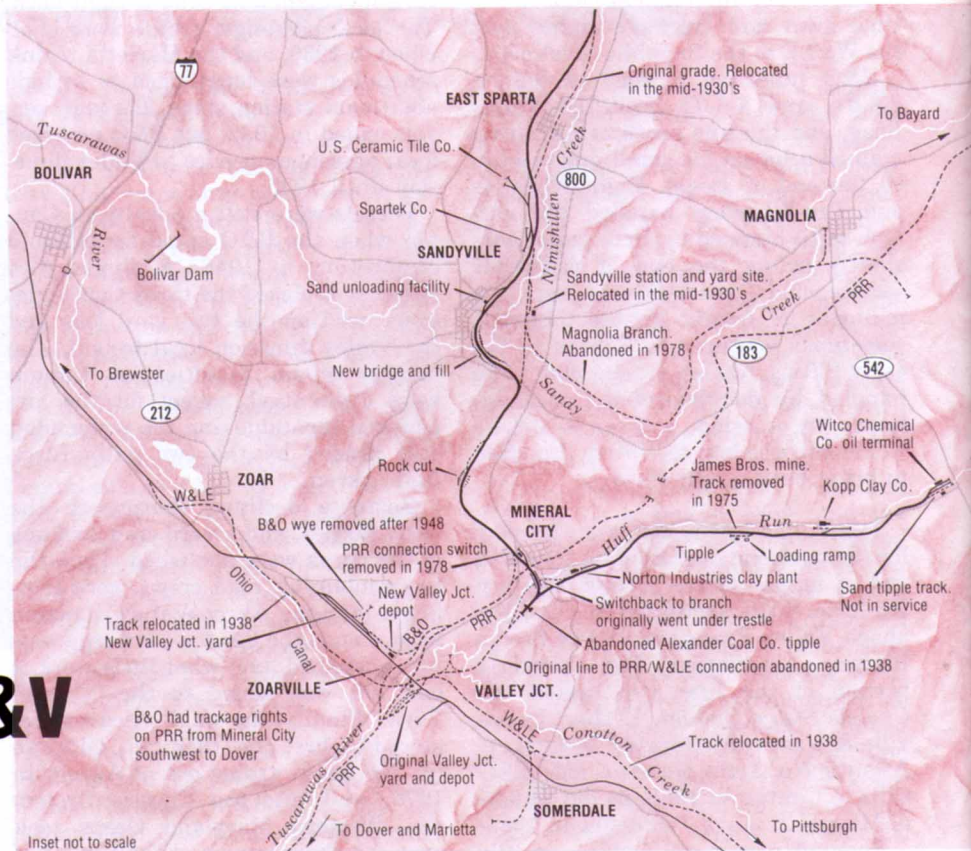
The 6 miles of line from there to Canton are almost devoid of rail customers. The train passes through another industrial park, more suburbia, a short narrow valley, and more than a mile of city park before coming to the meager Canton yard facilities.

Never more than four tracks wide,

the Canton yard consists now of little more than a long siding and a few spurs. Eight streets cross the yard at grade, and older industrial buildings line both sides of the tracks. Only a handful of those facilities still have sidings, and even fewer still ship by rail. Near the south end of the yard, the agent and the two-man section crew are housed in two small buildings left over from the time when steam engines were serviced there.

Immediately south of the freight station is the home signal of McKinley interlocking, where the CT&V crosses a Conrail main line, formerly the Pennsy's Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago Division and still the route of Amtrak's *Broadway Limited*. Formerly, a long blast of the whistle would alert the tower operator, whose view to the north is obscured. Today, a call on a hand-held radio will bring his explanation if he cannot immediately change the color-position signal to vertical green.

Nearly all of the Canton cars are routed to either Conrail or the Norfolk & Western, which crosses the B&O about a mile south of McKinley. Both interchanges have facing switches, however, and the simplest procedure is to work these tracks on the return trip. Accordingly, after getting the block at McKinley and stopping to tilt the target at the N&W, the turn proceeds to a storage track almost out of town and sets off all of its Canton cars. Upon return from Mineral City,



CHESSIE'S CT&V

Scale of map above

2 0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14

LISTENING IN:

B&O Ch. 1, 160.23; CR McKinley tower, 160.80; N&W, 161.25

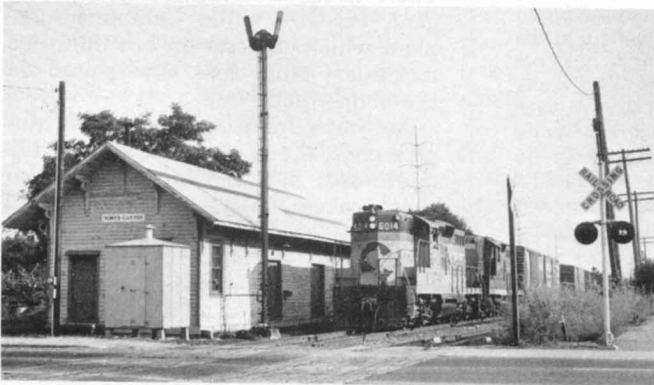
TRAINS Magazine — Robert A. Wegner



LEAVING Akron, the "Canton Turn" passes through the Goodyear plant complex, then under the A&BB.



GOODYEAR AIR DOCK is backdrop for northbound local in August 1978 as GP9's 6014/6678 race the 12-hour law to Akron.



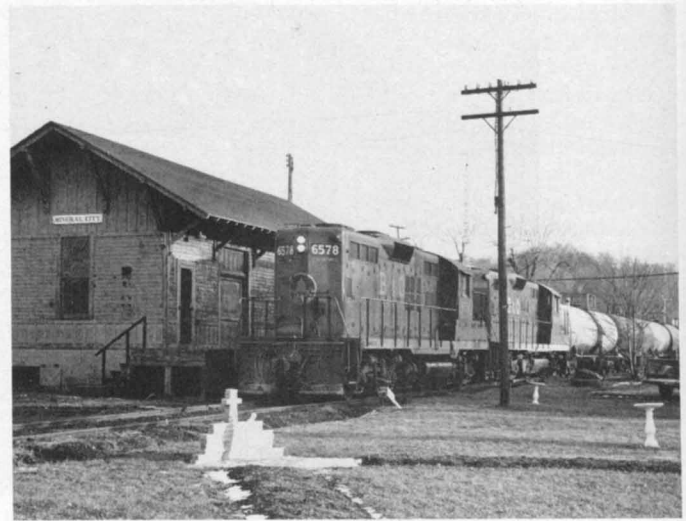
EARLY land-owners' heirs like North Canton depot as is.



MANUAL signal guards Canton "gondola war" crossing.



SOUTHBOUND local tops hill at Rock Cut in 1976 with empty tanks and two outbounds from East Sparta.



ABOVE, left to right: Behind the Mineral City Post Office is the lesser of the town's two trestles. Ten loads of petroleum trail the two Geeps past the Mineral City freight station in 1977; the neighbor's shrine occupies the former passenger station site. The James Brothers coal mine tippel, saluted by WM GP9 6400 in 1976, feeds the tender of ex-GTW 2-8-2 4070 but not B&O coffers. At the Witco Chemical oil rack in 1971, gravity helps ex-C&O GP9 5983 switch its loaded train.

the crew will "pull" the transfers and deliver up to 25 cars to N&W and 15 to Conrail. Then the private sidings uptown will get their cars, unless the 12-hour law threatens.

The runaway

I THE HOSTLER at the Canton engine terminal in the 1920's had a difficult job. The 11 engines serviced there daily needed their fires cleaned, ashes dumped, and tenders filled. Water ran out of a pipe easily enough, but coal had to be shoveled by hand from a gondola. With so much work to be done, we can understand his looking for shortcuts, and he did find a way to save steps in switching engines to the ready track. Really, it was quite simple: As he ran the engine past the switch, he would leave the throttle cracked, reverse the valve mechanism, and get off. With the right combination of throttle and initial speed, the engine would come to a stop clear of the points of the switch, and then come back past him. He would climb back into the cab and spot the engine where convenient.

On the last day of his employment with the B&O, he left the throttle cracked a bit too wide, and the engine came back so fast that he could not get on at the gangway. He did get on the footboard, however, but when he turned the anglecock he found to his dismay that the air had been cut out. Helplessly he rode his steed across the turntable, off the end of the track, and into a neighbor's house across the alley. I

TO THE SOUTH from Canton, the track runs perfectly straight for 3 miles, and the short train of tanks, boxes, and covered hoppers rocks along through a suburban area of somewhat modest property values. There is no industry along this tangent, except for the Canton sewage plant which on occasion has unloaded machinery from cars left spotted on the main track.

At North Industry, where the tangent ends, the grade turns perceptibly downward, and the track follows a short narrow valley through a wooded ridge. In ages past, nature's very own unit train, the glacier, blocked the drainage system of the area when it

The merry-go-round

I IN the latter days of steam on the Akron-Canton turn, the ancient turntable at Canton presented problems. For one thing, it was too short for the Mikes which would sometimes show up. For another, the old mechanism was worn to the point that it sometimes would not start itself even on the high-pressure train-line air used for passenger service. And so a clever expedient was found: If the turntable would not spin on command, a cable attached to the yard engine would give it a nudge. This worked well most of the time, but malfunctions were not to be avoided. More than once, the rails of the turntable failed to meet those leading to the rest of the railroad when the table came to rest, and it had to be restarted with the cable. At least once, the operator overshot his mark and gave the iron steed an extra revolution on the merry-go-round. And once, thanks to misguided signals, the yard engine pulled too long, too hard, too far. The cable drew up sharply against a utility pole, and fireworks erupted as power lines fell all over the yard. I





dumped its load of sand and gravel to the north. The lake resulting from the melting ice overflowed here at a low point on the ridge, cutting the water gap which Nimishillen Creek now shares with the railroad and a county road. An 1896 truss bridge here limits carloads to 240,000 pounds and prevents the use of units heavier than Geeps.

South of the water gap, the track follows the stream closely for a few miles and then turns upgrade at the first of two line relocations dictated by flood-control projects of the Thirties. The track skirts the village of East Sparta, first on a broad glacial terrace and then on a long fill which intercepts a portion of the original line which remains as a short industrial branch.

At the south end of the fill, where the right-of-way skirts a hill and enters upon another glacial terrace, the

train stops and a crewman makes a cut behind the East Sparta cars. The loads of sand, clay, and feldspar are then shoved gently down the grade to the remnant of the old line leading to the two clay plants.

Track arrangements of the plants differ somewhat, but both involve unorthodox switching. There is no run-around track, and the outbounds are routinely switched to the south end of the units by letting gravity pull them down the steep grades leading from the plants. After the inbound units are spotted, the outbounds, which are nearly always empties, are shoved ahead of the units to the Sandyville yard to be picked up on the return from Mineral City.

Ten tank cars are the most that can be handled at the oil-loading facility at the end of the line, and train length is usually adjusted by setting off or picking up at either East Sparta or

Sandyville. The storing of these cars in the one-track Sandyville "yard" is complicated by the presence of a facility for unloading sand imported from Texas. Ironically, Sandyville sits on a huge deposit of sand, some of which is distributed far and wide by truck. The inbound sand, however, is a special material which the oil drillers cannot get locally.

Originally, the Sandyville yard was equipped with more tracks and a track scale. It served as a holding area for coal from the branches and from Valley Junction. The old yard was on the flood plain, however, and had to be abandoned when the site became part of the normally empty reservoir behind Bolivar Dam. The yard as well as the village were moved to a natural terrace overlooking the old site, with a fill and a four-span deck girder to carry the track safely above the seasonal backwater.



VALLEY JUNCTION, old and new: B&O 4-4-0 764 paid a call at old depot, which sat at CT&V-W&LE crossing. View of new depot (opened 1938, closed 1970) in 1971 looks west. Beyond cut is four-track interchange yard; weeds hide B&O rails curving in from right.

Collection of John E. Beach.

The great gondola war

I TO a native of southeast Canton, it was just a track, not a battlefield, and the men who herded freight cars there were railroaders, not soldiers. The track in question was the interchange between the B&O and the Wheeling & Lake Erie's successor, the Nickel Plate Road. The "war" was over custody of the gondolas used to haul iron ore from B&O's port at Lorain, O., to the Canton steel mill, served directly by NKP and the Pennsylvania. For years, W&LE/NKP had delivered the loaded cars to the mill and returned the empties to the interchange. Suddenly, that practice changed. Instead of going back to their owner, B&O's gons were instead being dispatched to NKP's own port at Huron, O., and to the car-hungry mills and scrapyards at Canton, Mingo Junction, and even South Lorain, next to B&O's docks.

Why would the Nickel Plate do such a larcenous thing? Why, there was a car shortage, of course. And besides, NKP argued, B&O is stealing *our* gons down at Benwood! B&O tried to counter by routing the ore for PRR delivery but found quickly that the Pennsy was just as covetous and larcenous as the Nickel Plate.

Who fired the first shot . . . er, stole the first gon? No one can say for sure at this late date. The battle may have ended by ICC edict, but within a few years Republic Steel shut down its outmoded blast furnace, stopping the flow of iron ore as well as the dispute among the three Canton railroads over the use of B&O's gons. I

Though hardly a water-level route, the entire line from Cleveland to Sandyville closely follows one stream after another. Running water failed to breach the ridge south of Sandyville, however, and the original grade leads southbound trains through woodland and farms up to Rock Cut. Just north of the 80-foot-deep gash, rotting ties hint of the siding once used by coal trains doubling the hill.

The mile or so of 1.2 per cent between Rock Cut and Mineral City, while a trifle compared with, say, B&O's famous Allegheny crossings of Sand Patch and Cranberry, imposed severe limits on the small engines of yesteryear. The biggest steam power ever used on the line, an E-27 Consolidation, could handle only about 15

loads on the hill, requiring several trips when the W&LE delivered 40 cars of coal for Goodyear. The Alco switchers which replaced the steamers had perhaps a bit more muscle, but also had to double frequently. Trainmen still talk of the time they brought two cuts of coal from Valley Junction, gathered up sand cars from Sandyville, and started off from Rock Cut with 70 loads behind one little 1000 h.p. Alco. The 5000-ton train was too much for the single S2, of course, and the crew had to double from North Industry to Canton. Two Geeps are usually used today because of the heavy Akron-to-Canton business, but even one unit would suffice for the 10 loads of petroleum normally brought up the hill these days.

The operator

I LONG AGO, when labor was cheap and trains were frequent, target operators were on duty at certain hours at non-interlocked crossings in Canton and Mineral City. Night trains had to stop and align these targets for their own movements, but during the day when the passenger trains ran, an operator would throw the signal after making certain there would be no conflict with cross-line traffic.

These unproductive positions disappeared years ago along with the varnish they expedited, to be reincarnated briefly and very unofficially as late as 1972. It was during that year at Mineral City that I was amazed to see the oil train stop well back from the Penn Central crossing and hear the engineer give one very long blast on the horn. There was a long pause, and I thought, *That's strange. They usually pull up close and the brakeman gets off.* Suddenly, the door of a nearby house burst open, and a lad of about 10 charged out. Straight to the target he ran. Planting his feet firmly, he gave a mighty heave that flopped the target from horizontal to vertical. Two short blasts of the horn followed, and with the quickened chant of 567's the Geeps clattered over the diamond. As the caboose passed, the "operator" traded greetings with the crew, then cleared the target for the PC train which would never pass again. I

From Rock Cut, the train of tank cars drifts downgrade through woodland and hillside farms to Mineral City, a onetime brickyard town of perhaps 1000 residents (officially, 860 population). Although they're only 37 miles from Akron by now, the crew usually has been on duty at least 5 hours and is more than ready for lunch. Accordingly, after clearing a short trestle so the conductor and flagman can alight, the engineer reverses to clear the main street and joins his colleagues at the restaurant.

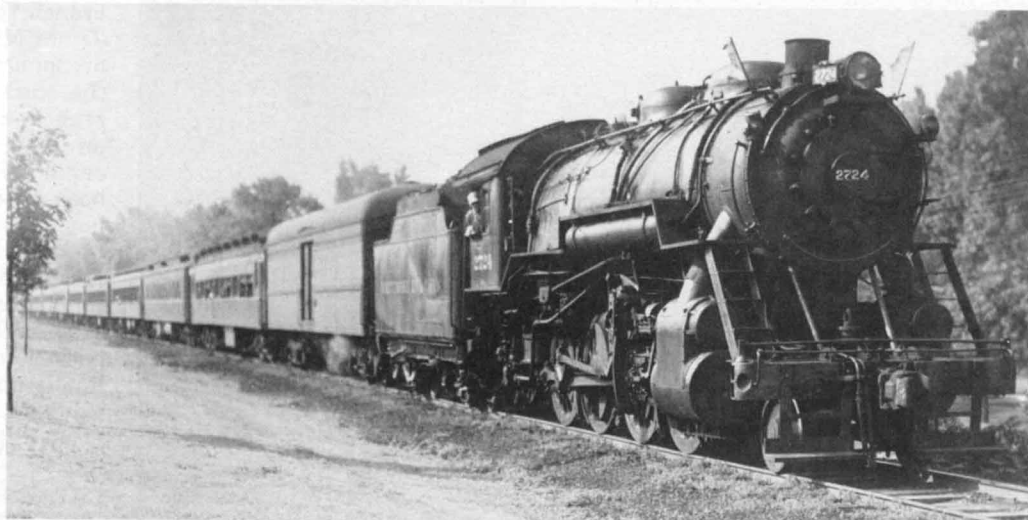
In the Forties and Fifties, when the local came from Canton, most of the work could be done before lunch, and the 2-mile trip over the Pennsy to Valley Junction had high priority. The connecting line was lightly used, but B&O crews could not get a clearance if Pennsy had a train anywhere on the 29 miles between Bayard and Dover. If the Bayard operator approved, most of the B&O train was left at Mineral City while the engine ran down to the junction. Infrequent cars for the Pennsy and the Wheeling were left on the respective transfer tracks, and in steam days, the engine was turned on the B&O's wye. Upon return to Mineral City, northbound cars were left on the connecting track or taken to Rock Cut until time to return to Canton.

As recently as 1965, the conductor would have received waybills from a full-time agent, who would have cleared his order board for the train to pass. Also, the crew would have turned the target at the PRR crossing, and reset it to horizontal after passing. Today the agent, order board, target, diamond, and Pennsy interchange are all gone, so the crew merely climbs aboard and drifts slowly across the 860-foot-long trestle that spans the valley of Huff Run. The bridge contains 62 pile and timber bents, together with deck truss and girder sections over roads, the stream, and the seasonal floods held back by Dover Dam. Villagers whose backyards adjoin the trestle say it groans alarmingly under its B&O burden. Railroaders have also been known to hold the structure in awe; some, it is said, have sought other employment when confronted with the prospect of riding a train across it.

THE SWITCH to the branch is only a few car-lengths south of the bridge. To get onto the branch with 10 tank cars, the Geeps stop under an abandoned coal tipple, perhaps two car-lengths from the end of the track. Most of the coal produced here went out by truck, but an occasional carload complicated the switching well into the Sixties.

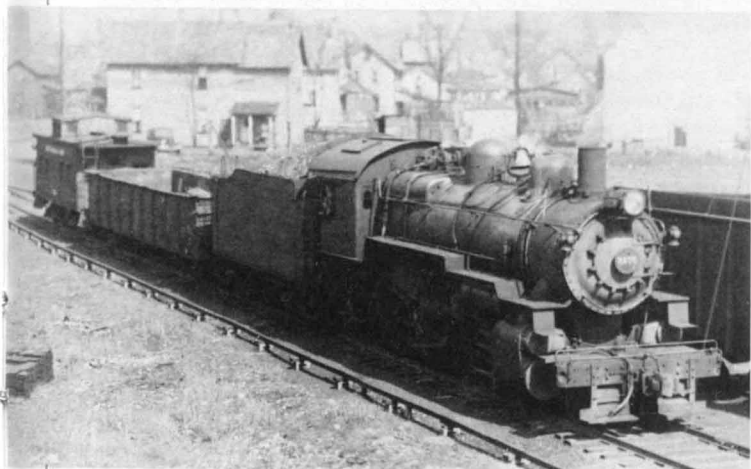
Another complication is presented by the train that is longer than the tail track. To get into the branch with 15 cars, a rare but not unheard-of sit-

Olden times on the Valley



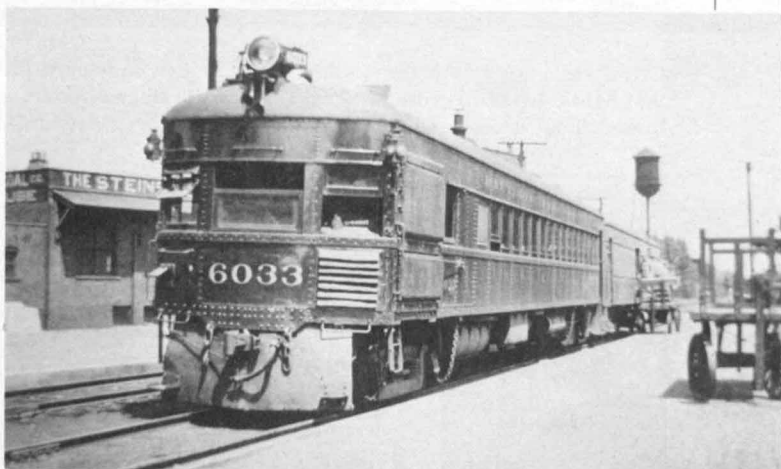
C. W. Burns.

TEN-CAR Timken Roller Bearing employee picnic special leaves Canton behind 2-8-0 in 1936.



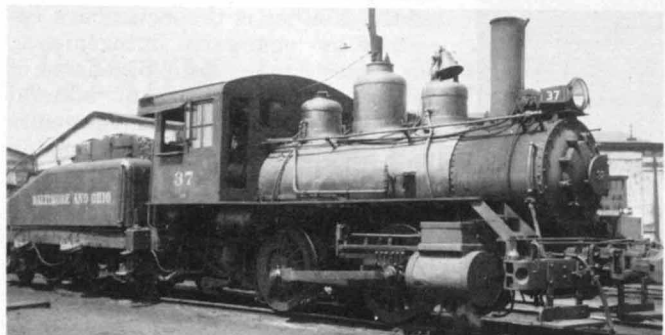
C. W. Burns.

BELPAIRE-boiler 2-8-0 2256 from McKinley Tower in 1942.



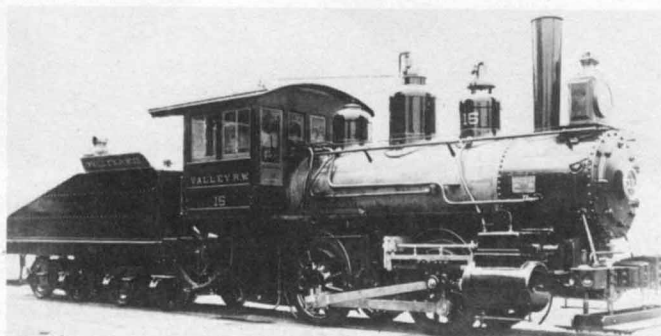
Collection of John E. Beach.

BRILL at Canton June 4, 1934, en route Valley Junction.



Collection of Harold K. Vollrath.

CLASS C-11 0-4-0 at Wilmington, Del., 1940, is ex-Valley 16.



Collection of Harold K. Vollrath.

PITTSBURGH built the 15 in 1890, 3 years before sister 16.

uation, the crew sets out 5 cars at Sandyville and picks them up again behind the caboose. At the switch-back, the process is simply reversed: The cars behind the caboose are cut off on the main, the caboose and 10 cars are set out on the branch, and the units pick up the remaining 5 and double to the branch.

Shoving ahead on the branch, the

crew flags a road crossing, then relaxes for the 3-mile ride at 15 mph through second-growth wilderness. Built at minimal cost, the line closely follows Huff Run upstream through scrub timber and swamp, mostly out of sight of the county road. En route, the caboose-led train clatters over the trailing switch of the Norton Industries clay plant, source of an occasion-

al carload, and passes the James Brothers Mine, a onetime customer now sans siding and which ships coal entirely by truck. Ironically, one of James' customers is Cuyahoga Valley Line's 4070!

Just beyond the mine tipple, the track which once led to the Kopp Clay plant turns off to the left, and the tank cars are set off there temporarily.



CHESSIE COLOR on the Valley: In the Christmas-card-like scene above, GP9's WM 6414/C&O 6010 cross Mineral City trestle December 28, 1978. Below, the south-bound local crosses Conrail's main at McKinley tower in Canton June 12, 1981.



ily. Then the cabooses and one idler are shoved the remaining quarter-mile to the oil rack, where the cabooses is tacked onto the five loads with idler which are waiting on one of the two tracks. With the Geeps in the clear on the other track, the brakes are released and gravity pulls the rear of the outbound train smoothly, if not quietly, downgrade past the waiting units. Then the remaining five loads with another idler are dropped in the same way to complete the outbound train.

When the empties have been spotted, the engine crew moves to the other unit in preparation for the return trip. After a quick check to be sure that lights, brakes, and other functions can be controlled from the new

cab, the engineer notches the throttle for the 3-mile backward movement to the main track.

Getting out of the branch with 12 cars is no problem, but on rare occasions the crew has had more train than the tail track would hold. The solution, following a recent mishap, was to double to Sandyville. At an earlier time, when the PRR connection was still serviceable, the first cut might have been set off there. After that track deteriorated to the point where only a couple of car-lengths could be safely used, the crew might have pulled the train down the branch, doubled to the main, and then dropped the whole train at that switch.

Dropping cars at the Pennsy connection was a common practice prior to

the start of the oil business about 1970. Most of the cars going to the branch then were for Kopp Clay and James Mine, both back-up moves. By dropping them at the PRR connection, the cars could be pulled up the branch. Sometimes cars would be taken to the branch on both ends of the engine. If James' car order had not been filled the day before, two or three hoppers would be taken up the branch to be loaded while work at the oil rack, sand rack, and Kopp Clay was completed.

After the usual 10 loads have been backed out of the branch, the train is finally put into forward motion for the run back to Canton. Often there is not enough time left to complete all of the Canton work, as the crew has usually been on duty 9 hours or more upon return there. Aware that time is running out, they quickly pull and fill the transfers and work as many of the industry tracks as the conductor deems wise. Tomorrow is another day, and if they must cut off and race the 12-hour law home to Akron, the unfinished work will have a high priority when they come back tomorrow.

THE future of the oil field surrounding Mineral City appears to be secure, and one would guess that the branch would share in that prosperity. During the summer of 1977, however, a terse notice appeared on the door of the depot, advising of B&O's intent to abandon the line south of Sandyville. That petition was conditionally approved, as the company has some valid reasons for wanting to trim the operation. Obviously, the problem is not lack of business, as 100-plus carloads per month cannot be dismissed lightly. Neither is the switchback operation an oppressive inconvenience. The biggest problem is maintenance of the two timber trestles at Mineral City. Both will need extensive repairs in a few years, and the company would like to avoid that expense.

Efforts to relocate the oil rack to a point north of Mineral City so far have proved fruitless. While any of several sites could be used, the Sandyville yard would be ideal since a minimum of grading and track construction would be needed. Unfortunately, local zoning severely restricts new industry there, and notwithstanding the energy crisis, residents do not want tank trucks meeting tank cars in their backyards.

The train crew is both anxious and optimistic over the future of the oil business. Old heads who could weather all but the ultimate retrenchment, they prefer that the present switchback operation continue. At worst, they hope that the precious black gold will move from a facility yet to be built on their own railroad. 1